

(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,<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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 me<sup>4</sup> with 10 other dinars, this time on account of the warehouse. I also sent the other letters.<sup>5</sup> Thus they have now 2 dinars every month until the 1st of Tishri, 1129 (August 30, 1117), complete.<sup>6</sup>

I sent with my lord, the elder Abu 'l-Barakāt b. Khulayf ("Blessings, son of little dear substitute")<sup>7</sup> 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 cloak<sup>8</sup> 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 Kārim<sup>9</sup> . . . [three lines lost] and send me the news from

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

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

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> He had forwarded before letters by Ḥamawī to his family and business correspondents.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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).<sup>10</sup> (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 Caleb<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>10</sup> See no. 53, n. 9.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

letter from you in this matter carried by Barakāt al-Ja'fari;<sup>2</sup> he has arrived, but no letter of yours was with him. Please honor me with your letter whenever you have any need or concern.<sup>3</sup>

#### B. THE SCRIBE

I ask you also to meet with R. Abraham the Rūmī, *the scribe*, who wrote a *Torah scroll* in Tinnīs,<sup>4</sup> and this year, too, I have heard that he wrote two others in Fustat. Formerly we did not have here in Alexandria a *Torah scroll* on *parchment*.<sup>5</sup> But now, with the support of the *Creator*, we have obtained parchment and are resolved, with the help of the H(oly one, be), he p(raised), to carry this matter through. Therefore I ask your honor to meet with the aforementioned R. Abraham and make an agreement with him regarding his remuneration and all his expenses. He should come here as early as possible. Here are many *scribes*, but our endeavor in this matter is that the scroll of the *congregation* should have the very best script.<sup>6</sup>

I intend to go up to Fustat, but wait for the answer to this letter of mine and the arrival of that man. Immediately afterwards I shall travel to Fustat where I have many things to do. So please have this matter done quickly.

Kindest regards to you and to all who inquire about me. I have learned what you have done to extricate that load of brazilwood.<sup>7</sup> May I never be deprived of your kindness. *Peace in plenty*.

(Address is on the otherwise blank verso, as in the preceding selections, with the variation indicated in the introduction. *Peace in plenty* is repeated.)

<sup>2</sup> His full name was Abu 'l-Barakāt Berākhōt ("Blessings," in Ar. and Heb.) b. Nathan. *Ja'fari* was a type of paper, in the manufacture or sale of which he specialized (TS 16.207).

<sup>3</sup> Mats were one of the main products of Alexandrian industry. They were exported overseas to Sicily and Tunisia.

<sup>4</sup> Once a famous center of the linen industry on an island east of Damietta. Very often referred to in the Geniza. See, e.g., the indexes of *Med. Soc.*, I-II, s.v.

<sup>5</sup> This translates Heb. *gevil* (spelled by Nisābūrī *gevil*), which is written on the side of the hair, not on that of the flesh.

<sup>6</sup> Torah scrolls usually were donated by private persons, often by women, and donations naturally are not always of the best quality. The congregation (the biblical word *'ēdā* is used) made a special effort.

<sup>7</sup> Probably from the customs in Fustat after arrival from India.

#### 56 REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION IN ALEXANDRIA

Late 1110s

The first part of this letter (ll. 6-36) deals with a partnership in a boat, in which the writer, the recipient, the representative of the merchants Abu 'l-Riḍa Solomon (see nos. 53 and 54, above), and several other persons, one of them already dead, were involved and on which the Nagid himself was expected to make a decision. The fact itself is interesting, since the Geniza is surprisingly reticent about partnerships in boats (see *Med. Soc.*, I, 309). But the details provided refer to a pending lawsuit not otherwise attested and do not sum up to a meaningful complete unit worth translating.

The second section, translated below, is concerned with a topic of vital importance to the Christians and Jews living under Islam, namely, whether they were permitted to regulate their matters of inheritance according to their own laws or had to refer them to Muslim courts. The Geniza contains much material on this question (see *Med. Soc.*, II, 394-399). The passage presented here is of some specific interest since it shows that the government had no "policy" in this matter; rather, it acted when a community, and each local community separately, took the appropriate initiative.

The addressee was a *nā'ib*, or deputy director of some government office. Such people usually conducted their correspondence in Arabic script, wherefore there was no reason to deposit its remnants in the Geniza. Thus far I have not found any other item referring to him.

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter  
Collection, TS 18 J 4, f. 6, as from l. 38.

A very serious matter occurred here, which should not be passed over in silence or slackness. A foreigner, a teacher, died here and left some gold. One of our coreligionists took it, but there was some dispute about it, and one of our fellow Jews went to the qadi and to the director of the (Muslim) office of inheritances and informed them. The qadi sent five policemen, who took the money.

In the times of our lord the Nagid (*may the memory of the*)