

Likewise, I wrote five letters to M. Abū Zikrī Yahyā,<sup>15</sup> may God keep him, and informed him about all I had sent to al-Mahdiyya this year, a total of 179 bales and two barqalūs,<sup>16</sup> specifying the boats, the advances on the freight collected for them, and similar matters. I ask God to mercifully grant them a safe passage.

I have asked my uncle, may God preserve his honored position, to send his son M. Abū Zikrī Yahyā to al-Mahdiyya as soon as our bales would arrive, to receive them all, to sell them in al-Mahdiyya during the height of the business season<sup>17</sup> and send all the proceeds to my uncle in Qayrawān. I have asked the latter to buy for my lord all the goods you have ordered, such as lead, wax, brocade, textiles, saffron, etc.

#### D. FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS. CONCLUSION

I have already informed my lord, may God preserve his honored position, that I owed 30 dinars on account of the advances on the freight and that I had taken a *suftaja* of this amount from Ibn 'Abd al-Qudra ("Slave of [God's] Majesty").<sup>18</sup> I also took the 10 dinars which were with Salāma,<sup>19</sup> may God keep him, and made payments with them.

All the ships are ready to sail—may God grant them a safe passage. I intended to send Salāma, when I learned that the ruler of

<sup>15</sup> The son of the uncle of the writer, Mūsā al-Majjānī. The letter translated in no. 18, above, was written by Yahyā about fifteen years later.

<sup>16</sup> This shows that another convoy had left Alexandria for Tunisia a very short time before. Ships did not sail before the very end of April.

<sup>17</sup> Ar. *fi nafs al-mawsim*. Merchants often adopted an opposite course, keeping their goods until later in the year. Intelligence must have reached Alexandria that in the West there was a great demand for Egyptian flax. Perhaps by European traders? This also explains why, despite a threat of war, such huge quantities were shipped.

<sup>18</sup> For *suftaja* see no. 67, n. 1, above. Stillman's rendering "cashier's check" is more to the point than the usual "bill of exchange." The banker Ibn 'Abd al-Qudra, who issued the *suftaja*, was a Muslim.

<sup>19</sup> One of the Ar. names corresponding to Heb. Solomon. The man was a factotum of Ibn 'Awkal.

Qayrawān had been defeated.<sup>20</sup> There was great confusion<sup>21</sup> here in the city and I was afraid that [. . .] and there were many bad rumors. (A few more disconnected words follow; the remainder, probably not more than two or three lines, is torn away. Of the greetings in the margin only the name of Ibn 'Awkal's youngest son, Abū Sa'īd,<sup>22</sup> is preserved.)

(Address, right side:)

To his excellency, my lord, the illustrious elder, Abu 'l-Faraj Joseph, son of Ya'qūb Ibn 'Awkal, (may his) s(oul) r(est in peace). May God make permanent his honored position, eminence, happiness, and prosperity.

(Left side:)

From his servant,<sup>23</sup> Ephraim, son of Ismā'īl, (may his) s(oul) r(est in peace), al-Jawharī.<sup>24</sup> (To be delivered) in his office<sup>25</sup> in Fustat, God willing.

#### 71 SHIPWRECK IN WAR TIME

*From Palermo, Sicily, to Damsīs, Egypt*

Ca. 1025

The writer of this letter had lost everything in shipwreck, and when he finally arrived in Palermo, Sicily, found that part or all of his property had been alienated. His state of utmost privation was aggravated by the Byzantine attack on Sicily, which threatened

<sup>20</sup> The rumors referred to here and in sec. A, above, were well founded. The mighty Berber tribe of the Zenāta (or Zanāta) had launched formidable attacks against the ruler of Tunisia, but were finally defeated in the course of the Muslim year ending in March 1025 (see Idris, *Zirides*, p. 162). The travelers arriving in Alexandria with the first boats which had sailed from al-Mahdiyya, brought the good tidings.

<sup>21</sup> The manuscript has *dahj* (see Dozy, *Supplément*, 1, 465b), which is related to the more common *dahsh*.

<sup>22</sup> His name occurs also in Bodl. Libr. MS Heb. d 80, f. 43v in the fragment of a legal document in Ar. characters.

<sup>23</sup> Absolutely exceptional.

<sup>24</sup> Dealer in gems, a family name.

<sup>25</sup> See no. 1, introduction, above. Ar. *bi-majlisihi*, lit., the place where one sits and receives guests. Meaning probably: not to his home.

to sever the communications between his temporary domicile, Palermo, and his home in Egypt, where he had left his young wife and little boy. Despite this dire situation we do not read a single word of lament or despair; all the letter contains is a succinct factual report, followed by practical instructions, culminating in the writer's main concern, the education and upbringing of his little boy.

