

"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.

rency;<sup>5</sup> and also 57 mithqāls, gold ore and old gold, worth 50 dinars, totaling 100 dinars. I hope it has arrived. I also sent you 50 2/3 dinars eastern currency for my own account; furthermore, 63 Ḥasanī<sup>6</sup> dinars—may God ordain their safe arrival.

## B

In the ship of the Amir Nāṣir al-Dawla I sent you thirty-one new large skins of oil, measuring sixty-two maṭars;<sup>7</sup> on their stoppers the names Salāma<sup>8</sup> and Judah are engraved. They are closed with small stoppers and fixed tightly with soaked palm leaves and parchment.<sup>9</sup> With them are two leather bags with soap, weighing five qinṭārs. The names Judah and Salāma are engraved on these as well. I hope everything will arrive. It is all in the hands of 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Alī b. Ḥabīb Sfaḳṣī.<sup>10</sup> The balance of the amount advanced for the whole partnership comes to 1 1/4 dinar.<sup>11</sup>

## C

In the same ship, I sent you two purses with 'Umar b. 'Uthmān al-Qa(z)dirī Sfaḳṣī,<sup>12</sup> one for the account of the partnership, containing 20 Shaykhiyya<sup>13</sup> dinars, worth 18 1/3, and one for my own account, in which there are 20 dinars of full weight of eastern currency. Please add this to the first purse, sent with al-Dūkī.

Together with this letter, I am sending you for my own account

<sup>5</sup> Egyptian dinars, which were regarded as standard money, wherefore no weight is indicated here.

<sup>6</sup> Referring to the Fatimid Caliph Abu 'l-Ḥasan aḏ-Ḍāhir (1021-1036), whose coins were issued from various mints in Tunisia, Egypt, and other countries. Also in the account TS Box 8, f. 62.

<sup>7</sup> Derived from the same Greek word as our "meter." In Tunisia, it designates a measure for oil, which in modern times has a capacity of about 20 liters (see Dozy, *Supplément* II, 600a).

<sup>8</sup> The writer's son, who was the third partner. In Dropsie 389, ll. 31-32 (see n. 2, above), Salāma reports to Judah about a similar shipment of his father and adds "your name and mine are engraved on the skin."

<sup>9</sup> Text: *wa-salāmatuhā fuluk sīghār wa-ḳhūṣ maṣbūgh wa-riqq.*

<sup>10</sup> A Muslim merchant, as his name indicates.

<sup>11</sup> Merchandise or money had been sent in advance from Egypt for the goods ordered in Tunisia.

<sup>12</sup> Qa(z)dirī, a dealer in tin. Also a Muslim. His father 'Uthmān, did a similar errand in Dropsie 389, l. 51.

<sup>13</sup> Dinars or quarter dinars from Palermo.

a purse in which there are 44 Ḥasanī dinars, weighing 43 dinars, as well as large dinars of eastern currency, 56 in number, and Ḥākimī rubā'īs,<sup>14</sup> 20 in number, of a total weight of 60 dinars.

## D

Please sell the Ḥasanī dinars of the two shipments for me and buy shining<sup>15</sup> flax of first quality for the dinars belonging to me, if possible, Māwī or Mīsārī,<sup>16</sup> unique in excellence, and if you find real Fayyūmī, knife-edge blades,<sup>17</sup> buy whatever you can—I ask God to inspire you with successful ideas.

## E

For our joint business, too, make an effort and buy whatever you see fit of flax and spices. You will find a list of the prices of the spices in my letter to Ḥassūn.<sup>18</sup> Please make an effort and buy accordingly both for our joint business and for me personally. Success, however, lies in God's hands. Send everything at the beginning of the sailing season to Sfax. When you find an opportunity to send flax to Sicily, do so and address it to Ishāq b. Khalaf.<sup>19</sup> Don't be stingy to write, but list in detail everything you received and sent, so that I shall be able to act according to your letters.

## F

I asked you in my previous letters to buy me a flame colored robe, which should be short and well fitting of fine, not coarse, material; I would like to wear it first on the Day of Atonement.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup> I.e., quarters of a dinar issued under the Fatimid Caliph al-Ḥākim (996-1021). His coins were struck in Tunisia, Sicily (especially the quarters), Egypt, and other countries. Twenty quarters make 5 dinars; thus we see that 56 of the "large" dinars had the weight of 55 only.

<sup>15</sup> Ar. *munaqqil*. See Dozy, *Supplément* II, 716a.

<sup>16</sup> For the various types of linen, see *Med. Soc.*, I, 455-457.

<sup>17</sup> Meaning, probably, thin and strong.

<sup>18</sup> His full name Ḥassūn b. Yahyā in Dropsie 389, f. 39. See also no. 27, n. 9, above.

<sup>19</sup> Often referred to in Dropsie 389.

<sup>20</sup> The custom of wearing new clothing first on the Day of Atonement and not on the Feast of New Year, preceding it by ten days, is attested in other Geniza letters. Since this was a day of fasting which could not be honored with good food, one singled it out by new clothing. Talmud Bavli, Shabbat, 119a.

Likewise, a turban of fine *sharb*-linen, which should be short and of pleasant, not coarse, material. Send with this some odorous wood, flasks (of camphor) and perfume, with which I can appear before my lord, the qā'id—may God give him victory. Deduct everything from the sum due to me.

## G

I sent you and to the elder M. Abu Ṣḥāq Ibrāhim,<sup>21</sup> with the Kohen al-Dūkī, 100 small sheets of . . . as "soap for your service."<sup>22</sup> They cost a little over 9 dinars; details are included in the letter sent with them. I hope everything will arrive.

## H

I wrote to your brother in Tripoli<sup>23</sup> urging him to forward those Aleppan *shuqqa*-gowns which he had there in Tripoli. I hope he has got them.

I wrote this letter hurriedly; kindly excuse its form. Greetings to you, your boys, and brothers-in-law, as well as to everyone inquiring about me. *And Peace.*

(Postscript, written upside down on the top of the page:)

Regards to M. Abū Yaḥyā Nahray. Inform him that I sent him the balance due to him with the oil through 'Abd al-Raḥmān. I hope it will arrive.

(Address on the reverse side, otherwise blank:)

To my master and lord Abū Zikrī—may God prolong his life—  
Ibn Sighmār—may God be his protector.

*the dear*, R. Judah, son of R. Moses, (*may he*) *r(est in) E(den)*,  
From his friend Mūsā, son of Isaac, (*may he*) *r(est in) E(den)*  
Sfaqsī.

<sup>21</sup> Spelled thus. Probably the addressee's brother is meant, mentioned here in the next paragraph and in Dropsie 389.

<sup>22</sup> As an inducement to give good service. This was not a present, but a good bargain, sent by the writer to his business friends on his own initiative, without being paid for it in advance.

<sup>23</sup> Tripoli on the Lebanese coast is meant. There was no point in writing to Egypt for action to be taken in Tripoli, Libya, which is near Tunisia. In addition, the goods referred to came from Aleppo in Northern Syria, from where they were exported to the West through Tripoli.

*Much support* (to you from God!)

(In another script:)

Forwarded by Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Iskandarānī.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> A representative of merchants in Alexandria, who acted also as a postal agency. See *Med. Soc.*, 1, 304, and nos. 72, 73, below.