

these two, like all the others mentioned before, were written before 1150. The two letters from the thirteenth century (nos. 61 and 62) were sent within Egypt. Selection no. 8 is the only example in this book of a letter referring to Mediterranean business in the thirteenth century.

48-51 FOUR SHORT LETTERS TO 'ARŪS B. JOSEPH, THE PURPLE-MAKER

Abu 'l-Afrāḥ 'Arūs ("Happy Bridegroom") b. Joseph, whose father had emigrated from al-Mahdiyya to Fustat, is known from many letters as well as from documents dated May 1088 through October 1116.¹ He had a hand in the India trade² and handled many commodities of both the East and the West, but was mainly a purple-maker and was called thus (*arjawānī*). A detailed account on the cost of the transport of purple from Fustat to Tunisia, presented to him, is discussed in *Med. Soc.*, I, 339-343.

'Arūs used to write accounts on the reverse sides of letters or other communications received by him, and many of these notes, easily recognizable by his erratic hand, have been preserved. He was a much respected and beloved man, but most of the letters addressed to him and expressing these feelings refer to unconnected details and do not lend themselves easily to translation.

48 PURPLE FROM ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT, TO ALMERIA, SPAIN

Two letters referring to the same shipment have been traced. The first lacks the beginning, and with it the address on the reverse side, and is damaged by holes and torn-off margins. But it presents a more complete picture than the second letter, which is preserved in its entirety, but, as natural, presupposes the knowledge of what

¹ TS 13 J 1, f. 20; Gottheil-Worrell, *IB*, p. 10; *India Book* 144a.

² *India Book*, ch. v, sec. b.

has been said in the first. The two comparatively short letters are translated here in order to show the reader that the completeness of a Geniza paper does not necessarily make it valuable, while a much damaged piece might prove to be much more instructive. The letter presented here first was identified by me more than ten years after I had copied the second.

The material sent from Egypt to Spain is described as "dyed purple" or simply as "wool." Here a qintār, or a hundred pounds, cost 6 dinars, while the purple sent by 'Arūs in the account discussed in *Med. Soc.*, I, 339-343, was worth about 14 dinars. Thus probably old purple renovated by additional dyeing is intended here.

The two letters were written by the same pleasant hand and both were sent from Alexandria, although this is said only in the second letter whose beginning is preserved. The writer, Hilāl ("New Moon," corresponding to Hebrew Hillel) b. Joseph might or might not be identical with a man bearing the same name who in 1099 bought ninety-one jugs of wine (Bodl. MS Heb. e 101, f. 16), for these were common names.

The purpose of this letter needs a short explanation. Pious people and respectable merchants avoided giving an oath under any circumstances (see also no. 51, n. 6). Therefore our writer consented to enter into a business connection solely if the other party agreed never to demand an oath from him, or, in legal parlance, to accept his word as valid as the testimony of two trustworthy witnesses, accepted by a court.

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter Collection,
TS Arabic Box 30, f. 255.

. . . [Everyone] of our friends [knows] that I am *trustworthy* [never giving an oath] and that I do not accept *responsibility* for risks on voyages.

I shall be traveling on the Spanish boat, and we shall load, if God will, on the 1st of Nisan (March)³—may God let me and you partake in its blessings.

You wrote that you would send other wool. Do not send anything

³ Most of the spring convoys recorded in the Geniza sailed in May. Either the lading took a long time or the Spanish boat was stronger than the ships going to Tunisia and Sicily and dared to brave the freaks of spring weather.

of the kind, for dyed purple is not worth a thing in Spain. During my absence on the land⁴ someone came to Khiyār⁵ and told him that dyed wool was not worth a thing there; so please do not send any.

