

the Ḥajj (Mecca pilgrim) Ibn Dunyā.<sup>4</sup> I canvassed its ends and bound it, for it had loosened. Until it was on board I paid for it 34 1/2 (dinars).<sup>5</sup> In the customs house and at the Sidra gate<sup>6</sup> I paid 1/2 and 1/3 less 1/8 dinar;<sup>7</sup> for the canal,<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

## 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.<sup>10</sup>

## 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

<sup>4</sup> "Man of the World," but meaning: despising worldliness.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

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

<sup>7</sup> That is, 12 + 8 - 3 = 17 (out of 24) qirāts, approximately, three-quarters of a dinar.

<sup>8</sup> The usual word for the canal connecting Alexandria with the Nile is Khalij. 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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 Hazzūn<sup>11</sup> 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-

<sup>11</sup> 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.

ness with interest in literature. The charming poem of Judah ha-Levi on the occasion of the circumcision of his grandson and namesake, and even more the longer one celebrating the birth of his own first-born, show the esteem in which he was held.<sup>1</sup> His domicile was Almeria, the port on the Spanish east coast. A letter addressed to him there by Ḥalfōn b. Nethanel has been preserved, as well as several other letters sent by him to Ḥalfōn.

As for the date of our letter: Sunday, July 10, 1138, can be assumed with great probability. The poet Judah ha-Levi (see sec. B) left Spain for good in the summer of 1140. In a famous poem written in that year he speaks of Ḥalfōn's dedicated friendship which had become particularly intimate "these last two years." Ḥalfōn visited Spain in 1128, 1130, 1135, and 1138, but only in the last of these four did the last day of the Jewish month of Tammuz, given as the date of the writing of the letter, fall on a Sunday. Thus the last day of Tammuz which corresponded to July 10, 1138, is the almost certain date of this letter. This is made even more likely by *India Book* 115, where a person with whom Ḥalfōn had concluded a partnership in Fez in January 1138, carried a letter of his from Tlemçen to Almeria.<sup>2</sup>

In Spain, even a humdrum business letter like ours was preceded by a carefully worded introduction, mostly in rhymed prose. The superlative epithets contained in it can be rendered in English only very imperfectly.

Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Heb. d 74, f. 41, *India Book* 104;  
partly edited *Tarbiz*, 24 (1955), 134-138.

(In the upper left-hand corner:) Your admirer and glorifier  
Ishāq (Isaac) Ibn Baruch.

#### A. INTRODUCTION

My most exalted master / and highest support, / my strongest resort, / most abundant resource, / most liberal help, / and Fate's finest gift to me, / may God, the exalted, prolong your life / and

<sup>1</sup> *Diwan des . . . Jehuda ha-Levi*, ed. H. Brody, Berlin, 1894, 1, 120, 189.

<sup>2</sup> Details in my paper "The Biography of Rabbi Judah ha-Levi in the Light of the Cairo Geniza Documents," in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, vol. 28, New York, 1959, 41-56.

fulfill your hopes to your satisfaction. / I am writing these lines, may God exalt you, out of esteem of your worthiness / and admiration for your greatness. / May God keep you and remove all adversities from your domains.

#### B. LARGE PAYMENT TO THE POET JUDAH HA-LEVI, ḤALFŌN'S SILENT PARTNER

I received your esteemed epistle carried by Abū Jacob Ibn al-Naghira,<sup>3</sup> my master and your admirer, may God keep him, in which you asked me to pay you 20 1/2 mithqāls (dinars). I shall carry out your instructions.<sup>4</sup>

I am writing this letter on Sunday, the last day of Tammuz. Four days ago I received from Tlemçen, with Abū Jacob Ibn al-Minna, ("Present," made by God to the mother)—may God keep and console him<sup>5</sup>—[100]<sup>6</sup> 1/2 and 1/3 mithqāls for the burnished copper.<sup>7</sup> You wrote in your letter that I should send 150 mithqāls out of the sum received from Tlemçen; but only 100 have arrived. Anyhow, I shall carry out your orders, contribute a part of the sum myself and send it to R. Judah Ibn Ghiyāth,<sup>8</sup> my most high support, may God keep him, who will forward it to R. Judah, the Levi, my most high support, may his honored position be permanent.

#### C. CHANGING MARKET CONDITIONS IN ALMERIA

I have already informed you that I have received the 100 mithqāls you sent from Fez. You instructed me to buy silk for it. Silk sold indeed for a reasonable price. Therefore I bought it for 50 mithqāls.

<sup>3</sup> This man concluded a contract of partnership with Ḥalfōn in Fez, Morocco, in January 1138 (see *India Book* 115). Abū Jacob, that is, the Heb. instead of the Ar. form, odd as it sounds, was Maghrebi usage.

<sup>4</sup> As is stated at the end, the payment was made to this partner of Ḥalfōn.

<sup>5</sup> A period of mourning has occurred in this man's family.

<sup>6</sup> See what follows. The writer omitted at the beginning of the line the letter *q* = 100.

<sup>7</sup> The best quality. See below.