The approximate date of our letter is provided by the reference to an impending enemy attack on Palermo and the name of the recipient, Isma'il b. Abraham (or Barhūn) Tāhertī, who lived at the end of the tenth through the first third of the eleventh century. Letter no. 12, and the account from the year 1024, no. 63, above, are addressed to him. Thus the dreaded enemy attack must refer to the Byzantine invasion of Sicily in 1025-1026.<sup>1</sup>

Isma'il Tāhertī, a native of Qayrawān, spent many years in Egypt, where he acted as a kind of representative of his compatriots, taking care of their affairs in that country.

Damsīs, whereto this letter was sent, was a small town on the right arm of the Nile, which was frequented by Maghrebi merchants who supervised the cutting, combing, and packing of flax destined for export. It seems even that a letter from Damsīs, written by one of these merchants, a nephew of the great merchant prince Joseph Ibn 'Awkal, makes mention of the stay of Isma'il Tāhertī in that locality. For he writes: "I sought the advice of Ibn Tāhertī."<sup>2</sup> To be sure, several Tāhertīs commuted between Tunisia and Egypt. But since our letter shows Isma'il stationed for some time in Damsīs, it is likely that he is meant in the letter sent from there.

Joseph b. Samuel, the writer of our letter, as indicated by the handwriting, style, and content, was a young man from the Muslim West who had settled in Egypt and married there. In addition to part of a house acquired there he possessed one in Palermo, no doubt because he used to commute between Egypt and the West. After suffering shipwreck he decided to settle in Sicily and asked his wife to follow him there. As was sometimes done, he had given her a conditional bill of divorce, in order to enable her to marry again in case he perished on one of his travels, by acts of God or men, without leaving an eyewitness of his death. He was doubtful

<sup>1</sup> See no. 70, n. 1, above.

<sup>2</sup> Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, E. N. Adler Collection 2727, f. 41, l. 6, ed. S. D. Goitein, *Tarbiz* 37 (1968), 166.

whether his wife would agree to leave Egypt, for wives were normally reluctant to join their husbands in another town, let alone country, where they lacked the protection of their fathers or brothers.

It is remarkable that our writer decided to settle in Sicily despite the Byzantine menace. (Since he was prepared to travel to Egypt in order to bring his wife to Palermo, he was apparently not afraid of a new voyage by sea.) Obviously, the inhabitants of the Sicilian capital were confident that the Byzantine attack would be repulsed or would peter out. Events proved that these expectations were justified.

University Library, Cambridge, University Collection, Or 1080 J 22.

My elder and master, may God prolong your life and make your welfare and happiness permanent. May he augment his bounty and gifts granted to you.

I am writing you from Palermo<sup>3</sup> on the 6th of Tishri; may God make this a blessed year for me and for you and for all Israel.<sup>4</sup>

What you wish to know: I was shipwrecked in Zahlaq, between Surt (Syrta, Sirte) and Hawwāra (Lebda),<sup>5</sup> and came out of it without a dinar or even a dirhem and no garment to wear; I arrived naked in Tripoli. By God, had I not met there a Jew who owed me a qintār of wax (sent to him) from Zawīla<sup>6</sup> and with whom I agreed on a price of 5 dinars,<sup>7</sup> which I received from him and with which I bought clothing and provisions, I would have been destroyed and forced to have recourse to philanthropy.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Siqillīya must here be translated with Palermo (and not Sicily), since it is later referred to as "town."

<sup>4</sup> The Jewish New Year is celebrated on the first and second days of the month of Tishri and falls mostly in September.

<sup>5</sup> Hawwāra (or Huw[w]āra, see *EP*, s.v.) is the name of a widely scattered Berber people; according to Ibn Duqmāq, v, 14, many of them settled in Lebda, Libya (see no. 36, above), and perhaps this town was called after them. In TS 18 J 3, f. 19, l. 8 (dated 1089), Lebda seems to be referred by that name.

<sup>6</sup> A suburb of Al-Mahdīyya.

<sup>7</sup> Compare this remark from a letter from Qayrawān: "The market price of a qintār of wax is 6 3/8 dinars. But we got it for 5 dinars less 5 qirāts, because there were no ships (for export)." Bodl. MS Heb. d 65 (Cat. 2877), f. 17, ll. 6-7.

<sup>8</sup> Text: *wa-nkashaft*.

Arriving in Palermo, I found that a man from Barqa had pulled down my small house<sup>9</sup> and built there another. I quarreled<sup>10</sup> with him, but, by God, I had no dinar or even a dirhem to spend (on a lawsuit). Then I did not find my brother here so that I could not get from him part of what he owes me.

