

bout was introduced in order to explain why the writer could commit such a folly as to send an unexperienced youth abroad. On second reading it was felt that such a detail was not commensurate with the dignity of an "illustrious elder."

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter
Collection, TS 10 J 16, f. 19.

(The seven lines of introduction are much damaged. The letter is sent from "my home, Tripoli.")

[. . .], son of our master and teacher Joseph, (*may the memory of the righteous be blessed*), arrived this year by boat¹ and told me much about you, my lord, about your exertions for your friends and your noble character traits, all of which, of course, I knew before. I ask God to grant you fame for your virtues and merits and to let you never lose that *good name*. May he bless you with a *male child*, who will be like you or even better²—Amen, oh Lord of the universe.

I wish to inform you, my lord, that it so happened that, while I was drinking, my boy asked me to let him travel overseas. I swore to him that he would travel this year unless no ship set sail.³ But God, the exalted, had willed that there was one. Thus I sent him and ordered that at arrival in Miṣr (Fustat), he should follow in everything the instructions of my lord, and ask you to guide him with your good advice. If a bahār of lac which had fallen into the water comes your way, buy it for him. In case it does not, and the boy goes down to Alexandria, kindly advise him to leave with you the money for such a buy, until the occasion for it arises. Then you will buy it and send it to him. Naturally, you will act according to your own judgment.⁴

¹ Interesting, because it shows that travel overland had again become common. During the half-century following the invasion of North Africa by the Arab bedouins, travel had become practically confined to the sea.

² The wish that the addressee's children should become better than he himself is somewhat strange to us, but natural in a society with strong family affection. The same occurs in no. 11, n. 12, above.

³ Remarkable that such a possibility was taken into consideration. The Geniza mentions a case when no boat sailed from Alexandria to Tripoli. One had to take a boat to Palermo and from there back to the Libyan coast.

⁴ The father wished the boy to come home with a big sack—a bahār normally comprised 300 pounds—but he did not want to spend much money on

Buy him also two mann of clove bark.⁵ If it is expensive, buy one. Also a quarter mann nutmeg, and a quarter mann odoriferous wood of middle quality, for the family. Kindly do me this favor—may I never be deprived of you, and may God keep you for your friends. (Some greetings.)

58 SHIPPING CARAWAY FROM ALEXANDRIA TO FUSTAT

The Gaëta Boat

Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Heb. c 28 (Cat. 2876), f. 55.

(Conventional but beautifully styled introduction, seven lines.)

A

I congratulate your high excellency on these noble days of festivals approaching you.¹ May God let you reach similar ones for a long time and during many consecutive years. *May you be blessed to behold the beauty of the Lord and to visit constantly in his Temple.*²

B

In your precious letter to Abū Ishāq Ibrahīm you asked that I send you the bale of caraway.³ I acted in accordance with your instructions, asked God for guidance and loaded it on the boat of

that venture. Therefore he asked to buy lac damaged by water, which had little value.

⁵ This fragrant spice was often sent as a present and is intended as such here, too, as is expressly said. The father wanted to train his son also in this important task of a traveler: selecting presents for those at home. Three qualities of clove are mentioned in the Geniza: "heart of clove," "cleaned clove" (namely from its bark), and "the bark," which is the meanest.

¹ They were approaching the writer as well. But all good things had to be related to the recipient.

² Psalm 27:4. A common wish for those feast days, like Passover or Pentecost, with which a pilgrimage to Jerusalem was connected.

³ Caraway seed (the English word is derived from the Arabic) came from Spain or North Africa.

the Ḥajj (Mecca pilgrim) Ibn Dunyā.⁴ I canvassed its ends and bound it, for it had loosened. Until it was on board I paid for it 34 1/2 (dinars).⁵ In the customs house and at the Sidra gate⁶ I paid 1/2 and 1/3 less 1/8 dinar;⁷ for the canal,⁸ 16 dirhems. For freight I have made an agreement on 15 dirhems, which you will pay him after its arrival, with God's will, glorified be his might. Please take notice of this.⁹

C

By God, the discontinuation of your letters to me, while they reach others, hurt me much. But your honor is excused, may God keep you well and allot me again your favors.

D

I need not tell you what happened to the boat from Gaëta and about its final arrival. The elder Abū Ishāq has written you a detailed letter about this and all other matters.¹⁰

E

I am eager to meet with you after the holidays, if God wills. I extend to your honor my humble and most sincere greetings and

⁴ "Man of the World," but meaning: despising worldliness.

⁵ In the approximately contemporary TS 12.290v, margin, the price asked for 100 pounds of caraway in Fustat was 3 1/2 dinars. Even if we assume that this bale, *'idl*, comprised 600 pounds, we would arrive at a sum of only 21 dinars. Thus, there must have been different qualities. Dirhems cannot be intended here, for the next line no doubt refers to dinars.

⁶ A city gate of Alexandria at which goods destined for Cairo or the countryside were charged with a toll. Often mentioned.

⁷ That is, 12 + 8 - 3 = 17 (out of 24) qīrāts, approximately, three-quarters of a dinar.

⁸ The usual word for the canal connecting Alexandria with the Nile is Khalīj. The word used here and at the end of the letter is *khawr*, designating a gulf largely formed by a river, especially in India. The use of this word here is perhaps owing to the increase in the India trade.

⁹ This complete report about one shipment shows again that customs and the cost of transport, compared with the value of the merchandise, were not oppressively high; 31 dirhems were less than 1 dinar at that time. See *Med. Soc.*, 1, 380, secs. 50-52.

¹⁰ A Jewish merchant from Egypt, writing from Spain in the spring of 1137, intended to come home on the boat of "the man from Gaëta." (see *Levi Della Vida Jubilee Volume*, Rome, 1956, pp. 403-404). Here it is called *al-marqab al-gy'ny*, "the Gaëta boat."

ask you to kiss for me the eyes of your noble issue, your boy, may God let you see the fulfillment of the hopes you have for him. If you will honor me with the favor of your letter containing a report about your doings and your well-being, this will be the finest present I ever received. *And may your well-being increase.*

F

My lord, ask Hazzūn¹¹ b. Rajā' ("Hope"), how much he paid for the bale on the canal. If it was less than they took (from me), deduct the balance from the freight. And peace!

59 FROM ALMERIA, SPAIN TO TLEMÇEN, ALGERIA

Probably July 10, 1138

The recipient of this letter, Abū Sa'īd Ḥalfōn b. Nethanel ha-Levi, was a great traveler. One year we would find him in Aden and India, and the next in Spain and North Africa. About eighty Geniza items refer to him. He used his extended travels for meeting scholars and poets and for searching after interesting books. He was rightly characterized as "the center of all the leading personalities of his time." His intimate friendship with the Spanish Hebrew poet Judah ha-Levi was the cause of the preservation of five holographs and a good number of other items related to this great writer: they were kept with Ḥalfōn's papers and, one day, deposited in the Geniza with them. Here we find Ḥalfōn in Tlemçen in present-day Algeria, after he had traveled there from Fez, Morocco. Shortly afterwards a letter was addressed to him to Lucena near Granada, Spain.

The writer, Isaac b. Baruch, although of a somewhat lower social rank, belonged to the same circle of merchants who combined busi-

¹¹ I have not met this name elsewhere. Certainly a Muslim. This was the captain of the boat which carried the caraway, while the proprietor was the Ḥajj. The toll for the use of the canal was not levied in Alexandria, but somewhere on the way. The captain had received the sum of 16 dirhems in advance, but could not know exactly how much he would have to pay.