

Memorandum sent by Abū Zikrī Kōhēn to Halfon, while the latter was on his way to the East.

Cairo - Qūs in upper Egypt. Spring 1132

University Library, Cambridge 13 J 22, fol. 33.

27,5 x 10

Whitish paper, folded into unusually narrow strips (of about 0.9 cm). The distribution of the writing on the page is the same as in No.83 with the exception that here one half of the verso is also used for the communication.

The oblong size of the paper is in conformity with the contents, which is not a formal letter, but a mere <sup>h</sup>ʿadkira or memorandum, a list of sundry items, which the two business men had had no time to settle before Halfon's departure, or which had cropped up shortly after he left.

Halfon is on his way to Aden, verso, 1.16. As the writer asks him to send a certain payment from Qūs in upper Egypt (top, 1.2), the letter clearly was sent after him on the Nile from Cairo.

The time of No.84 can be ascertained with great accuracy. For No.85, 1.11, the date of which corresponds with 9th January 1133, clearly refers to our document as being sent a few months earlier. In addition, Abū Zikrī asks here his partner to dispatch from Aden a commodity ordered with a certain Abraham b. Muṣṭī (verso, top 11.

1-2). In No.86 V. 1. 15, Halfon actually sends a letter to Cairo (from the East African port <sup>y h</sup> Aidāb) with this merchant. As No.86 was written in summer 1134 and as Halfon had meanwhile been in India, our memorandum must have been sent two "travelling seasons" before, i.e. in spring 1132.

Instead of a summary of contents, the chapter "The accounts in this document", below p. 11 {1}, will serve as an outline of the main items contained in our memorandum.

#### TRANSLATION

A (1) In Y (ourname, O merciful).

(2) A blessed memorandum for my master, the Sheikh (3) Abū

Sa'id - may God ordain him welfare!

B After we parted, I met (5) Hiyār in the street and he said (6) to me: "There is a balance in my f{avor". I answered "Let's go back; (7) I shall pay you everything." Then I returned with him and made with him the account (8) and found that you owed sixty dirham, those of which (9) you had said that you would pay back their equivalent dirham (10) by dirham; but you have not paid.

C (11) As to the second account, there was a balance in your favor with him (12) of 12 dīnār and on my side of ten (13) dīnār and two thirds. The total being 22 dīn, (14) and two thirds.

D Of this, you owe for:

Customs (15) one dīnār and eighty dirham.

Posters and packers and (16) Ta<sup>c</sup>rīf 12 dīn.

Abū Muḥammad 10 (17) dīn.

The <sup>h</sup>Sarīf - two and a half dīn.

The <sup>t</sup>total being (18) four dīnārs less two qīrāt and one ḥabba. (19)

3 dīn. were given to Ben Ayyūb.

Altogether six (20) dīn. and two thirds and one fourth less one ḥabba.

E Balance (21) in your favor 15 dīn., one half and one quarter and a ḥabba. I sent (22) you through Ben Ayyūb sixteen and two thirds, (23) the agio of which was one sixth - altogether 17 dīn. less one sixth. (24) ~~There,~~ Winding up all the accounts, there remains with you a debt of one dīnār and two qīrāt less (25) one ḥabba and sixty dirhām, which (26) I have settled <sup>this account</sup> for you.

F I filled also (27) the oil jug, which cost one dīn. (28) and ten qīrāt. Together

Margin:

(1-3) with the price of the paper, four (4) dīnār and one sixth, (5) less one ḥabba. This sum (6) shall be with you; buy (7) me for it, if God will, (8) "pearlstrings" for the boy (9) of middling quality; and this (10) is my most urgent order (11) for you; for I intended (12) to ask you for it (13) and then it went out of my mind.

G Furthermore, the (15) Rayyis Abu (16) ī-Najm- may God (17) keep him ~~alive~~ - gave me (18) a <sup>promissory</sup> note in your handwriting (19) to the amount of 3 dīn. (2) and 13 qīr. (21). However I did not pay him a thing. (22)

Please, as soon (23) as you take notice

[Top of the page:]

(25) of these lines send them (2) to him from Qūs at all events.

H (3) Another thing with (4) regard to the Wakīl and the storax. (5)

There was between me and him much (6) argument. Finally he took from me (7) one sixth dīnār too much. (8) I sold for you

Verso:

(1) the rest of the storax and bought you 29 razors (2) and a package of needles and also (3) 14 ratl and a half <sup>t</sup>white lead (ceruse). The dīnār (4) was defective; therefore I completed it from the dirhams and paid (5) with them also the sixth of the dīnār.

I All this (6) I sent you through the Sheikh Muhārak, (7) namely

5 jars of wine;

the jug of oil;

(8) the razors in a little basket together with the needles, (9) and the white lead in a barnīya pot. Take (10) all this from him, if God will.

