

reiterates a medical prescription for his mother, which he had previously sent from Palermo, and concludes with a series of greetings, which shows that the community in Mazara must have included quite a number of scholars.)

(Address:)

To our dear father, may God keep him with his never ceasing watch, Joseph, the teacher, b. Peraḥyā Yijū, God is his protector! From his sons Peraḥyā and Moses, who are longing for him.

*May salvation be near!*¹²

76 DIVERTED TO TARSUS

From Alexandria to Cairo

Ca. 1212

Reading this fragmentary thirteenth century letter one regrets that not more material of a similar type has been preserved. A Jewish shipowner from Alexandria, Egypt, was on his way to Cyprus. At that time the island was under Christian domination, and he, coming from a Muslim country, certainly possessed a letter of safe-conduct, permitting him to land at Cyprus and to do business there. But a storm diverted him to Tarsus, the birthplace of the apostle Paul, in southeastern Asia Minor—Turkey today, but at that time the capital of Lesser, or New, Armenia, a Christian kingdom ruled by Leon II, “The Great” (1187-1219).¹ In these unforeseen circumstances the shipowner was without protection and afraid that the king would force him to take up his residence in Tarsus instead of Alexandria. For Leon II was eager to attract the maritime trade to his city, as is known from Venetian and Genoese sources.²

¹² Published first in *Archivio Storico per la Sicilia Orientale* 67 (1971), and revised here.

¹ He received a crown from the Pope of Rome, but was recognized as king also by Byzantine and Muslim rulers. See, for instance, Jacques de Morgan, *The History of the Armenian People*, trans. E. F. Barry, Boston, 1965 (reprint), pp. 222-225.

² Heyd, *Commerce du Levant*, 1, 369-372. At that time the river on which Tarsus is situated was still navigable and accessible to seafaring vessels. See

But a Christian business friend, most probably himself a native of Egypt,³ helpfully secured a strong letter of safe-conduct: the writer had a good time in Tarsus and would have remained longer, had not illness forced him to hurry back to Alexandria.

The second part of the letter reports the successful treatment of the writer (most Geniza letters report the opposite) and mentions the names of four physicians, but is otherwise fragmentary.

In the third section we find ourselves again in a larger historical context. The writer recommends an “illustrious” person, “a scion of the noblest families” of Sicily, who, for reasons not indicated, had lost everything and was forced to leave his home. The community in Alexandria was unable to take care of him, for at the same time a large company had arrived from France, and the cost of their stay in the town and the expenses for their travel (to the Holy Land) put a heavy strain on public charity. It has been recognized long ago that the exodus of “300 rabbis” from France to Palestine did not happen in the one year 1211, for which it was reported, but was a more protracted process.⁴ This is confirmed by several Geniza papers. Here, too, the arrival of a large group of needy travelers from France is reported as nothing very extraordinary. It was common practice to send persons whom the community of Alexandria was unable to take care of to the far more populous and richer capital. Letters to this effect have been preserved from the eleventh to the thirteenth century.

The beginning of the letter, and with it the address, which was written on the reverse side, is torn away, but not much can have been lost, since the first two lines contain the end of the introductory blessings.

University Museum, University of Pennsylvania E 16 522.

*May He keep your boys, the esteemed notables, the brilliant*⁵

Heyd, p. 367, and G. Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate* (Cambridge, 1905), p. 133.

³ He is introduced in a way which shows that he was well known to the Cairene recipient of the letter.

⁴ S. Krauss, “L’émigration de 300 rabbins en Palestine en l’an 1211,” *Revue des Études Juives* 82 (1926), 333-352; E. N. Adler, *ibid.* 85 (1928), 70-71.

⁵ Heb. *h-mhyrym* is a slip for *h-mhyrym*. The letter was written by a clerk.

youth, and may you be granted to see their joy and wedding. Amen, may it be ordained thus.

