

had remained unsold, and of the flax belonging to you personally—five bags. I have asked M. Abu 'l-Faraj, son of Salmān's⁵ sister, to take care of this in my place if he happens to find a customer for this. He asked me to request you to kindly go to 'Abdallāh al-Malaṭī⁶ and ask him whether two bags with Ṭabarī cloth⁷ which he had sent him have arrived safely. Take a letter from him and enclose it with your answer to me . . .

Give my regards to M. Abū Maṣūr b. Shu'ayb⁸ . . . and inform him that Ibn Zurjiz (George) says: "He is making fun of me. He has not paid me a thing." Yes, this is what he said: "Ibn Shu'ayb has not paid me a thing." Please let me know which loan you have accepted from him.

Give my regards to Abū Sa'ūd⁹ b. Levi . . . and tell him that I am grateful to him.

May your well-being wax forever.

(Address:)

To my master and lord, Abū Jacob (!) Joseph, son of Nahum, (*may his*) *s(oul) r(est in peace)*.

From Jacob, son of Samuel al-Andalusī, (*may his*) *s(oul) r(est in peace)*.

To Miṣr, if God wills.

⁵ A representative of merchants in Ramle; so called because he had apprenticed with his uncle Salmān.

⁶ Misspelled 'L'Imṭy. From Malatia in Asia Minor.

⁷ Presumably genuine Ṭabari(stān) fabric, imported from Iran and re-exported to Egypt.

⁸ Mentioned twice in TS 8 J 38, f. 7, l. 1, and *verso*, l. 7, ed. E. Ashtor, *Braslavi Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 482. The letter is in the hand of Israel b. Nathan, the same man who wrote the letter from Jerusalem to our Jacob b. Samuel. See next selection, n. 3.

⁹ A rare name in those days with both Muslims and Jews.

22 A FAMILY PARTNERSHIP AT WORK

A Letter from Palermo, Sicily

Middle of Eleventh Century

Two Spanish merchants, brothers-in-law, had moved eastward during the early years of the turbulent eleventh century, one settling in the Muslim Middle West (Sicily-Tunisia) and one in Egypt. In a very detailed letter¹ Isma'īl, the father of the writer of our letter, Ya'qūb b. Isma'īl (Jacob b. Samuel), addresses his sister's son, Yūsha' (Joshua) b. Nathan, but refers all the time to the transactions of the "old man," his brother-in-law, who at that moment must have been traveling. Among many other things he mentions that he had a fine son who was entirely to the taste of the addressee and his father, and if the latter agreed, he would send the boy to serve as an apprentice in their firm. Whether this referred to the writer of our letter or to one of his two brothers (see below) cannot be made out.

By the time of our letter, in which Ya'qūb addresses his cousin Yūsha', both old men were dead. Here, Ya'qūb suggests that his own son and that of the addressee should start a partnership and thus continue the tradition of their grandfathers.

Besides the letter translated below we have five other complete and some fragmentary letters by Ya'qūb. One, TS 16.7, was written five days after this one and is almost identical with it. Two others were addressed to Nahray b. Nissīm (dated documents as from 1045), namely, one from Tyre, Lebanon, with an enclosure to our Yūsha', and one from Sicily, referring to the death of Maṣliāh, the Jewish judge of Palermo (see below).² In his letter from Tyre Ya'qūb refers to his sojourn in Egypt, and we also have a lovely little letter to him from a relative reporting that Ya'qūb's family in Jerusalem, consisting of his mother, his "baby" (*iṣṣla*), that is, young wife, and babies, were all well and happy. Thus it appears that the

¹ TS 20.127. In *Med. Soc.*, 1, 376, sec. 28, this letter is (tentatively) misdated. It was probably written around 1030 and in Sicily. For the business cooperation expressed in it see *Med. Soc.*, 1, 178, n. 41.

² TS 8 J 41, f. 2, *Nahray* 191; Bodl. MS Heb. c28 (Cat. 2876), f. 61, *Nahray* 190.

Andalusian merchant, while working in the East, settled his family in Jerusalem, which, in addition to its holiness, had the advantage of being inexpensive (as that letter states).³ A letter by Jacob himself sent from Jerusalem is translated in the preceding selection.