K And by God, beware (11) of the slave with all your might, for I have heard (12) that he has a light hand. However you need not advice (13) in this matter.

L There remained in my favor from this (14) transaction one gold qīr.

Please add it to my account (15) so that you owe me four dīn. and 5 qīr.

less (16) one ḥabba. Please buy me for this in Aden a small quantity of  
(17) "pearls" for the boy and send it with

Verso, margin:

(1) Abraham (2) b. Mu<sup>o</sup>tī at all (3) events.

M I express to you (4) the best greetings. And do not (5) cease  
writing me (6) from every place you arrive (7) at. And (8) all orders  
you have, please honor me with them.

N The lac was bought by the son of your brother (10) for 8 dir. which  
was included in (11) this account. However (12) the small quantity of  
white pepper (13) remained stuck (14-15) and is still here.

And Peace.

Address. Right side:

*his honor,*  
(1) To ~~the Presence of~~ my master, the most illustrious Sheikh (2)

Abū Sa<sup>o</sup>īd b. Hibat Allah al-Dimyātī

Left side:

(1) Grateful for his bounties, Abū Zikrī Kōhēn

1. The strange spelling ~~زكريا~~ <sup>*zkr*</sup> probably is not a mistake, as  
we find it also at the beginning of a memorandum of Abū Zikrī's brother  
No.222 l.2. On the other hand, Abū Zikrī himself uses in No.84 l.14 the  
usual spelling.

<sup>S</sup>  
Commentary

- 2 A blessed memorandum - For this expression see No.34 l.1.
- 5 Ḥiyār - may be indentical with a merchant of this name in Cairo, who was active already at the end of the eleventh century, No.217, l. 10 and verso l.20. However, as we find another merchant bearing the same name in 1037, No.158 l.6, the name seems to have been rather common.
- 9-10 Dirḥām<sup>e</sup> by dirḥām<sup>e</sup> - in the original "dirḥāms<sup>e</sup> for dirḥāms<sup>e</sup>". Concerning the account<sup>s</sup> in this documents see below p. 11 14
- 13 t u l t a y (cf. also l.20 and 22) is used for the status absolutus or unconnected form and t u l t a i n for the constructus or the connected, l.14. This is neither actual language, nor a mistake, as the same use by another person proves, cf. No.22, l.10. It is an artificial form believed to be classical.
- 14 Customs - called here maks, usūr<sup>V</sup> as in Aden. About the different *mentioned here* payments<sup>s</sup> cf. notes to l.16.
- 15 Porters - attāl<sup>C</sup> is used in Egypt up to the present day, but not common in these papers, where a porter normally is called hammāl.
- Packer - maqḡāt, from maqat to tie with a rope. Not in the dictionaries.
- 16 Ta<sup>C</sup>rīf - This word, from which the English "tariff" is derived, means "notification" "visa", cf. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, Paris 1893, Vol.3.pp.406-7.

As the <sup>n</sup>tiny sum indicates (12 dirham for porters, packers and Ta<sup>c</sup>rīf together) it was at that time a small fee connected with the customs procedure.

16 Abū Muḥammad - In a letter from Cairo contemporary with our memorandum, No.193, margin l. 1-3, it is said about a person (obviously Jewish) that he had become Wakīl Tujjār, representative of the merchants, in partnership with Abū Muḥammad <sup>c</sup>Abd as-Salām. It is very likely that the latter is identical with our Abū Muḥammad and that the sum of 10 dirham<sup>e s</sup> was a fee due to him. In Aden, the fee was 1/48 of the merchandise (one Qīrāṭ for 2 dīnārs), No.4 l.10. If we assume a similar percentage for Cairo, the merchandise handled would have been worth 480 dirh. The duties paid for it were 80 dirham and 1 dīnār. l.11, about 20 % by no means a high rate for that time.

17 The <sup>v</sup>Sarīf - anybody claiming to be a descendant of the prophet of Islam may bear that title. Therefore, it cannot be made out whether this man is identical with "the <sup>v</sup>Sarīf" who kept at that time ships on the Red Sea, No.96, l.9; No.131, l.16.

18 Ḥabba is one third of a qīrāṭ or 1/72 of a dīnār.

19 Ben Ayyūb obviously was Halfon's factotum. The sum of 3 dīnārs was given to him for travel expenses and smaller purchases.

27 Jug - fugqā<sup>c</sup>a, Dozy, Supplément <sup>S.V.</sup> ~~S.V.~~ vase, cruche, probablement dans l'origin; pot à bière. The same expression fugqā<sup>c</sup>a zait in Univ. Lib. Camr. T - S.12, 7 verso, l.5.

