

these ships here soon in safety. I shall keep you informed about any new happenings. May they be good.

(Several smaller business matters.)

Some people say that the barge of Yusr al-'Attāl ("Ease, the Porter") is coming back.<sup>18</sup> If it does, I shall take receipt of what you have in it, if God will. Of all the other ships no one has reported that they are coming back. May God, the exalted, make it easy for all in his mercy. The wind we had a short time ago was of no avail for the ships, for all those in which you have goods have not yet moved from their moorings.<sup>19</sup> May God ease in his mercy.

### 73 AN ATTACK BY THE ENEMY'S NAVY

*Postscript to a letter in the hand of  
Ibrāhīm b. Farāḥ al-Iskandarānī  
Ca. 1060*

Of the letter itself, only the end, providing no self-contained information, has been preserved. For the writer see no. 72, above.

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter  
Collection, TS 8 J 24, f. 21, ll. 20 - verso, end.

Then there happened something which I am not able to describe to you. It is not something which (often) occurs. The people felt safe as if they were in their own city. I have never seen nor even imagined what happened. I had rolled out my sleeping carpet and spread my bedding, as if I had been at home. My money bag was under my head and I felt safe and calm—until hell broke loose.

Ten galleys had penetrated the roadstead, each carrying 100 warriors, part of whom disembarked, while the others remained aboard. People said there were 200 galleys. This happened when the moon rose, but the sky was overcast. Land and sea became crammed. They

<sup>18</sup> The returning of boats to the port of embarking was a calamity very frequently mentioned in the Geniza. See *Med. Soc.*, 1, 322-323.

<sup>19</sup> In a previous letter, the writer had reported that a favorable east wind was blowing in Alexandria. But before the ships carrying most of Nahray's goods started moving, the wind had already ceased.

threw firebrands into all the ships to burn them, but the fire did not catch.

(Added in larger letters:)

Praise be to God that the end was good! Thanks to God, the exalted! *And Peace*. Accept special greetings for your noble self. And greetings to my lord, the Rāv.

(Continued in writer's regular script:)

They cut loose the ship of the Damascene and towed it behind them. But the wind was against them, so they turned it back, took out all they wished and left it on the rough ground. The two rudders of the ship of the employee of Ibn Shiblūn were on its stern and without sailyards and sails. The rudders of the ships of the 'Aṭṭār ("Perfumer") and of the Khammār ("Wine-seller") were on land. All this was the cause that they could not take them. The firebrands thrown into them were not effective, for the wind there was not strong. Finally the people quenched the fire, working in shifts. But I am unable to describe what happened. *And Peace!* I threw the firebrands into the sea with my own hand!

### 74 THE HORRORS AND AMENITIES OF TRAVEL

*Sicily to Egypt  
Ca. 1140*

Despite the horrors experienced by the writer and his family on the short voyage from the town of Tunis to Sicily, he invites his brother in Egypt to make the long journey to Palermo "for both pleasure and business," *nazāhan wa-tijāran*. Life in the Norman capital appeared to him attractive, economically and otherwise, after it had become so miserable in the once-flourishing country of Ifrīqiya ("Africa," designating present-day Tunisia and some adjacent districts).

The fragment of an earlier letter by the same writer (TS 8 J 23, f. 13), establishes his full name and provides more of his personal history. That letter, like the one translated here, was addressed to his elder brother Abu 'l-Barakāt ("Blessings"). He himself was