The writer of our letter lived around the middle of the eleventh century, as can be established by the references to many persons mentioned in his letters who were active at that time. The addressee, Yūsha', was a prominent member of the community, as can be gauged from a document dated December 1046.⁴

As to the city from which our letter was dispatched the choice is between Palermo, Sicily, and Qayrawān, Tunisia, for mention is made of letters sent to al-Mahdiyya, the Tunisian seaport, to be forwarded to Egypt.⁵ These considerations decide in favor of Palermo:

1. All the goods sent by the writer directly (secs. C and J.) are of the regular Sicilian type. See S. D. Goitein, "Sicily in the Cairo Geniza Documents," *Archivio Storico per la Sicilia Orientale*, 77 (1971), 9-33.

2. Typically Tunisian products, such as saffron, are sent not by him personally, but by business friends in Tunisia on his order (secs. F and J.).

3. He lives in a port city, reporting the arrival and departure of ships, but not in Mazara, the other Sicilian terminal for the trade with the East in those days (sec. E).

4. He is closely connected with Maṣlī'ah (b. Elijah), the Jewish judge of Palermo (secs. E and H).

The main text of the letter was written by a clerk, but the address and the long P.S. are in the peculiar hand of Ya'qūb, which looks like chicken scratches. TS 16.7, which is mainly a shorter version of our letter, is entirely in his hand.

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter Collection, TS 20.76.

³ TS 10 J 15, f. 12. "Inexpensive": *rāḳhī*, as in Tunisian Ar.

⁴ TS 20.9, ed. Assaf, *Texts*, 137-140. Also TS 10 J 21, f. 1, where he bears an honorific title conferred on him by the yeshiva of Jerusalem, and where he is referred to as "Sefaradi," the Heb. word for Spanish.

⁵ After the closing of the seafaring season, letters were dispatched in boats on the small stretch of sea dividing Sicily from Tunisia to al-Mahdiyya, from where they were sent on to Egypt overland.

A. PREAMBLE

In your name.

My master and lord, may God prolong your life, make your well-being permanent, and be for you and with you as a protector and helper. I am writing from home on the first day of Elul (August), may God bring the month to a happy end for me and for you. I am longing for your dear countenance and asking God to unite us under the most auspicious circumstances.

Your letters containing the good news that you and your sons—may God keep them and augment their number—were well, have arrived. I am always eager to see a letter of yours; having one gives me the feeling that you are near to me, and merely looking upon it makes me happy. I ask God to let you always be well and never deprive me of seeing your face or your letters.

You say in your letter that you have not received any from me. I have written several letters to al-Mahdiyya with the request to forward them to you to Miṣr (Fustat).

B. DIFFICULTIES WITH A MUSLIM MERCHANT⁶

You spoke of the trouble you had with Abū 'Abdallāh Ibn Kha-fāja. I regretted this very much. Now, my lord, if, at the arrival of this letter, something is still owed, make accounts with him and take the balance from him, for your exertion is many times more valuable to me than this sal ammoniac. For the money received buy spices,⁷ pack them in the wickerwork basket together with the sal ammoniac and send them as early as possible, if God wills.

⁶ The addressee had been requested to buy sal ammoniac with the money owed the writer. But the Muslim merchant had delivered only part of the quantity paid for.

⁷ *Saqat*, pl. *asqāt*, extremely common in the business correspondence of the eleventh century, cannot have the usual meaning of "junk," "scraps," but denotes spices and seasonings. See, e.g., TS 13 J 29, f. 10, ll. 16-17: "All *saqat* sell well: spikenard—25 (dinars); nutmeg—7 dinars; sugar—11; costus—25." In 12.693v, ll. 10-11, 14, pepper, cinnamon, and ginger are included. See below, at the end of the price list.

C. GOODS SENT (A) FOR THE ADDRESSEE,
(B) ON ACCOUNT OF THEIR PARTNERSHIP,
(C) FOR THE PARTNERSHIP WITH THE
WRITER'S BROTHER

I had sold seven out of the nine bales (of flax, sent by you). I added certain sums from my own resources to the price obtained and bought silk, *lāsīn*,⁸ *farḳhas*,⁹ turbans, hides, and tin, and sent you everything by boat—may God ordain their safe arrival and unite me with you soon.