Margin 3. Paper was one of the most urgently needed commodities of the India travellers, see No.24, l.19 and No.51 verso, l.12

23 Agio - ṣarf obviously for converting smaller coins into dīnārs.

Margin 8. - "pearlstrings" - for 4 dīnārs one could not buy strings of genuine pearls, as the smallest pearl of the weight of  $1/6$  mitqāl,

about 0,8 grm, cost about 2-3 dīnārs. cf. E. Wiedemann, "Über den Wert

von Edelsteinen bei den Muslimen, Islam Vol. 2x (*Strasbourg 1911*)

p. 250. "Pearlstrings" for children were made of cheaper material.

From No.85 L.12, we learn indeed that Abū Zikrī meant ambergris, which was made into necklaces in the East in the middle ages, cf. Heyd,

Commerce du Levant, vol. 2, p.574 note 8, and e.g. in Yemen is still used profusely for both women and children for that purpose.

15-16 The Rayyis Abu'l-Najm is mentioned in a letter to Solomon B.

Moses "the sixth in the Ḥavārā. or College of Scholars", University

Library Cambridge T.-S.12. 327 last but one line. The name Abu'l-Najm

is very common. Cf. ib. T-S 8.164, l.17; 12.7 verso, l.2; 13 J. 13, f. 18

and f.27; J. Mann, Jews in Egypt, vol.2. p.292 (= University Library

Cambridge T.-S. 10 K 20, No. 1). Rayyis may denote both a religious or a civil authority.

Top 2 Qūṣ on the Nile in upper Egypt, a main station on the way from Cairo to India, see Index.

Wakīl - may mean here either a general representative of merchants, see above l.16, or the agent of a certain businessman.



4 Storax - see above No.1, 1.21 ff.

Verso 1 razor mūs for class. mūsā, as used in Egypt today. cf. S. Spiro, Arab-Engl. Dict. of the modern Ar. of Eg. Cairo 1923, p.460. Razors <sup>the private</sup> were used for shaving the head and ~~certain~~ parts of the body.

3 White lead (ceruse): For this article of toilette and medicine see No.50, 1.22.

4 The dīnār was defective: see below "The accounts in this document".

5 One sixth - refers not to 1.23 above, but to top, 1.7.

6 Mubārak - perhaps

7 jars - the plural jurar is colloquial, cf. Dozy, Suppl. (according

to Boctor's Dict. française-arabe, Paris 1864, modern Egyptian). The wine

and the oil, as the comparatively small quantities indicate, were sent for

Halfon's own use, ~~or perhaps partly for serving as presents to his business~~

~~friends in Aden.~~

~~8 Small basket gufafa, obviously not mentioned by the dictionaries.~~

9 B-ṣarniya - for this vessel, which may be made of earthen ware or of glass, see above No.33 B. 1.9.

11 The slave - slaves served as business agents, and Halfon obviously was accompanied by one. "Light-handed" in class. means nimble, dexterous, in modern colloquial, a pilferer, or thief, cf. S. Spiro, Ar. - Engl. Dict. of modern Ar. of Eg. p.161 and Dozy, s. v. (according to Bustāni's Muḥīt al-muḥīt, Syrian dialect). Here, certainly the second meaning is intended.

13-14 It is interesting that Abū Zikrī writes twice hādihī l-hisāb, see verso margins l.11, i.e. in the feminine, although he has above recto l.11 hisāb <sup>n</sup>tāhī in the masculine.

15 4 dīn. 5 qīr. - Above, recto margin ll. 3-4, a balance of 4 and one sixth dīn. was mentioned, which, with one qīr. more makes 4 d. 5 q.

17 See above recto margin, ll.6-13. Abraham b. Mu<sup>o</sup>ṭī; verso margin l. 1-2, see above the Introduction.

9-10 Lac - the price given here (8 dirhams) refers certainly to Raṭl's (437,5 grms; see Hinz, Isl. Masse und Gewichte, p.29)\*. Normally, lac was traded in bahārs (300 raṭl), 60 dīnārs was a very good price, cf. No.85 l.15, No. 193 ll.7-9 and No. 213 margin, l-5. Thus one fifth of a dīnār or about 7 dirham, (for the relation between dīnār and dirham see below) would be a high payment for a raṭl. It stands to reason, however, that retail prices were higher. The son of your brother - As Halfon had many nephews, of some of whom we know that they had been merchants, this expression shows that one must have been outstanding.

12 White pepper - In comparison with pepper in general, white pepper <sup>rarely</sup> is as ~~seldom~~ mentioned in our papers as in mediaeval European documents, and only in small quantities cf. Heyd, Histoire du commerce du Levant, vol. 2, p.658. See below No. 193 l. 16.

13 Stuck (unsold) — han bān, obviously an otherwise unknown Arabic word. However, its meaning can be ascertained through modern Yemenite Arabic, where hinib means to stick fast, e.g. hinib al-  
minsār, "the saw remained stuck."

