

[Best regards to my sister]<sup>27</sup> and her husband, the illustrious elder Abu 'l-Faḍā'il, the scholar, to Ma'āni, the scholar (?), and his son. I have exerted myself for him to a degree that only God knows. The elder Abu 'l-Khayr ("Mr. Good") agreed to pay him 10 mith-qāls (Egyptian dinars), which the elder Abu 'l-Makārim ("Noble Character") will deliver to him.<sup>28</sup>

Convey my greetings to the elder Abū Ishāq, the son of your paternal uncle, to his mother, to the elder Abu 'Imrān and his children, to [. . .], the daughter of your paternal uncle, and to all those whom you<sup>29</sup> know, my most sincere regards.

I sent you 7 1/2 mann of nutmeg, which is better than anything found in the Kārim<sup>30</sup> and worth more than other sorts of it by 1 dinar; 11 mann of good galingale;<sup>31</sup> two fuṭa cloths for the children; 2 1/2 of celandine and 25 of odoriferous wood; fourteen pieces in number.<sup>32</sup>

(Repetition of some greetings and other matters from above. The end of the story can be restored with a high degree of probability. The letter was not sent, but reached Fustat nevertheless, which can only mean that the writer succeeded in coming home. I do not believe that he would have returned to Fustat had his wife accepted the repudiation. He then would have stayed in Aden and married there. Thus the long years of suffering had not been in vain. The India traveler was finally united with his wife.)

<sup>27</sup> See below.

<sup>28</sup> Probably a case of inheritance of a merchant who had died in Aden. Abu 'l-Khayr was in Aden and Abu 'l-Makārim in Cairo-Fustat.

<sup>29</sup> Feminine singular!

<sup>30</sup> The goods going from India to the West. See no. 43, n. 9, above.

<sup>31</sup> Ar. *ḥawlanj*, from which the English word is derived; a plant from the ginger family serving as an aphrodisiac or as a constituent in narcotics.

<sup>32</sup> These quantities of costly Oriental products were not really "gifts," but destined to be sold and to serve for the upkeep of the family.

#### 46 DEATH IN MALAYA

July 7, 1226

This and the following short piece are not letters, but are translated here in order to alert the reader to the fact that countries from which we do not have a single letter still were visited by traders who belonged to the same group of people who have left us hundreds of letters in the Geniza. It was not customary to send letters over very great distances. Almost no letters sent from Iran to Egypt or from Spain to Egypt have been found despite the manifold and close relations connecting these countries (see no. 2, above). Likewise, in the India trade one would write from India to Aden and from there to Egypt, but rarely, if at all, directly. The medieval seafarer needed a month to reach Malaya or Indonesia from India.<sup>1</sup> He would send a message from there to the southeastern coast of India, as is implied here, but not farther. Thus it is natural that no letters from those distant parts have found their way into the Geniza.

The document translated below is a draft containing the gist of a court record and is written on both sides of a tiny piece of paper measuring 4 x 2 1/2 inches. It is in the hand of the Nagid Abraham Maimonides in his most cursive style, which we are able to read safely only because so many of his holographs have been preserved. A court clerk would write out a complete record, or rather two, one of which would be written in Arabic characters, to be submitted to the government office of inheritances.<sup>2</sup> These copies, of course, would be signed by witnesses.

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter Collection, TS Arabic Box 30, f. 42, *India Book* 322.

*We, the undersigned members of the court, were assembled in a session of the court, in Miṣr (Fustat) on Tuesday, 10th of Tammuz, 1537 of the Documents, corresponding to the 10th of Rajab of the year 623 (July 7, 1226), when Abū Sa'īd, the Levi, son of the elder*

<sup>1</sup> See Jean Sauvaget, *Relation de la Chine et de l'Inde, rédigée en 851*, Paris, 1948, pp. 8-9, 43.

<sup>2</sup> For this purpose the Muslim date was added here.

Abu 'l-Ma'ānī, the Levi, the merchant, known as al-Dajājī<sup>3</sup> appeared before us and deposited his testimony that Abu 'l-Faḍl b. Mukhtār ("Chosen") al-Iskandarī ("Of Alexandria"), known as Ibn [. . .] died in Kalah,<sup>4</sup> which is in the country of. . .<sup>5</sup> He checked and verified this when he visited al-Ma'bar<sup>6</sup> in the country of India. After he had deposited his testimony in our presence, we confided it to writing so that it should serve as a title of right and a proof.

#### 47 DEATH IN INDONESIA

This is the upper left-hand corner of a query submitted to the Nagid Abraham Maimonides.<sup>1</sup> It is translated here for the same reason as the preceding selection.

Fanṣūr, a port on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia, was famous for its export of camphor and is mentioned as such not only by Muslim writers, but also by the famous Venetian traveler Marco Polo. The Fanṣūrī camphor was the best to be had both according to the Geniza documents and the later European sources.<sup>2</sup> No wonder that Jewish traders, too, made the long way from Cairo to Fanṣūr, requiring four months at least.

Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, E. N. Adler Collection,  
ENA 4020 I, f. 55 (?), *India Book* 233.

<sup>3</sup> About this man and the meaning of his names, see no. 45, sec. F, above. It is noteworthy that the son, although already having returned from a trip to India, is not yet styled "the elder."

<sup>4</sup> Kalah (today Kedah) on the west coast of present day Malaysia, is frequently mentioned by Muslim geographers as the main port for the export of tin, but also of camphor, aloe, and other Oriental products. See the extensive article in *ET*<sup>1</sup> s.v., also Sauvaget (cf. n. 1, above).

<sup>5</sup> Partly effaced, which is a pity, for the medieval Arabic name of the Malayan peninsula has not yet been established with certitude. I am still working on the identification.

<sup>6</sup> The Coromandel or southeastern coast of India. Only the upper part of the last three letters of 'l-M'br has been preserved, but no place name in India beginning with 'l-m other than al-Ma'bar is recorded in the Geniza.

<sup>1</sup> Not contained in Abraham Maimuni, *Responsa*, Jerusalem, 1937.

<sup>2</sup> See Heyd, *Commerce du Levant*, II, 592-594.

[What is the legal opinion of . . . . .] our illustrious master and teacher Abraham, the paramount Rav [. . . . .], the leader of our generation, the light of the world—may his glory be enhanced—about this: a man has traveled to the land of India and remained there for about fifteen years. [Before setting out he had appointed] his wife as his legal representative. She maintains herself and her two daughters by work. [. . . . .] Recently a Jewish man has arrived from Aden [and was questioned by another] Jewish man<sup>3</sup> who asked him [about that man who had traveled to India]. The Jew who had arrived from Aden said: we have heard [that he traveled to Fanṣūr and] died in Fanṣūr and that the ruler of that country [had taken his property (?) . . .]

Can the wife on the basis of this testimony [. . . . .]. (Rest of lines visible. The question was not only whether the wife could marry again, but how much of the property of her late husband she was permitted to take for herself. According to Jewish law, the daughters, not she, were the heirs. But since she had maintained herself [and the children] for fifteen years, which was the duty of the husband, she was clearly entitled to remuneration of the living costs for this long period.)

<sup>3</sup> Many queries were styled in such a general way (without mentioning names) in order to emphasize the purely legal character of the problem.