

Since a copy had to be deposited with the captain or, rather, the proprietor or bursar of a ship, no doubt most of them were written in Arabic characters and no need for their preservation was felt. No. 77, below, is an example of a small shipment, probably attached to the bale of a business friend, for whom the bill of lading was written in Hebrew characters.

Although an ancient Arabic proverb has it that of the good things of this earth Muslims enjoy most sex, Christians—money, and Jews—food,² the Geniza letters contain very little information about culinary matters in general and provisions on travel in particular. The short note translated in no. 78 arouses rather than satisfies our curiosity: how were those roast chickens and quails preserved?

A business trip in the Mediterranean area required an absence from home for at least one summer; one on the India route, for at least one year, but often far more. Naturally, such long separations imposed great hardships on married couples, as is eloquently brought home in no. 45, above. Unfortunately the religious and learned middle-class traders, who left us their writings in the Geniza, were as tight-lipped about sex as we are bubbling over with it. The whole problem has been dealt with by me in the forthcoming third volume of my book *A Mediterranean Society*. Here, two specimens touching on it are translated, one from the India route (no. 79), and one from the Mediterranean (no. 80).

69 LAST-HOUR ARRANGEMENTS FOR DISPOSITION OF PRECIOUS SHIPMENTS

Alexandria to Fustat

Ca. 1023

As repeatedly emphasized in the letter, this is a hurriedly written apology explaining why it was impossible to carry out instructions received from the addressee. Details (such as the names of the travelers entrusted with the care for the shipments) would follow later.

The shipments involved were very large, especially if one con-

² Discussed in Goitein, *Studies in Islamic History*, p. 251.

siders that the time of their dispatch was one of warfare and great perils. Eighty-five bales of flax,¹ containing about 30,000 pounds, about 140 pounds of pepper, and one bale each of finished textiles and lac, and a camel load of myrobalan,² had a value of well over \$300,000. The proprietor living in the capital had received intelligence of the war situation in Tunisia and had given last-minute instructions to divert all shipments destined for Qayrawān, then the capital of Tunisia, to Palermo, the capital of Sicily. But it was too late; moreover, good news from Tunisia meanwhile had reached Alexandria, where this letter was written.

The addressee, Abū Naṣr Tustarī, the son of Sahl, the recipient of no. 11, above, was one of the leading merchants of the Egyptian capital during the first half of the eleventh century until he was liquidated, shortly after his brother Abū Sa'd had been murdered in October 1047.

The writer, Ṣadaqa b. 'Ayyāsh ("Charity," son of "Long-lived") was the son of the brother-in-law and representative of the leading Jewish merchant of Qayrawān around 1000, who has been met by us in no. 11, n. 29, and n. 5, above. Ṣadaqa is praised by his uncle for his efficiency in a letter to his father 'Ayyāsh (Taylor-Schechter Collection 13 J 23, f. 14). The ease with which he addresses the great Abū Naṣr Tustarī shows that the two belonged to the same social class.

Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Heb. d 66 (Cat. 2878), f. 15.

(Five lines of introduction, containing the date: second half of Iyyar [May], and acknowledging letters received.)

As to your order, may God preserve your honored position, to send everything to Palermo: I had asked God, may his name be glorified, for guidance, and, in accordance with your prior instructions, loaded for Qayrawān since I was afraid that time would be running out and we would miss the sailing altogether.

Specification of the shipments to Qayrawān:

Boat of Abu 'l-'Alā' ("The Excellent")³ 19 bales

¹ Flax was the staple export of Egypt in those days. Therefore bales containing flax were not described as such.

² See no. 22, n. 35, above.

³ Here sailing from Alexandria to Tunisia in the spring. In a letter to

Boat of Ibn al-Mawwāz ("Banana seller") ⁴	22 bales
Boat of Othmān (The Seller of Lac) ⁵	10 bales
Boat of Ḥasan of Barqa ⁶	3 bales
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Total	54 bales

One bale arrived⁷ on this very day on which I am writing this letter; it will go to wherever God, the glorious and exalted, will grant.

Specification of the shipments to Palermo:

Boat of the shaykh Abū 'Abdallāh, al-Andalusī ⁸	20 bales and 1 barqalū ⁹
Barge ¹⁰ of Ḥusayn ("The Seller of Lac")	10 bales

The bale with the textiles was opened by me. I sent one part with Ibn Dhīsūr,¹¹ and the other bundle with al-Andalusī.¹² May God ordain safety for all of them.

