

nothing exceptional. Khallūf, the senior partner, urged him to clear his accounts with him, since he was not eager to continue the relationship. It nevertheless went on for years, but was finally terminated when Khallūf sued him in court, a last resort normally avoided by respectable merchants. We know about this affair through the draft of a settlement carefully written in Yeshū'a's own hand on the back of a letter to him by Khallūf's nephew Joseph Tāhertī, who had continued the partnerships of his uncle and father with him (see no. 25, below).

23 THE DISAPPOINTED SENIOR PARTNER WRITES FROM THE MAGHREB

Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Heb. a 3 (Cat. 2873), f. 13.

A. THE WRITER'S DISAPPOINTMENT

I am writing to you, my master and lord, . . . on the eve of the *New Year*, may God make it happy and blessed to its very end . . .

Your letter has arrived with the couriers³ and I was happy with it, for it contained some apologies and promises, which reassured me somehow, for I was very much dejected because of all the losses I suffered through one for whom I exerted myself and worked here to no avail. Let us praise God for this very much.⁴

I had entertained the hope to derive some profit from our partnership this year. But when the ships landed and I learned which goods had arrived for me, I became very angry, but [. . .] and I thanked God, for I found that all merchandise arriving here this year brought no profit. Thus there was some consolation for me and [. . .]

In your letter you complain about how much trouble you had in the Rif (the little towns and villages of the Egyptian countryside). I was very angry about this; as if I had chosen this for you! You have my letters from the beginning of our partnership; look

³ It was September, the end of the seafaring season. Another letter, sent by boat, certainly was on its way. Couriers always went overland. See *Med. Soc.*, I, 284ff.

⁴ Meant sarcastically. Religion commands to thank God for bad things as we naturally do for good ones (*Mishnah Berakhot* 9:5).

through them. Did I not advise you not to sell there even for a penny?! So, brother, this was your own choice, and there was no point in complaining to me about this, for, from this blessed undertaking of yours only losses came to me, namely, that my goods remained unsold year after year.

B. PREVIOUS SHIPMENTS

But the height of all is that you conjure me by God in your letter and call God as witness against me that I should not keep one dirhem of yours, except the goods not yet sold. As if you had had merchandise with me which I sold and whose price I retained! I showed your letter to people and then showed them the blessed goods you had here with me, namely, asarum,⁵ cinnamon, clove, aloe,⁶ *khawlān*,⁷ and another quantity of clove, about which I learned only this year that it belonged to you. I wrote to you about it at the beginning of the year, but you did not answer me. I asked my young man,⁸ but he did not know a thing about it. Then, when I sold my own clove, I found that there was more of it than I knew of and asked Sulayman b. Saul⁹ about the redundant quantity. Then, during this summer, I took out all your goods in the presence of a number of our friends and delivered them to Tammām,¹⁰ who sold everything. I was about to write you and to enclose legal testimony that all this was sold only in the course of this year, so that you should be reassured.

Had I known how to sell other people's goods, I would have chosen first to sell my own and would not have entrusted them to one who keeps them unattended and does with them what he likes. But, brother, I do not argue with you, for you are excused; perhaps similar things have been said to you before and you have been fooled. Had I listened to what people say, I never would have en-

⁵ Ar. *asarūn*. A medical plant (used as an emetic), imported from the Orient (Maimonides-Meyerhof, p. 14, no. 21).

⁶ Ar. *harnawa* (Maimonides-Meyerhof, p. 58, no. 113).

⁷ See no. 25, n. 15, below.

⁸ Ar. *ghulām*. He could have been a slave or freedman, or even a free employee.

⁹ Mentioned in the P.S. of no. 22, above.

¹⁰ The addressee's sister's son, who, as was usual, had apprenticed with him (TS 10 J 14, f. 20, l. 13, and *verso* l. 11).

tered into a partnership with you, but I am one who cannot be fooled. God calls to account every man for his deeds.

C. TRANSACTIONS OF THE CURRENT YEAR

All you have sent has arrived. I took delivery of eight bales of flax, seven of which had been torn open, and only one had remained intact. I sold them immediately after arrival. Together with Abū Abraham¹¹ I sold the one which was complete for 38-42 (quarter dinars per 100 pounds).¹² But when we were through with the sale and wished to collect the price there occurred here what you certainly have heard and the collection stopped. After great exertion and many interventions we were apportioned about 600 quarter dinars from its price, which Abū Abraham and I divided between us (for collection). But the money has not yet come in so that I could report about it.

I sold the ginger, for it was sought after here. Indeed, there was no other product which sold well.

The pepper, however, was dead. No one offered it (lit., cried it out). The price went down to 130, but still no one bought. Until the calamity occurred in the town, of which you know, whereupon all the foreigners either sold everything they had for 130-132, and regarded this as a boon, or bought and loaded. But my heart did not let me sell for such a price and I held it until the time when the sailing of the ships approached, in the hope it would rise. However, the slump got worse. Then I was afraid that suspicion might arise against me and sold your pepper to Spanish merchants for 133.

I bought you saffron, wax, and clothes, and packed everything together with what I had bought for my brother-in-law¹³ in two bundles. I sent one in the small boat¹⁴ and the other in the large

¹¹ Probably Ishāq b. Barhūn (Isaac b. Abraham) Tāhertī, one of the writer's brothers-in-law.

¹² A bale weighing around 500 pounds often contained flax of different qualities. See *Med. Soc.*, 1, 226.

¹³ This one, of course, was in Egypt. His name was Mūsā (Moses). See no. 24, below. He was the father of Joseph, the writer of no. 25.