In the ship of Ibn al-Shawwā ("Mr. Cook") I sent you a bundle on account of our blessed partnership. It contains five bags of silk and *lāsīn*, and one of tin and copper. They are wrapped in twenty-five hides and two pairs of sacks and canvases. Three bags with silk and *lāsīn* for the partnership with my brother Elhanan are in the same bundle. The freight, completely paid in advance, amounted to 3 1/2 quarter dinars.

In the boat of Bū-gharwā Abdallāh b. Maymūn ("Greedy, Servant of God, son of Lucky") I sent you a bundle containing five bags with silk and *lāsīn*, twenty-five hides, and two pairs of sacks and canvases for the partnership with my brother Elhanan, and four bags with silk and *lāsīn* and one bag with tin in shells¹⁰ for my partnership with you.

(Most of the seven subsequent lines were cut out. They speak about two bundles with cotton¹¹ (garments) and 106 quarter dinars "in number" [and presumably 100 in weight] sent. The corresponding passage in TS 16.7 states that the total value of the goods sent for the partnership in that year was 1,628 1/12 quarter dinars.)

This consignment, my lord, is the most profitable and blessed bought this year. Had I not dispersed¹² (agents) for buying *lāsīn* im-

⁸ A specific Sicilian, cheaper sort of silk (see *Med. Soc.*, 1, 102).

⁹ The *farḳha*, like the *thawb*, was both a sheet of cloth and a garment. A staple export from Sicily and Tunisia.

¹⁰ Tin was traded in "tongues," *līsān*, and "shells," *maḥāra* (see TS 16.264, ll. 4-5). "Shells" of tin, mentioned, as here, in TS 13 J 19, f. 9, l. 13, DK XVIII, l. 8, *Nahray* 43.

¹¹ Egypt, today one of the great cotton-growing countries, imported cotton textiles during the Middle Ages from both East and West. See *Med. Soc.*, 1, 105.

¹² Ar. *nufarriq*, a term found also elsewhere. *Lāsīn*, the popular Sicilian

mediately after my arrival, I would not have got a thing. As soon as your consignments arrive I shall take a loan¹³ on them and buy with it merchandise with prospects of gain and send it on, if God wills.

D. ARRIVAL OF SHIPMENTS SENT BY THE ADDRESSEE

All the ships arrived safely, and also the bales transported by Nzly,¹⁴ son of the freedman of Ṣāliḥ.¹⁵ One of the three bales was torn open and I sold them at the fair, for it was impossible to keep them any longer.¹⁶ A hundred pounds (of flax) brought 24 (quarter dinars), and of the bale damaged by water, 14.¹⁷ The bale of pepper and that of indigo held in partnership by myself and Abu 'l-Bishr ("Good Tidings") Salmān have also arrived safely, thank God, and I shall act according to your instructions.

E. NOTE ON THE JEWISH JUDGE OF PALERMO AND HIS BROTHER

You mentioned that you had given me a volume of legal opinions by Rabbi Maṣlī'ah, but I do not have it.¹⁸ It is true that you told me I should have it copied and then return it to you, but when we parted, you did not hand me over anything. You will find it in your house. If this is agreeable to you, kindly give it to M. Abū Zikrī, the brother of R. Maṣlī'ah, for he traveled this year together with my brother Judah from Mazara, may God ordain them safety.

fabric was manufactured in countless little workshops, both in the city and in other places.

¹³ It was August, and only a few weeks remained until the end of the seafaring season. Thus he could not wait for cash until he would have sold his partner's consignments.

¹⁴ The name of this son of a former slave is written clearly, but I do not know how to pronounce it. Perhaps a European.

¹⁵ Probably Ṣāliḥ b. Barhūn Tāhertī. For another case of a liberated slave of the Tāhertīs remaining in close contact with the family of his former master, see no. 13, above.

¹⁶ At the arrival of a caravan or convoy of ships a fair was held, where the prices, naturally, were somewhat lower than usual. See *Med. Soc.*, 1, 277.

¹⁷ Reasonable prices under the circumstances. See *Med. Soc.*, 1, 224-225.

¹⁸ As far as I know, the book is lost, which is a pity, for we would have learned from it much about social and economic conditions in Sicily around 1050.

I need not counsel you with regard to him (the judge's brother): do not leave him without your effective guidance.