The Accounts in this Document

Section B-E

Owing to the clumsy ways of reckoning, the various accounts recorded in this memorandum appear confusing. One has to bear in mind that saying:

four dīnārs less two qīrāṭs and a ḥabba (1.1<sup>8</sup>)

or

three dīnārs plus two thirds and a quarter, less a ḥabba (1. 19-20)

is exactly the same. According to Arabic aesthetics, expressing the same thing, even in accounts and even in two consecutive lines, in different ways, is regarded as elegance of style. To us it appears confusing. All fractions of dīnārs, therefore, will be converted here into qīrāṭs (1/24 of a dīnār).

Another strange aspect is the relation between gold and silver money. On the one hand, the two categories are kept asunder not only at the payment of customs duties (1.15), but even in the accounts between the same two persons. Thus <sup>Kh</sup>Ḥiyār is paid by Abū Zikrī for Halfon 60 dirhams (1.8 and 25), but pays him 12 dīnārs (1.12) cf. also verso 11. 3-4. On the other hand, sums of silver are tacitly converted into gold (11. 15-18), without indicating the rate of exchange) - <sup>t</sup>his perhaps, because Halfon had left only a short time before the writing of the memorandum and no change had occurred

in that matter.

While the accounts in section B and C are self explanatory,  
do sections D (11.14-20) and E (11.20-26) call for comments.

The following was the expenditure made by Abū Zikrī for  
Halfon according to passage D.

In dīnārs 1

In dirhams 104 1/2

Total 3 dīnār. 21 qīr, 2 ḥabba (1/3 qīrāt)

This would mean that 2 dīnārs, 21 2/3 q. were the equivalent of  
104 1/2 dirham, a rate of 1:36 approximately. In No.21, l.8,  
which is a letter addressed to Abū Zikrī Kōhēn, the rate is  
1:12,5 or slightly higher and that was at a time, when silver  
was particularly rare and expensive. Cf. *ib.*

However, the silver dirhams referred to in No.21, l.8, were  
Nuqra (i.e. an alloy of 2/3 silver and 1/3 copper) while those  
mentioned in our document certainly were "black dirhams", of  
which Qalqasandī, *Ṣubḥ*, vol. 3 (Cairo 1914), p.443, says that  
they were generally regarded as having one third of the value  
of the Nuqra dirhams. Therefore the rate 1:36 calculated here  
for dīnār and dirham is in conformity with the sources adduced.  
It is remarkable, however to learn from our documents that  
dirhams without additional definition were "black" dirhams.

This is the more noteworthy, as in some Geniza documents black d. (dirham sawād) are mentioned expressly as naqd miṣr, the Egyptian currency, University Library Cambridge, 13 J 7 f 12 (around) 1180). 8J 6, f.14 (dated 1241).

The accounts in sections B - E may be summarized as follows:

Balance in favor of Halfon	22 dīn, 16 qīr
Expenses for customs, etc, and his factotum	<u>6 d.      21 2/3 q.</u>
Balance	15 dīn, 18 1/3 d
Actually sent to him plus agio	<u>16 dīn, 20 q</u>
Due from him	1 dīn, 1 2/3 q.

In addition, he owned Abū Zikrī 60 dirham, which the latter had paid to Hiyār (11.8 and 25)

Section R (1.26 - margin 1,13),

Here Abū Zikrī reports that he had spent 4 dīn, 5 2/3 qīr. (margin 11.4-5) for buying oil (1 dīn. 10 qīr. L.27-28) and paper (the balance 2 dīn. 19 2/3 qīr.). However he did not want that sum back, but asked Halfon to buy for it "pearlstrings" for his boy.

G (Margin 1-14 top 1.2)

Abū Zikrī, as Halfon's representative, was served a note <sup>Concerning a sum due</sup> ~~to~~ <sup>from</sup> the latter's ~~debit~~. However, for reasons not stated he did not pay it, but asked him to send the money to the creditor direct.

H (top, 1.3 - verso, 1-4)

The background of this passage seems to have been the following:

Halfon had left Abū Zikrī one gold dīnār and a certain sum of dirhams for purchasing the items mentioned verso, 11.1-3. In addition, the proceeds from the selling of a quantity of storax were earmarked for that purpose. Abū Zikrī does not mention the sum obtained, because it was known to Halfon. He only reports that the Wakīl or agent had taken the sixth of a dīnār more (e.g. for keeping it in storage) and that, the dīnār being defective, he paid <sup>the balance</sup> ~~everything~~ out of the dirhams <sup>given</sup> ~~confided~~ to him by Halfon.

It is interesting that Abū Zikrī does not omit as small a sum as one gold qīrāt in his own favor (verso 1.14). This is in accordance with a maxim expressed in a well-known Arab proverb: Taḥābabū wataḥāsabū, "Love each other, but make exact accounts between the two of you".