Send money for the freight and customs and write me who has the papers of the shipment, namely, the paper for the Mānak (customs) house,⁶ and that for the commission, for no goods can leave (the city gate for the harbor) unless they have a sign that they are cleared;⁷ otherwise one has to pay the dues again. The purple-maker 'Abd al-Raḥmān⁸ said he had no papers, except the 2 dinars less one-sixth which you (or, I) have received from Ibn Mu'allā.⁹ He said that the wool was worth 6 dinars per Egyptian qinṭār and that it weighed five qinṭārs, which makes 30 dinars, to which will be added the sum you will send for freight and customs. 'Abd al-Raḥmān asked me also to write to you in his name to pay to Ḥasan 1 dinar and 2 qīrāṭs for the packing.¹⁰

When you have done what I am asking you to do in this letter, write to 'Abd al-Raḥmān to deliver the wool to me and send me the testimony. For he said to me: "Take the wool as a commenda."¹¹ I answered: "I shall not accept anything before I receive an answer to what I am writing to him." This is what impeded my accepting delivery from him: I have sworn that I shall not enter into any agreement with anyone in the world unless he makes a legally binding declaration that I am *trustworthy*¹² and that I am free from any *responsibility*. I notify you of this. God is my witness that, had I not given such a binding oath, I would not have written you anything of the kind, for between the two of us there is more trust

⁴ Ar. *al-barr*, meaning perhaps the Egyptian *Rif*, or countryside.

⁵ Of the various persons bearing this name this one probably was Khiyār b. Zikrī, for his son Zikrī b. Khiyār wrote the letter ULC Or 1080 J 54 to 'Arūs. Another contemporary was Khiyār b. Jacob (TS 10 J 28 f. 12 [dated 1100]).

⁶ A customs house of Fustat, where exports were cleared.

⁷ Text: *mā yaqdir yakhruj illā [mar]sūm*. See next letter.

⁸ A Muslim colleague of 'Arūs, who had carried that "dyed purple" together with his own goods to Alexandria.

⁹ The meaning of this clause is not evident.

¹⁰ Text: *tglyg*, which is a scribal error. I assume that *tglyf*—i.e., *taghliḥ*—is intended.

¹¹ Text: *iqriḍ*, referring to the term *muqārada*.

¹² Meaning not obliged to give an oath under any circumstances.

than exists in the whole world, and I know well that you are more trustworthy than I am myself.

You still owe me 2 gold qīrāṭs, balance of the price of the [. . .] which I sent you. The son of your sister, 'Allān,¹³ wrote to Hilāl¹⁴ to pay me these 2 qīrāṭs, but he has not done so.

Best regards to you and to those under your care. And most respectful regards to your partner Sibā' ("Lion").

God alone is sufficient for me.¹⁵

49 A LATER LETTER ON THIS SHIPMENT

TS NS J 197.

I am writing to you . . . from Alexandria. . . .¹ Your letter with the testimony has arrived. Had I not been under oath, I would not have troubled you with this. Our friends will convey my excuses to you, namely, that I do not carry a thing for anyone except with this arrangement.

I loaded the wool, although I did not have the exact weight. 'Abd al-Raḥmān said that it weighed five qinṭārs and was worth 30 dinars. I took the expenses for the canvas, the ropes, and the freight from Abū Mūsā Hārūn ("Aaron, father of Moses") Ibn Shammār ("Trader in fennel").² I had great trouble in getting the shipment out to the harbor, for its papers had been lost. The two additional pieces which arrived with Hārūn³ are already on board. The total

¹³ Often mentioned in 'Arūs' correspondence. Since 'Arūs had no male offspring, he groomed his sister's son (who probably was married to a daughter of his) as the prospective heir of his firm.

¹⁴ Most likely Hilāl b. Binyām (Benjamin), proprietor of a drugstore in Alexandria, given as an address in no. 50, n. 4, below. Drugstores, then as today, served as landmarks and small bourses. See *Med. Soc.*, II, 261.

¹⁵ This phrase from the Koran was mostly used by Jews from the Maghreb. See above, *passim*.

¹ Seven short lines of the usual phrases.

² In TS 8 Ja 1, f. 5 (middle of the eleventh century) a man with this family name lives in al-Mahdiyya.

³ The aforementioned Aaron, it seems. When mentioning him first the writer had to be exact, since he charged the addressee with a debt to this man.