F. SAFFRON FROM TUNISIA. PARTNERSHIP

BETWEEN THE SONS OF THE WRITER AND THE ADDRESSEE

My lord, I have instructed Abu 'l-Bishr Sulaymān b. Farah al-Qābisī ("Good Tidings, Solomon, son of Joy, of Gabes [in Tunisia]") to buy saffron for 80 dinars from the sums he owes me and to send everything to you. In case he is unable to buy goods, he should send you the cash. If God ordains a safe arrival, take 25 dinars from it, add another 25 dinars on your side, and buy whatever God puts into your mind for the entire sum. This should be in partnership between my son Abū Ibrāhīm¹⁹ and your son Abū Sahl,²⁰ as we have agreed, so that they should if God, the exalted, wills, follow in the footsteps of their grandfathers. On the goods bought by you "Isma'il b. Ya'qūb" should be written.²¹ I shall make a similar arrangement for M. Abu 'l-Ḥasan,²² if God wills.

For the balance buy whatever God puts into your mind and send it by boat together with the sal ammoniac and whatever you still owe me.

G. SOME PERSONAL ORDERS

Kindly buy me a holiday robe with its wimple,²³ made of fine linen, green with gold threads, worth between 8 and 10 dinars, made of dense fabric, so that it should be durable. Also (buy) two white wimples, six cubits long,²⁴ for 2 1/4 to 2 1/2 dinars, and a pair of . . . shoes.²⁵

¹⁹ He was called Isma'il, as was Ya'qūb's father, the kunya (honorific byname) of which was "Father of Abraham," Abū Ibrāhīm.

²⁰ "Easy," connected with different names, probably given by the mother when delivery was smooth. Often paired with the Arabic equivalent of Nathan ("Gift"). Thus this boy, too, was called after his grandfather.

²¹ The name of the boy, not of the writer. See n. 19.

²² The addressee's second son. See below.

²³ Ar. *wa-mi'jarhā*, the female turban wound many times around the head, then around the face, and finally floating down a shoulder.

²⁴ Ar. *sudāsiyya*. A letter sent from al-Mahdiyya to Egypt in 1048 contains an order for a wimple 10 cubits long, *'ushārī* (TS 20.69, l. 38). For the length of turbans see no. 2, n. 17, above.

²⁵ Orders sent to Fustat for shoes for personal use were common in the Geniza correspondence.

H. ON A CONSIGNMENT OF THE JEWISH JUDGE

OF PALERMO

My lord, a balance of 2 dinars in my favor had remained with M. Abū Sa'īd Dā'ūd b. Sha'yā (David b. Isaiah), of which, according to a note of his, he had spent half a dinar on a bag belonging to R. Mašlī'ah. I had [asked] you to receive the bag and the balance from him, but you did not mention this in your letter. I hope you have, in the mean time, received delivery. Please give the bag, together with the other little bundles, to M. Abū Zikrī Judah, the brother of R. Mašlī'ah, and assist him in their sale with your good advice. The purchase price was 60 quarter dinars.

I. UNINVITED SHIPMENTS

I had asked you to tell M. Abū Sa'īd²⁶ what you have heard from my mouth, namely that he should not send me anything. But after all, you have not done this, for this year he sent me eight bales of flax. I have asked Abu 'l-Faraj Marwān²⁷ to accept delivery, to sell them, and to send him the price. He already has received them. Please tell him not to do this again—neither he nor anyone else—and inform him about the oath I have sworn in your presence.²⁸

J. CONCLUSION

Kindest regards to you and to M. Abu 'l-Ḥasan, may God keep them,²⁹ and to your mother,³⁰ and all under your care. My son Abū Ibrāhīm sends you all kindest regards. Do not deprive me of your letters reporting about your affairs and your well-being and the well-being of your sons. I sent you with Abu 'l-Bishr Salmān b. Dā'ūd al-Barqī (of Barqa in eastern Libya) a jar of salted tuna fish, 15 [about twelve words missing]. And peace upon you. My trust is in God alone.

²⁶ See preceding paragraph.

²⁷ The bales were sent to al-Mahdiyya, and the writer of our letter asked the Tunisian merchant Abu 'l-Faraj Marwān (see no. 14, n. 22, above), to take care of them.

²⁸ Not to deal with merchandise sent to him against his instructions.