You, may God preserve your honored position, had instructed me previously to send the four bales of pepper to Qayrawān. Accord-

Ibn 'Awkal (TS 12.223, margin, ed. S. D. Goitein, *Tarbiz* 36 [1967], p. 392), it returns to Egypt in the fall.

⁴ "The *new* boat" of this shipowner had to undergo repairs in Alexandria during the winter according to another letter to Ibn 'Awkal (Mosseri L 52, l. 10, *Tarbiz* 37 [1968], 50).

⁵ Presents to this shipowner by Abu 'l-Khayr Moses Tāhertī, the writer of no. 11, above, in University Library Cambridge Collection Or 1080 J 35, l. 35.

⁶ The medieval name of eastern province of Libya (see no. 72, n. 15, below).

⁷ In Alexandria, sent from Fustat.

⁸ The Spaniard mentioned also in no. 70, below. In TS 8 J 20, f. 2, the Andalusian ship arrives in Alexandria, sailing from Denia, Spain. Here, on the way back, it makes a stop in Palermo.

⁹ A smaller bale. See *Med. Soc.* 1, 335.

¹⁰ Ar. *qarrāba* (see *Med. Soc.*, 1, 477, n. 13). This "Seller of Lac" may, or may not, have been a relative of the one whose boat sailed to Qayrawān, mentioned here before.

¹¹ Occurring about ten times. Possibly different ships of the same proprietor, one replacing the other, are meant. In TS 13 J 17, f. 11, l. 23, ed. *Tarbiz* 36 (1967), 387, where a boat of Dhīsūr sails from Palermo, it is expressly said that it had come there (as in our letter) from Alexandria.

¹² Finished textiles were particularly valuable. Therefore, as a measure of precaution, they were loaded by the writer on two different boats.

ingly, one camel load¹³ was loaded on the boat of Ibn Abi 'l-Shi'shā' ("The Man with the tendril"),¹⁴ and another with Ibn [al-] Iskandar.¹⁵

In your letter which arrived today you ordered to send the pepper to Palermo. This, however, was not possible, for I could not unload them and I had already paid the freight. I was about to direct most of the flax to Palermo, when news was received here that the amir Sharaf al-Dawla ("Glory of the Dynasty"),¹⁶ may God preserve his power, had returned to Tripoli and defeated his enemies. I hope that this is true, if God wills. Consequently, I asked God, the glorified and exalted, for guidance and directed our things to Qayrawān. I hope it will be to the good.

You ordered me to return the textiles (from Alexandria to Fustat).¹⁷ This is the right thing to do, for they are not like flax or pepper, which could be sold locally (namely, in Alexandria). They are being sent to you in their entirety, and also the bundle (men-

¹³ Two camel loads correspond here to four bales. It is proper that a camel load should comprise two bales, Ar. *'idl*, which means lit., a package being exactly of the same weight as the one fastened on the other side of the camel's body. The Ar. term for justice, *'adl*, is derived from this word.

¹⁴ A nickname. In the huge account TS Box J 1, f. 54, col. iv, l. 30 (see no. 63, end, above), this boat is on its way back from Tunisia to Egypt.

¹⁵ In the Greek name *Alexander* the Arabs took *al* as the Ar. article. For reasons unknown to me the writer here deleted the *al* after he had written it. The boats of this family of shipowners (which might have been Christian) are frequently mentioned, but, as far as I have noted, always with *al*. The usual form of the name today is *Iskandar*.

¹⁶ This is the princely title of Mu'izz b. Bādis, the contemporary ruler of Tunisia, 1016-1062. In early spring of 1023 he made indeed great preparations for an attack on Tripoli, but finally did not carry his plans through (see Idris, *Zirides*, p. 161). The "news" reported here early in May 1023 had been received from travelers who had seen Bādis marching through al-Mahdiyya, their port of embarkation, at the end of March. Their reports might have been true. Bādis might have had initial success, but did not pursue the war because of the general situation within his state (see Idris, loc.cit.). The historians had no reason to mention these early gains, because they were not followed up; the merchants were very much concerned with them because the success of the business season depended on the safety of al-Mahdiyya, the port of Qayrawān.

