

From Joseph b. Mūsā, son of Barhūn, (*may he r(est in) E(den)*). (The draft of the settlement, referred to in the introduction to nos. 23-26, above, is written in the space left blank between the end of the text and the address. The senior partner Khallūf b. Mūsā "Goldsmith," who is described here as Ḥamawī, that is, native of Ḥamāh in Syria, but still as resident in Palermo, Sicily, had made Moses Samarqandī [see no. 1, above] his attorney against Yeshū'ā. The matter came before the court of Mevōrākh b. Saadya, later Nagid, or head, of the Jews in the Fatimid empire, but was finally settled by "elders," who took the trouble to go through all the accounts and came up with a complicated settlement. Since the draft is in the hand of Yeshū'ā, we do not know, of course, whether this was the end of the story.)

## 26 WEAVING OF A *maqṭa'* CLOTH IN ALEXANDRIA FOR A BUSINESS FRIEND IN AL-MAHDIYYA

This note from a business letter sent by Mūsā b. Abi 'l-Ḥayy (see no. 25, sec. J) to Joseph Tāhertī, the writer of the preceding selection, no. 25, illustrates the personal services accompanying the overseas trade. R. Yeshū'ā, mentioned in the first line, is, of course, the recipient of no. 25, who had traveled to al-Mahdiyya as announced in that letter.

Alexandria was famous for its *maqṭa'*s, and here we learn that they were woven from cotton and linen, or linen alone.

Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Heb. c 28 (Cat. 2876), f. 34, l. 29, margin and top of page one.

From the threads belonging to R. Yeshū'ā I had two pieces of *maqṭa'* garments and one *baqyār* turban<sup>1</sup> woven. I took them from the weaver and handed them over to the blancher.<sup>2</sup> The rest of the (linen) thread is coarse, while the cotton is fine, so that it does not fit in with it. Therefore, if he wishes to have two *maqṭa'*s made

<sup>1</sup> Large-sized turban. A *baqyār*, 25 cubits long, was made in Alexandria for Nahray b. Nissīm (TS 13 J 15 f. 19, l. 3, *Nahray* 108).

<sup>2</sup> "Whitening" or "blanching" was different from bleaching.

all in linen,<sup>3</sup> from the rest of the thread, let him inform me accordingly.

If he prefers, however, that I buy him some coarse linen to fit his thread, I shall have it made thus.

Together with the cotton he also had eight ounces of fine (linen) thread, which I did not notice when I gave them for whitening.<sup>4</sup> Thus, if he wishes, I shall buy, in addition to it, five or so ounces, which will make roughly two *maqṭa'*s, the woof of which will be the cotton owned by him.

## 27 A DEDICATED PARTNER

*From Tunisia to Egypt*

This short letter of Nissīm b. Isaac Tāhertī, the cousin of Joseph (nos. 25 and 26, above) and brother of Barhūn (no. 30, below), is presented here partly as a contrast to no. 25 and partly as an illustration of the vicissitudes of prices and the total expenses for one single item. The recipient was the sender of no. 16, a prominent merchant, much of whose correspondence has been preserved.

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter  
Collection, TS 10 J 9, f. 3.

### A. THE ARRIVAL OF A LATE BOAT

I am writing to you, my master and lord, . . . on the 25th of Elul (August-September)—may God bring this month to a good end for you, and accept these coming days from you and from me.<sup>1</sup> *May you be inscribed in the book of life, atonement and forgiveness, you, and I, and all Israel.*

My preceding letters have been sent to you in the boats, may God ordain their safe arrival. The boat of Ibn Mu'ajjir ("Lessor")<sup>2</sup> ar-

<sup>3</sup> Lit., linen by linen, i.e., both warp and woof being linen.

<sup>4</sup> This seems to imply that both the threads before weaving and the woven material were "whitened."

<sup>1</sup> That is, the prayers and the fast during the subsequent month of the High Holidays.