<sup>8</sup> A sum of 150 dinars, on which a middle-class family could exist for six years, was no gift. Judah ha-Levi, who was a successful physician, had invested a part of his capital in Ḥalfōn's business ventures, on what conditions we cannot know. Here, he gets his investment back, no doubt with considerable profit. Ibn Ghiyāth ("Present," often wrongly pronounced Ghayyāth) himself a poet, was closely connected with Judah ha-Levi, and the latter addressed to him several poems. See e.g., pp. 53, 60, 151, 174, in his *divan*.

But when the time of the sailing of the ships approached and it became clear to me that you would spend the rest of the summer in Spain,<sup>9</sup> I desisted from further action: I did not buy and left the money. But between the time I bought and today the mithqāl lost some of its value and the goods are today more expensive, namely:

D. A PRICE LIST<sup>10</sup>

Peeled <i>khazāj</i> silk	. . . mithqāls
First class ( <i>khazāj</i> )	5; the best 6; today, to 4 <sup>11</sup>
The very coarse	3-2 1/2
Khazz silk <sup>12</sup>	9 1/2-9. <sup>13</sup>

As to the cash being paid today for silk, it is permissible to pay (only) one-third in the present currency, the difference between the current mithqāl and the Ḥammūdī mithqāl is a *thumānī* (1/8).<sup>14</sup>

Good, "burnished" copper	8
Cast copper	7
Good wax of Fez	8 1/2 per 100 pound
Pepper	27-25 per 100 pound

(Three damaged lines)

## E. SMALLER ITEMS AND CONCLUSION

The 20 1/2 mithqāls will be paid by me to Abū Jacob from the

<sup>9</sup> And not sail back from North Africa to Egypt directly.

<sup>10</sup> Another price list, sent by Isaac b. Baruch to Ḥalfōn only a few weeks later (*India Book* 202) shows a very considerable additional rise in prices, occasioned, of course, by the imminent departure of the last convoy of ships to the East.

<sup>11</sup> They used to mention the higher quotation first.

<sup>12</sup> For the various types of silk see *Med. Soc.*, I, 104, 418, and, esp., 454-455, n. 53. See also no. 2, n. 10, above.

<sup>13</sup> The quantity was standard and therefore is not indicated. In *India Book* 202, l. 16, it is referred to with *al-wazna*, "a weighing," a term used in different countries and periods. See Dozy, *Supplément*, II, 800b; Hinz, *Masse*, p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Very interesting, but extremely surprising. The Ḥammūdids were a small Berber dynasty which ruled various Spanish cities, especially Malaga, for a short time (until 1057), and which had an extremely poor record as far as their coins are concerned (see Harry W. Hazard, *The Numismatic History of Late Medieval North Africa*, New York, 1952, pp. 96, 236-237). The passage must wait for parallel sources.

balance remaining with me.<sup>15</sup> For the (price of the) spices I shall buy pure *khazāj* silk, as you have ordered, if God wills.

Kindest, best, and sincerest regards to my master and support, expressing the extent of my yearning for you—may God ordain our reunion, if God wills. Reiterated greetings of peace be upon my high support and the mercy of God, the exalted.

I beg to inform you that a time was set for the sale of the myrobalan.<sup>16</sup> I sold half a pound for 1/2 mithqāl; then I noted that you had fixed its price as 1 1/2 mithqāl per pound, whereupon I left it. I had not sold more than that half pound of it. The turpeth<sup>17</sup> costs today 1 mithqāl per two pounds.

## F. ABOUT SHIPS EXPECTED FROM EGYPT

A day after the completion of this letter a barge arrived from Alexandria, which had been on its way sixty-five days. Muslim merchants, who had traveled in it, said that they had left behind them two ships ready to sail for Almeria. But they have not seen the ships sailing from Spain, nor do they have any information about them.<sup>18</sup> Kindest and best regards to my highest support. May God's mercy be upon him. I have paid to Abū Jacob the 20 1/2 mithqāls as ordered by you. And peace.

(Address:)<sup>19</sup> From the admirer of his worthiness—may God exalt him—Isaac, son of Baruch, (*may he*) *r(est in) p(eace)*.

[To] the illustrious merchant, the noble and generous elder Abū Sa'īd ha-Levi, son of Nethanel<sup>20</sup> ha-Levi, *m(ay his) s(oul be) b(ound up) in (the bundle of) l(ife)*.

<sup>15</sup> See n. 4, above.

<sup>16</sup> A widely used Oriental medical herb for intestinal troubles. "A time was set," i.e., the market price was announced.

<sup>17</sup> Ar. *tirbid* (from which the English word is derived), an emetic made from a plant cultivated in Ceylon and other Oriental countries. See M.A.H. Ducros, *Le Droguiier Populaire Arabe* . . . , Cairo, 1930, p. 28, no. 50.

<sup>18</sup> *India Book* 105, which was sent on August 8, 1138, reports that these two ships arrived on Friday, August 5, and that Jews traveling in one of them told that Ḥalfōn's brother, who served as judge in Cairo, and all friends in Egypt were fine.

<sup>19</sup> Note that in this letter the sender is mentioned first.

<sup>20</sup> Spelled *N'l* instead of *Ntn'l*. Not a mistake, since this spelling is found also in other letters.