²⁹ The clerk had erroneously omitted the name of the elder son Abū Sahl.

³⁰ The mother is greeted, since she was old and the writer's aunt. It would not have been good form to greet the addressee's wife, who was still young enough to be expected to produce more sons. See above.

K. P.S. IN THE SENDER'S OWN HAND

(The first two notes were occasioned by the arrival of a ship from al-Mahdiyya on its way to Egypt.)

Abu 'l-Bishr Sulayman b. Saul sent you in the bundle of Abu 'l-Faraj Mardūk (Mordechai) a chest with corals, for which no freight is to be paid, for he carried for him two chests with saffron. In this bundle of Mardūk I sent you a bag with shelled almonds, containing 25 pounds of almonds, receive them from him, also free of charge.

Abu 'l-Bishr Sulaymān b. Farah³¹ wrote me that he had bought 33 1/2 mann saffron, packed it in a bundle destined for his brother³² and loaded it on the boat of Ibn 'Allān.³³ A rumor was spread that it was captured by the enemy. I ask God that this may be false and that we might be united in his mercy.

L. A PRICE LIST

You would certainly like to know the prices here (in quarter dinars per 100 pounds unless otherwise noted. Parenthetical question marks after some figures indicate that we cannot be sure that these prices are in quarter dinars).

Waddle flax³⁴—22-33

Mālāl flax—18-20

Kirmānī indigo, first quality—200-350

Lawāhī—100-300

Brazilwood (only one man in the town has it)—300

Cinnamon—110

Pepper, today—135

Myrobalan,³⁵ the yellow?—

Myrobalan, the Kābulī—1 din. per 1 1/2-1 2/3 pounds

Myrobalan, the Indian—1 din. per 8 pounds

Senna—50 (?)

³¹ This refers to paragraph F, above. The quantity mentioned corresponds to about 70 pounds.

³² Called Isma'īl b. Farah, sender and recipient of many Geniza letters. See no. 31, below.

³³ Probably identical with Abu 'l-Faraj Ibn 'Allān (no. 17, above). See *Med. Soc.*, I, 309.

³⁴ For the types of flax see *Med. Soc.*, I, 456.

³⁵ A widely used medicine for intestinal troubles. Different varieties of it were on the market. See *Med. Soc.*, II, 267, where senna, too, is referred to.

Gum arabic—30 (?)

Nutmeg—18 (?) per 1 mann

Cardamom—4 (?) per 1 mann

Cubeb—1 din. per 4 pounds

Prunus Mahaleb³⁶—25

Rose marmalade—43

Mace³⁷—30 per 1 mann

Camphor—13 per 1 ounce

Musk—50 per 1 ounce

All spices are rare here and almost not to be had.

(In the price list of TS 16.7, which was written five days later, pepper had fallen from 135 to 120 quarter dinars, brazilwood from 300 to 200, but only 3 1/2 (and not 4) pounds of cubeb could be had for a dinar; see *Med. Soc.*, I, 219. In conclusion the writer greets the same persons as before and three others.)

(Address:)

To my master and lord Abu 'l-Surūr Yūsha, son of Nathan, (may he) r(est in) E(den), may God prolong his life and always keep him well and happy.

From his friend Jacob, son of Isma'īl the Andalusian, (may he) r(est in) E(den). To Miṣr (Fustat), if God, the exalted, wills.

23-26 A DIFFICULT PARTNER

Yeshū'ā b. Isma'īl ("Salvation," son of Samuel), like many Maghrebis, had settled in Alexandria, Egypt, where we find him first in the service of Mūsā Majjānī,¹ and later exchanging many letters with Nahray b. Nissīm.² His ramified correspondence reveals him as a difficult person, but frictions between partners were

³⁶ A drug against intestinal parasites and a pectoral (Maimonides-Meyerhof, p. 109, no. 220).

³⁷ Ar. *fisfāsa*, which I take as a variant spelling of *bisbāsa*. TS 12.251, l. 14, another price list from Sicily, notes mace with 50 quarter dinars per mann.

¹ Majjānī's letter to him (TS 12.566). For Majjānī see nos. 17-18, above.

² *Nahray* 13, 14, 17 (to Yeshū'ā); 86-90 (from him). For Nahray see ch. IV, below. *Nahray* 88 is translated in no. 34, below.