<sup>2</sup> A man who has apartments for lease. Such persons appear in the Geniza, but not the word in this form (could be read also *mu'jir*).

rived after they had sailed and he told us that the boats setting out from Alexandria had been forced to return.<sup>3</sup> Your letter arrived in the boat and I learned from it that you were well and in good health; may God keep you thus. The purse with pearls arrived, too, and Abu 'l-Ḥasan 'Allāl<sup>4</sup> states in his memo that their price is 50 dinars. I shall, if God wills, make every effort to sell them well, as is incumbent on me. They should be sold only when demanded and with precaution.<sup>5</sup> I have given to you the account for the lac.<sup>6</sup>

B. SHIPMENTS WITH A BOAT THAT HAD BEEN  
FORCED TO RETURN

I had written you about the pitchers which I had bought in order to fill them with soap. A qinṭār (hundred pounds) then cost 2 1/2 dinars, but only the sultan was in a position to buy it.<sup>7</sup> After the sailing of the ships the price went down to 2 dinars less 1/8 dinar per qinṭār. Then that *ḵhinzira*-barge returned,<sup>8</sup> and Abū 'Alī Ḥassūn<sup>9</sup> was in it. Therefore I asked God, the exalted, for guidance and bought (soap) to fill ten of those pitchers (which I had bought for you previously). A hundred of them cost 5 dinars less one quarter and now they are worth 8 dinars, for they are much in demand and are not to be had. I sold six of them for you for half a dinar and left the rest, which I might also fill, if God wills, when I shall have sold that purse of pearls and when the soap will be cheap and good this year because of the "redness."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>3</sup> By bad weather or enemy action.

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps a grandson of his namesake mentioned in no. 1, no. 30 ('Allāl = 'Allān).

<sup>5</sup> See *Med. Soc.*, I, 491, n. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Mūsā had forgotten that he had received the account and asked for it again in the letter sent in the late boat. The transaction is referred to again below.

<sup>7</sup> The "sultan" and his family, who were shipowners and participated in the overseas trade, made use of the pernicious "right" of preemption, later so strongly condemned by his Tunisian compatriot Ibn Khaldun.

<sup>8</sup> Probably forced by a leakage or a similar mishap which affected it alone. For the type of vessel called *ḵhinzira* see *Med. Soc.*, I, 477, n. 13. Read *ra[j]'at*.

<sup>9</sup> Frequently mentioned as a commuter between Tunisia, Sicily, and Egypt.

<sup>10</sup> This technical term escapes me. The soap was a by-product of the great Tunisian olive oil industry. Olives would be collected only after the writing of this letter, and new soap would be available only months later.

I filled these ten pitchers with 745 pounds of soap, for a price of 2 dinars less 1/8 per qinṭār.

	<i>Dinars</i>
Total price: 14 din. less 1 qīr.	(13 23/24)
Add: Earthenware (the pitchers): 1/2 din.	( 12/24)
Casing in two wickerwork baskets and fastening: a quarter	( 6/24)
Filling, transport to the sea, and consideration for the sailors: a quarter and a <i>ḥabba</i>	(6/24, 1/72)
Freight: 3 din. & 1 1/2 qīr.	(3 1 1/2 / 24)
All this has been paid in advance.	
Commission <sup>11</sup> : 1 1/2 quarters	( 9/24)
Grand Total: 18 din., a quarter, an eighth, & a <i>ḥabba</i> <sup>12</sup>	(18 9/24, 1/72)

This sum will be retrieved from the balance of the price of the lac; what remains in my favor will be collected by me from the sale of the . . . and from your share in that purse (of pearls), God willing.

C. THE WRITER'S OWN SHIPMENTS. CONCLUSION

I had written you before about two containers with olive oil, which I had sent on my own account. I hope God ordains their safe arrival. Now I am sending, again for my own account, five jugs with soap in this *khinzira*-vessel with Abū 'Alī Ḥassūn, for which freight and everything else have been paid in advance. "Nissīm" is written on them with ocher, and "Aṭā Tēhertī" with ink.<sup>13</sup> Kindly add their price to that of the oil and that of the three purses of gold sent with Raḥamīm<sup>14</sup> and buy for the total whatever you deem fit.

Regards to you and to those under your care.

P.S. Your letter destined for Sicily (that is, Palermo) has arrived and I shall forward it, God willing.

<sup>11</sup> To the agent(s) who bought the oil for the writer.

<sup>12</sup> The grand total seems to be short by 1/2 qīrāt (1/48 dinar).

<sup>13</sup> Aṭā, a brother of Nissīm, often mentioned in the Geniza, was to receive the shipment, while the addressee, the experienced local merchant, would handle the sale. Shipments usually were marked with ocher (red clay), not with ink (or sepia, *ḥibr*). "Tēhertī" is Tāhertī pronounced with Imāla (ē = ā). See the address.

<sup>14</sup> "Mercy" (Heb.), a name frequent in the West.

