

corals are worth 20 dinars, and none have arrived thus far either from Europe¹⁸ or from North Africa.¹⁹

kindest regards to you and to all the friends.
And may your well-being wax indefinitely.

Two P.S.'s: Textiles from Alexandria

The scarfs²⁰ are with the bleacher. God willing, I shall send them as soon as they are ready.

(In the margin:)

I am sending three brocaded robes with the muleteer Kāfūr ("Camphor").²¹ They are for Isaac Nafūsī. Give them to him.

(Address, right side, five short lines:)

(To) his honor, my lord, the illustrious elder,

Abu 'l-'Alā Ṣā'id), (*our*) *master*,

Joseph, *the almoner, the trustee,*

the Friend of the yeshiva,

may God make his honored position permanent.

(Left side, four lines:)

(From) his grateful Isaac *ha-Levi, son of Simḥā al-Nisābūrī, (may the m(emory of the) r(ighteous) be b(lessed).*

(I) *h(ope for your) s(alvation, oh) G(od).*²²

(Third P.S. beneath the address:)

Do not move with the silk. Leave it as it is, unless you find . . .

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¹⁸ Ar. *Rūm*. Corals are found especially on the shores of Sardinia.

¹⁹ He seems to say that his corals were of a particularly fine quality.

²⁰ Ar. *radda*. My card index of textiles contains about sixty entries of this item from Geniza lists of trousseaux, but the word seems not to be mentioned elsewhere. Its meaning can be established through the combinations in which it appears. One of many which might be of interest here: "An Alexandrian cloak, *milḥafa*, with a *radda*—6 dinars." Bodl. MS Heb. f 56, f. 48, l. 15.

²¹ A slave or freedman, as his name indicates. Transport by land was regarded by our writer as safer for precious textiles than the treacherous voyage on the Nile.

²² This use of the verse Genesis 49:18, abbreviated *LQI*, must have been common to "Easterners," for the Baghdadi who wrote the selections 47-49 follows the same usage. In later centuries it became customary to write *LQI* on the top of a letter, and many Oriental Jews still do so.

54 PROVISION FOR THE FAMILY OF A MERCHANT ABROAD

When a merchant traveled abroad for a prolonged period, he did not leave cash for the maintenance of his family, for cash in those days did not mean paper, but gold and silver, the supply of which is limited by nature and therefore possessed an incomparably higher purchasing power than our so-called money. Even a well-to-do merchant set his gold working all the time and carried very little with himself even for his own needs (see *Med. Soc.*, 1, 200). The requirements of the family were provided for through monthly payments by a business friend, often fixed in an official document made out by a notary before the husband would set out on his journey. The business friend would take care also of additional needs of the family, often also foreseen in the legal instrument safeguarding its well-being. In addition to a fixed sum the family often was provided with such basic requirements as wheat, oil, and firewood. Several such notarial documents have been preserved. Our letter shows how the arrangement worked in practice.

Our Isaac Nisābūrī of Alexandria took care of the family of Abu 'l-Faraj al-Ḥamawī, who traveled in the Muslim West (see no. 53, n. 10). Ḥamawī remained there for two winters at least, for our letter refers to provisions for three periods of five months each. The payments were made twice by bookkeeping arrangement and once by sending gold. The family lived in Fustat where it was looked after by the addressee, who was an important merchant, but also an almoner and trustee of the court. The accounts were made with Abu 'l-Riḍā, representative of the merchants (see no. 53, n. 8).¹ But he could not be bothered with such matters as payments to the family of a merchant abroad. This was left to a man one rung lower on the socioeconomic ladder.

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter
Collection, TS 13 J 21, f. 26.

¹ A document referring to a commenda of 300 dinars given by this man to three partners traveling to Yemen "and other countries" is contained in *India Book* 156. It is dated January 1118, that is, during the period of our nos. 53 and 54, here. The document, pieced together by me from four different fragments, is the longest referring to the India trade, but is still not complete.