¹⁴ Referring to the boat of the "Lady," one of the relatives of the ruler of Tunisia, while the large boat was that of the "Sultan" himself.

boat. The latter bears the inscription "for Mūsā b. Khalaf,"¹⁵ in which you have four chests with saffron; the other, in the boat of the Lady, is inscribed "for Khallūf b. Mūsā"¹⁶ and contains clothes, namely 112 broad *farkhas*, which I bought for a very low price such as no one has obtained: 50 quarter dinars.¹⁷ Three hundred pounds of wax and all its containers are yours. You have another package with wax, well covered, in partnership in equal shares with Ya'qūb b. Azhar (Jacob son of 'Luminous,' Heb. Meir).

An account specifying all that has been sold and bought for you follows.

You will also receive a detailed account for last year's transactions copied from the original list. When I wrote the former account I was in a hurry and made a mistake in the addition. I am sending you also your own account book, so that you may check which goods you have sent to me and which have remained with you. For you have not charged me with the price of two bales of flax which arrived in al-Mahdiyya, neither last year nor this, and indeed do not list them at all.

D. LAST-HOUR NEWS

Dear brother, while I am writing this letter—it is the night before the sailing of the ships—pepper has become much in demand, for the foreigners had sold all they had, while boats (with customers) arrived and only local people had some left. Thus it was sold for 140-142. I took collateral for the sale of my pepper at 140-142. But, brother, I would not like to take the profit for myself. Therefore I transferred the entire sale to our partnership. May God reward me for what I do for other people. I do not expect gratitude from men.

¹⁵ "Moses, son of 'Substitute,'" with the family name Samarqandī (see no. 25, below), an old business friend of the writer of our letter.

¹⁶ The writer of our letter. Khallūf is a form of endearment, common in the Maghreb, and means the same as Khalaf. See preceding note.

¹⁷ This can only mean that a certain standard number, of, say, 10 *farkhas*, cost 50 rubā'is. Compared with other quotations in the Geniza even this would be a very low price.

E. VARIOUS DETAILS

I paid Baruch 10 quarter dinars.¹⁸

The flax for your sister's son was taken by his mother. It did not reach me from her hand. Khiyār had delivered it to her.¹⁹

Those 10 quarters will be deducted from the additional pepper sold, and you will receive its account as soon as its price is collected, together with the balance from the sale of the flax.

For the price of the flax I bought for you 200 quarters. Thus, nothing belonging to you remains with me, neither goods nor cash, except what has to be collected from the balance of the price of the flax. I shall check everything which will come in, so that nothing should remain either on account of the partnership or your own account.

A letter has been received from Abū Sa'īd²⁰ saying that Mufriji's boat had arrived in Sfax²¹ and that he would send for the lac and redirect it to al-Mahdiyya. I have no further information about this matter.

You admonish me in your letters to send you all goods ordered, as well as all cash received, and to make all the payments on which you advised me. All this has been done on my side and I ask you now to do the same for me. But, please, do not send me flax, for on those ships all flax gets ruined. (A few words written on the top of the sheet are partly effaced.) So, make an effort this year and leave one business for another (that is, do first things first), as other people do.

A green robe was in your bundle and I do not know whether it is for the partnership or on your own account and for what price you bought it before Tayyib²² departed.

¹⁸ See no. 24, end of letter, below.

¹⁹ Tammām (see n. 10, above) then was in Egypt (see at the end of the letter). Several persons named Khiyār appear in the contemporary Geniza correspondence.

²⁰ Probably the writer's nephew who wrote no. 25. But Abū Sa'īd was a common kunya.

²¹ In southern Tunisia. The boat carried lac sent by Yeshū'ā.

²² See n. 8, above. Mentioned in Bodl. MS Heb. c28 (Cat. 2876), f. 61v, l. 23, *Nahray* 190, expressly as Khallūf's factotum. See also no. 43, sec. D.

F. FINAL ADMONITIONS. CONCLUSION

You write that you have fixed 1 out of 10 dinars (from our partnership) for your sister's son. This is quite in keeping with your character.²³ But I shall not interfere with your actions.

You also charged the fare of 2 dinars for my employee to my account, although he traveled with your goods and for your affairs and you asked me to send him. I trust in God, but the decision is in your hand. Do what you deem fit.

Kindest regards. I wish not to say more about our mutual relations. I trust in your religiosity. Regards to anyone asking about me, especially, your sister's son. Your servants, my sons, send you regards. *And peace.*

G. P.S. I. IN THE SCRIPT OF THE MAIN TEXT

Please, with every courier leaving send me letters, for I am worried. I have received the price of the two bales. I shall buy for it additional saffron and turbans. *And peace.*

P.S. II. IN ANOTHER SCRIPT

You will receive with the Jewish sailor²⁴ a bag with fourteen pounds of silk. Give him a quarter. *And peace.*²⁵

P.S. III. IN A THIRD SCRIPT

I ask you to settle my account with yourself and give the balance to my brother-in-law, for you are a very busy man. *And peace.*

(Address:)

To my master and lord Abū 'l-Faraj Yeshū'ā, son of Isma'il, (may he) r(est in) E(den), al-Makhmūrī,²⁶ may God [...]. From Khallūf, son of Mūsā, (may he) r(est in) E(den), Ibn al-Ša'īgh ("Mr. Goldsmith").

²³ Ar. *wa-ant sahifat rūhak*.

²⁴ Because of the ever stricter observance of the Sabbath Jews had to give up the profession of sailor. The one mentioned here was an exception. See Goitein, *Jews and Arabs*, p. 108.

²⁵ Here, and in the next P.S., "And peace" is in Ar. Before, it was twice in Heb.

²⁶ The family name is half effaced here, but clearly written in TS NS J 145, where it occurs twice. *Makhmūr*, lit., "drunk," was taken perhaps in a mystical sense.