"Mūsā" is written with ocher on the ten jugs.<sup>15</sup>

(Address:)

(To) my master and lord Abū 'Imrān, may God prolong his life, Mūsā (Moses), son of Abu 'l-Ḥayy, (*may he*) *r(est in) E(den)*, Khalīla<sup>16</sup>—God is his protector.

From Nissīm, son of Isaac, (*may he*) *r(est in) E(den)*, Tēhertī.

(Since this letter provides exact information of the total cost of Tunisian soap at arrival in Alexandria, it is worthwhile to note the level of prices reached there. A qinṭār was sold throughout the eleventh century for 4 to 5 1/2 dinars.<sup>17</sup> Since the cost per qinṭār was here about 2 1/2 dinars, a comparatively high profit was assured. It is remarkable that no export duty was levied.)

## 28 COMMERCE DURING CIVIL WAR

The anarchy following the invasion of North Africa by the Hilāl bedouins in the late 1050s occasioned the rise of several small principalities warring with each other. Sfax, a seaport on the east coast of Tunisia, only about 80 miles south of al-Mahdiyya, made itself independent and remained so for about forty years (1059-1099/1100).<sup>1</sup> This situation is reflected in the Geniza papers. During this period, Sfax, instead of al-Mahdiyya, often served as terminal for boats coming from the East. When the "Sultan" of al-Mahdiyya actively fought the *qā'id*, or governor, of Sfax, he would seize the ships and confiscate the goods of the merchants of the rival city, and sometimes their very life was in jeopardy. The longest letter preserved in the Geniza, written in Mazara, Sicily, by Salāma b.

<sup>15</sup> Ar. *jirār*, referring to the ten pitchers, *qulal*, mentioned above. "Pitcher" was also a measure, as in English (cf. TS 8 J 25, f. 19, l. 20, *Nahray* 40: "a jug containing half a pitcher"). The medieval passion for variety in expression led to such inexactitudes.

<sup>16</sup> "Female friend," "mistress." See S. D. Goitein, "Nicknames as Family Names," *JAOS* 90 (1970), 521.

<sup>17</sup> Mosseri L-52, margin, ed. S. D. Goitein, *Tarbiz* 37 (1968), 50-51: 4 + dinars; TS NS Box 320, f. 2: 5 1/2; TS 8.25v, l. 3, *Nahray* 64: 4 1/2-5.

<sup>1</sup> Idris, *Zirides*, pp. 231, 251.

Mūsā b. Isaac ("Well-being," son of Moses) of Sfax deals profusely with these matters.<sup>2</sup> Salāma, who, like his father, was closely connected with the *qā'id* of Sfax, faced the executioner in al-Mahdiyya five times. Finally he recognized that life in North Africa had become unbearable; he bought a house in Mazara, Sicily, for 300 dinars and brought his family over. His partner in Egypt—and, as he wished, exclusive partner—was Abū Zikrī Judah b. Moses Ibn Sighmār, the brother of the Jewish chief judge of al-Mahdiyya (whose letter is translated in no. 33, below).

Salāma's extensive letter deserves to be edited in a separate publication. Here we translate a letter of his father, addressed to the same partner in Egypt, but showing us business as usual, with the slight qualification that the main carriers of goods and cash were Muslims, not Jews, probably because most of the greater Jewish merchants of Sfax had already left that city.

The time of our letter is defined by a reference to a ship of Nāṣir al-Dawla who was the actual ruler of much of Egypt during most of the years of terror 1062-1073.<sup>3</sup>

Bodleian Library, MS Heb. a 2 (Cat. 2805), f. 20.

### A

I am writing to you, my lord and master—may God prolong your life and make permanent the days of your well-being, happiness, and prosperity—on Tuesday, 26th of the month of Elul (September). I am well and prosperous—praise to God in gratefulness—and longing to see you. May God bring us together soon.

I have sent you a number of letters from al-Mahdiyya and Sfax and hope they have arrived and you have read them. I informed you in them that I have dispatched two purses to you from al-Mahdiyya with Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf al-Dūkī,<sup>4</sup> one for our partnership and one for my own account. The first contained 50 dinars eastern cur-

<sup>2</sup> Dropsie 389, 414. Facsimile of the opening in *Med. Soc.*, 1, opposite p. 20. A P.S. to another letter sent by Salāma b. Mūsā to Judah Ibn Sighmār from Mazara to Egypt is found in INA D-55, no. 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Med. Soc.*, 1, 310.

<sup>4</sup> Referred to in section G as "the Kohen al-Dūkī." Thus, this merchant from al-Mahdiyya was Jewish. Dūkī probably denotes a man having dealings with the Norman duke.