When I parted from your excellency, I intended to sail to the island of Cyprus, but a strong storm diverted the boat to Tarsus.⁶ I was very much afraid that the king would take hold of me and detain me. Therefore the boys⁷ who traveled with me went up to Fahd b. Karīm ("Cheetah panther, son of Noble-minded"), and informed him of my arrival. Fahd came on board and said to me: "Disembark, do not be afraid, the king has granted you safety." He carried with him letters of safe-conduct from the king assuring me that I was permitted to return to my place, and I found with him safeguards the like of which no one has received before. The ministers⁸ were very happy with me and thought that I would remain. They made me all kinds of offers ensured by guarantees. I said to them: "Until the first of the next month." I offered⁹ a sum of money to the Christians in the town; Fahdān¹⁰ is an in-law of theirs. But the illness of which you know remained with me and I could not stay any longer [for I needed] treatment. [Four lines torn away.]

I found my paternal uncle present in Alexandria and he brought me to the physician who let me take medicine three times. I found¹¹ healing through it, God lit up my eyes in his bounty and goodness. I am very much indebted to the illustrious elder, the physician Abu 'l-Karam Ibn al-Wāsiṭi,¹² the son of your paternal uncle, may God let many people be like the two of you.¹³ [Most of three marginal and four main lines lost.] . . . and the elder Abu 'l-Manṣūr ("Victorious"), . . . and the physician 'Abd al-Kāfi ("Servant of the All-

⁶ Spelled *Tarṣūs* for the usual *Tarsūs*, i.e., with interchange of the emphatics.

⁷ The writer's sons.

⁸ Ar. *al-dīwān*.

⁹ Ar. *ar-raḍt* (fourth for first form, as often). The offer was probably for the purchase of goods.

¹⁰ Meaning Fahd. This is an attempt at classical Arabic for *Fahdun*.

¹¹ Ar. *'ṣbh*, with two dots on the *h*, again a wrong attempt "to go classical."

¹² From the town of Wāsiṭ in southern Iraq. A common family name among the Jews in Egypt through three centuries. Physicians bearing the names Abu 'l-Karam and Ibn al-Wāsiṭi are mentioned in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *Biographies of the Physicians* (Cairo, 1882), I, 255-256, II, 141-142, but cannot have been identical with this one, who was Jewish.

¹³ From here one gets the impression that the recipient, too, was a physician.

sufficient"), . . . the physician 'Abd al-Raḥmān ("Servant of the All-merciful"),¹⁴ *may our God remember them by bestowing on them blessings, life, bounty, and peace, and may thus be his will.*

The bearer of this letter,¹⁵ the illustrious elder R. Isaac, the son of R. Abraham, is one of the illustrious men of Sicily (or Palermo); many here in Alexandria know him as a prominent and fine person and a scion of great families. His arrival in Alexandria coincided with the presence of a large company from France. Our community has made a large collection for them and has also taken care of their maintenance and expenses during their stay here, so that there is no possibility to provide for this or any other man at present. Your bounty is now besought that you may act for this man in accordance with your [noble] habits and your munificence, so that he will part from [you] full of thanks, as all people who pass your house.

To all of you¹⁶ kindest regards, greetings, and respects. *And peace.*

I need not impress on you the urgency of action for that man, so that he should be treated well and kindly, for he is suffering utmost deprivation. Any good done for him—he is worth. *And peace.*¹⁷

77 A BILL OF LADING

This bill was given to the traveler who accompanied the shipment and took care of it. Another copy would be sent to the recipient in another boat.

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter
Collection, TS NS J 300.

¹⁴ These Muslim physicians obviously had been invited to a consultation by their Jewish colleague who treated the writer. Cf. *Med. Soc.*, II, 254.

¹⁵ Lit., "service," *ḳhidma*.

¹⁶ Such an informal conclusion was possible only between relatives or very close friends.

¹⁷ It was customary to recapitulate the main purpose of a letter in a P.S. and to conclude it with a second "*and peace.*"