(As from l. 4.) In a previous letter I had written to you about the family of our friend, the elder Abu 'l-Faraj al-Ḥamawī—may God ordain him safe travel—namely, that you should take from his excellency, my lord, the elder Abu 'l-Ridā 2 dinars every month,² as from the new moon of Iyyar (April). This is on his private account, not on that of his warehouse, for I paid expenses for the goods he sent to the Maghreb.³ I have written to him about this and communicated the account to him. I paid for him 10 1/8 dinars. Thus, this is for five months, from the new moon of Iyyar to the first day of Tishri (August 30, see below).

He also credited me⁴ with 10 other dinars, this time on account of the warehouse. I also sent the other letters.⁵ Thus they have now 2 dinars every month until the 1st of Tishri, 1129 (August 30, 1117), complete.⁶

I sent with my lord, the elder Abu 'l-Barakāt b. Khulayf ("Blessings, son of little dear substitute")⁷ a purse with 10 dinars in number and 10 in weight for another five months. Please take it from him and pay them 2 dinars every month until the new moon of Adar (mostly February). When this will be finished, I shall send more.

For the balance of the price of the cloak⁸ buy wheat for them, and when the al-Mahdiyya ships arrive, I shall send them [. . .], and if they wish something else [. . . a line and a half lost . . .] in the Kārim⁹ . . . [three lines lost] and send me the news from

² The standard minimum monthly budget of a middle-class family. Here they receive wheat, in addition.

³ The warehouse, *dār al-wakāla*, was often kept in partnership, in this case probably with a prominent Muslim. See *Med. Soc.*, I, 188-189.

⁴ Text: *rf' 'ly*. To the best of my knowledge, this can only mean: he charged me. The Persian writer seems to mean: he asked me to pay for him.

⁵ He had forwarded before letters by Ḥamawī to his family and business correspondents.

⁶ The first of Tishri is the Jewish New Year. The writer closes here the accounts for the year preceding August 30, 1117; in addition to the five months referred to above, payments had been due for another five months.

⁷ Called "the Alexandrian" in a note to him from his brother (TS 16.244). See also no. 53, n. 7, above, where he is also on his way from Alexandria to Fustat.

⁸ An Alexandrian *milhafa* (see no. 53, n. 20) was sent to the recipient with a request to buy for the family other items requested by them.

⁹ He wishes to receive information about the goods that arrived that year "in the Kārim," that is, from India. See no. 43, n. 9, no. 45, n. 30.

Shām (Syria and Palestine).¹⁰ (Three damaged lines with the conventional phrases of conclusion. In the margin, the writer's son Simḥa kisses the hand of the recipient, and greetings are extended to his brother Abū Sa'd and the latter's son. The address, on the otherwise blank verso, is as in no. 44. The Heb. Shālōm ["Peace"] is added in the upper lefthand corner; see no. 45.)

55 INVITATION OF A SCRIBE FROM EUROPE

The father of the recipient is called here not by his Hebrew name Joseph as in the two previous letters, but its Arabic equivalent Munajjā ("The rescued," namely, from the pit in the biblical story, Genesis 37). The medieval writers delighted in such variations.

The invitation of a scribe from Europe at a time when many local scribes were available in Alexandria should not be understood as an indication that the Jewish copyists of "Rūm" were in general superior to their Egyptian colleagues. The Geniza material on this question needs further study. This and the following selection are presented only to show that the merchant Isaac Nīsābūrī had concerns other than his business.

Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Heb. d 66 (Cat. 2878), f. 43.

I am writing from the port city Alexandria, may God protect it, . . .

A. MATS ORDERED IN ALEXANDRIA

Abu 'l-Ḥasan Caleb¹ b. Nathan arrived some time ago and told me that he had carried with him a note with the measurements for the pair of mats which your honor had ordered to make; he had lost it and also did not remember the measurements. I expected a

¹⁰ See no. 53, n. 9.

¹ The biblical name Caleb was popular among Byzantine Jews, probably because of Caleb's connection with the Land of Israel (Numbers 13-14; Joshua 15:14-18) and among Arabic-speaking Jews because it sounded much like the Arabic name Khulayf (see no. 54), which was sometimes used as its equivalent.