I sent you ten pounds of silk with Ḥayyīm b. Sa'āda and sent you also 6 dinars gold, numbering 6 1/4.<sup>11</sup> With you I left 2 dinars and with them in the house 1 dinar and the olive oil I bought from you. As you know, 10 dinars are due the girl<sup>12</sup> as her second installment (of her marriage portion). I wrote her a *bill of divorce* fearing the vicissitudes of fate, nor do I know whether I shall be able to return to them in the course of two or even three years, for this town is menaced by enemy attack, and, at present, I do not have a thing.

I left with you promissory notes of: the "Son of the Swollen Woman," 6 1/2 dinars; Isaac Qābisī,<sup>13</sup> 1 1/2 dinars; Ḥayyīm Ibn Jāsūs,<sup>14</sup> three qintārs of tragacanth gum;<sup>15</sup> all this besides what is owed me by Muslims.<sup>16</sup> Collect these debts and keep the proceeds for the *alimony* of the boy. If she accepts the *divorce*, I shall send every year the *alimony* for the boy. But if she prefers not to accept the *divorce*, deal with this matter cautiously in a way deserving my thanks: ask her whether she is prepared to settle with me in Sicily. (In case she does), let her confirm this by oath and inform me accordingly. I shall then sell my apartment<sup>17</sup> and bring her here

<sup>9</sup> This might imply that a larger house in the neighborhood of the smaller one also belonged to the writer. But it could mean also that he possessed only that small house.

<sup>10</sup> Text: *mutashārīr*. Dozy, *Supplément*, I, 739a, has form 7 in this meaning.

<sup>11</sup> He sent 25 (Sicilian) quarter dinars. The silk was worth about 20 dinars. See *Med. Soc.*, I, 222.

<sup>12</sup> His wife. The second installment was due at divorce or death of husband.

<sup>13</sup> Family name derived from the town of Gabes in southern Tunisia. This man, Isaac (b. Abraham) al-Qābisī, bought in about 1044 a house in Qayrawān from a lady divorced by an Ibn Jāsūs (see next note). Bodl. MS Heb. c 28 (Cat. 2876), f. 41, ed. S. Assaf, *Tarbiz* 9 (1938), 214.

<sup>14</sup> "The Spy"—a Maghrebi family name often found in the Geniza at this time.

<sup>15</sup> Ar. *kathīrā* (here, *ā* is missing). A medical plant much traded in the Geniza period. In TS 8 J 21, f. 29 (ca. 1050) the price of 4 1/4 dinars for a qintār was regarded as bad. Thus the quantity sent here was worth about 15 dinars.

<sup>16</sup> In Damsīs. For these he presumably wrote to a Muslim business friend.

<sup>17</sup> Text: *rū'y*, which could mean also "my quarter," namely of a house.

together with my boy. By God, I did not write her the *bill of divorce* because I do not love her, but because I was afraid of the punishment of the Creator.<sup>18</sup>

And, o God, o God, my lord, the little boy! Concern yourself with him in accordance with your [religiosity], so well known to me. When he becomes stronger, let him pass his time with a teacher.<sup>19</sup> I shall write to you and i[n]form you about my situation]. By God, at this moment I have nothing, [. . .] But as soon as [. . .].<sup>20</sup>

(Address on verso, which is blank otherwise.)

To my elder and master Abī<sup>21</sup> Ibrahīm Isma'īl b. Abraham, may God be his protector.

From Joseph b. Samuel, known as al-Dny.<sup>22</sup> *Many greetings!*  
To Damsīs, if God will.<sup>23</sup>

## 72 REPORT ABOUT BOATS EXPECTED FROM THE WEST

*Alexandria*

Ca. 1050-1065

The letter was written on the third day of Av, which, in the period concerned, and practically always, fell in the month of July, when the seafaring season was at its height. A total of over 52 ships is reported here as being on their way from the Muslim West to Alexandria or as having already arrived (see n. 9). Most of the ships mentioned by name are known from other Geniza letters.

<sup>18</sup> This is a religious alternate for the "vicissitudes of fate," mentioned in the same context before. A violent death was normally regarded as a punishment for a sin.

<sup>19</sup> Instead of wasting time playing in the streets.

<sup>20</sup> Only a few words seem to have been lost. Obviously, the writer wanted to emphasize that, at the moment, he was unable to pay for tuition.

<sup>21</sup> This might be an attempt at correct Arabic grammar or a fixed usage (Abī for Abū) in some Maghrebi circles.

<sup>22</sup> Probably for al-D'ny, that is, Dānī, a family name derived from the town of Denia, Spain.

<sup>23</sup> Published first in *Archivio Storico per la Sicilia Orientale* 67 (1971), 20-23, but thoroughly revised and adapted.