¹⁷ Certain textiles concerning which intelligence had been received that they did not sell overseas.

tioned in your letter) with Ibn al-Wazzān ("The Weighmaster"),¹⁸ to whom I have also handed over a letter destined for you.

I gave your letter to the shaykh Abū 'Abdallāh al-Andalusī.¹⁹ I shall settle accounts with him on the freight and take promissory notes from him, if God will, provided he does not put me off.

This very day, the bale of lac and the camel load of myrobalan arrived. In accordance with your instructions, I shall ship the lac to Qayrawān and the myrobalan to Palermo. I have given to 'Abd al-Salām²⁰ all the specifications concerning our shipments to these cities. May God grant safety to all of them.

I have transmitted your letters to Masarra ("Happiness") and he has already answered you. Let me know what should be done in this matter.

The ships are ready to set sail. They wait only until the heavy warship will be repaired.²¹ This is what kept them until this time. May God grant them a safe passage.

God willing, you will receive additional letters from me with all the details and all the news coming in; may God let us hear good news.

I have written this in a hurry on the evening of Friday (Thursday evening);²² please, my lord, excuse this lack of details. (Added in small letters:) As I have written, I shall inform 'Abd al-Salām about my shipments and I have already informed him about all I have loaded.²³

¹⁸ A Jewish family name, common throughout the centuries.

¹⁹ This shipowner from Spain (see n. 8, above), had done business with the addressee, but not paid him yet.

²⁰ A Muslim factotum of the recipient. Larger Jewish businesses, like that of Ibn 'Awkal or the Tustaris, always had among their employees a Muslim, not because they believed in desegregation, but because it was practical, for instance, if a boat carrying shipments for them arrived on a Sabbath. A slave could not be used for such and similar tasks, since a slave was bound to observe the Sabbath like his master. Salām, peace, is one of the names of God.

²¹ The convoy of the merchantmen was accompanied by a flotilla of the navy consisting of an *uṣṭūl*, or heavy warship, Greek *stolos*, and light galleys. See no. 70, below.

²² In the Middle East, the day begins in the evening (cf. Genesis 1:5, etc.: "There was evening and there was morning, one day"). The mail couriers seem to have left Alexandria for Fustat on Friday. See *Med. Soc.*, 1, 287.

²³ The second item listed the expenses (transport to the boat, customs,

I extend kindest greetings to your noble self, to my lords, the elders (the addressee's two brothers), and to my lord, the illustrious elder Abu Sa'īd Sahlawayh b. Ḥayyīm.²⁴

(Address, right side:)

(To) his excellency, my lord, the elder Abū Naṣr ("Victorious") al-Faḍl b. Sahl ("Bounty, son of Ease"), al-Dustarī.²⁵

(Left side:)

From Ṣadaqa, son of 'Ayyāsh, (may his) s(oul) r(est in peace), who is grateful for his kindnesses.

70 NAVAL ESCORT AND OTHER PRECAUTIONS

Alexandria to Fustat

Ca. 1025

This letter, like the preceding one, reflects a war situation: the spring convoy of ships sailing from Alexandria, Egypt, to the West, again is accompanied by a heavy warship and galleys manned with soldiers. But this time, all goods go to Tunisia, none to Sicily. This would fit the crisis of 1025-1027, when the Byzantines invaded the island, which then was in Muslim hands.¹

One single shipment of 180 bales (sec. C), worth perhaps half a million dollars, is the largest noted by me thus far in the Geniza papers. Its proprietor was the merchant prince Joseph Ibn 'Awkal, the recipient of our letter, about whom the introduction to no. 1,

freight, considerations for the officials, and sailors, etc.) for each bale and the names of the persons to whom they were entrusted. The first contained descriptions of their content, for goods arriving from Fustat often had to be repacked for the overseas transport.

²⁴ This great Karaite banker, who is repeatedly mentioned in connection with the Tustaris, must have been a close relative of Abū Naṣr, the addressee, probably his brother-in-law.

²⁵ With *D* instead of *T*, because polite style derived this family name not from its real origin, Tustar, the Iranian city, but from the Persian word *dastūr*, high dignitary.

¹ A. R. Lewis, *Naval Power and Trade in the Mediterranean, A.D. 500-1100*, Princeton, 1951, pp. 194-196.