

B. III, 9
1320, f. 11

10 φ. A BOOK IS MADE

LETTER OF A SCRIBE TO HIS EMPLOYER (Al-Mahalla, ca. 1145)

The writer of this letter, Zakkay b. Moses, is known from documents dated 1127 through 1150 and wrote and signed himself legal deeds in al-Mahalla ^{from} ~~in~~ 1143 through 1147.¹

In this letter, too, we find him in that town. The recipient, a tax farmer who kept also a dyeing workshop, lived in a smaller town not far away from al-Mahalla, for he and a friend of his, a druggist, received their supplies from that provincial capital, as we also learn here.

Normally, a book was copied from a model provided or recommended by the customer who gave the order. When Zakkay writes that the book will comprise two volumes, because it is on parchment and its letters are bold, he refers to the model from which he copied. On first reading, I thought that Zakkay was only asked to supply missing pages. But nothing in the wording of the letter justifies such an assumption.

The Tafsir, that is, the Arabic translation by Saadya Gaon of the Five Books of Moses, written in Hebrew characters, which forms the object of this letter, comprises

about 400 pages of thirty lines. Assuming that Zakkay could make ten pages a day, like his colleague, the Muslim judge, mentioned Med. Soc., II, p. 229,² and that the exchange rate of the dinar was approximately 1:40, as in Med. Soc., I, p. 381, secs. 55-57, he would earn $2-1/2 \times 40 = 100$: 40 days = $2-1/2$ *dinars* per day. This appallingly low remuneration of the scribes' work was the rule, see p. (), above.

It is also noteworthy that a discount (from 3 to $2-1/2$ dinars) was granted during the work. The parchment was ^oan account of the employer; nothing is said about pens and ink.

TS 13 J 20, f. 11

I am writing to my lord, the illustrious Kohen, may God prolong his life....³

REPORT ABOUT THE PROGRESS OF THE WORK

The preceding letter of my lord, in which you asked me to copy the Tafsir of the Torah, has arrived, together with the ten sheets of parchment. As soon as I had read the

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letter, which was forwarded to me by R. Solomon,⁴ I set to work. I cut the parchments in the way I thought suited best and copied. The ten sheets were sufficient for about one third of the Torah. When R. Solomon was about to travel to Misr (Fustat), I informed him about the situation and said to him: "I need parchment for the completion of the work." Said he to me: "The Kohen's concerns are dear to me. I shall buy the parchments in Fustat and bring them with me and you will select from them what you need for your work." When he returned from Fustat, he brought the parchments, I selected the best of them and am now bent on completing the work.⁵

The Tafsir will comprise two volumes, since it is on parchment and in bold letters. If you wish that it should be bound in al-Mahalla - for we have a bookbinder here - send us bindings⁶ for two volumes. Otherwise, convey your wishes to your servant and to the elder Abu 'l-Murajjā R. Solomon. And please do not neglect the payment of the fee for I am in great [...] on account of the work which I have undertaken for you because I h[old you in high esteem].⁷

BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF COMMON FRIENDS⁸

R. Solomon told me that he had sent you w[ith] the hävēr Ibn Tarīf⁹ two packages of brazilwood¹⁰ weighing ~~14~~ fourteen pounds and that he had sent to the elder Abu 'l- Alā' nine pounds of pepper and two pounds of ginger. Kindly confirm arrival. Also, R. Solomon sends with the bearer of these lines to the elder Abu 'l- Alā' three pounds less one quarter cinnamon and civet perfume¹¹ weighing 2-1/2 ounces.

R. Solomon wrote to the elder Abu 'l- Alā' and asked him to buy for him ten to fifteen mījārs¹² in addition to those he already has. Kindly let me know whether they have been purchased, for he intends to put in them some [... He will either fetch them] himself or send his messenger.

NOTE ABOUT THE COPYIST'S FEE

The completed sh[heets I shall leave here.]¹³ If this is convenient to you, please send the fee. Otherwise, write your instructions to the elder Abu 'l-Murajjā¹⁴ and he will pay out of his own money.

I had informed you in my first letter that the fee was 3 dinars, for the writing of this Tafsīr is like the

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writing of a Bible codex, the only difference being that it needs no signs for the vowels.¹⁵ But in view of the esteem in which I hold you, I remit from this half a dinar. You have sent me half a dinar through R. Solomon, the balance being 2 dinars. Please do not delay to remit them or to instruct R. Solomon to pay them for you and to charge you with them in addition to the price of the parchments.

Also, give him pleasure by honoring him with your orders; he is very grateful to you and gives much publicity to you and to the elder Abu 'l- Alā'.

CONCLUSION

Best regards to you, the elder Abu 'l- Alā', the teacher,¹⁶ and to my lords, the masters, your boys - may they be blessed from Heaven.

And, please, make all of you an effort to get those mījārs.¹⁷ Also, if you can find rennets,¹⁸ please buy them and inform me about their purchase in a letter with the Muslim, the bearer of these lines, or anyone else whom you

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will find convenient. If you wish to send something with this Muslim, please do; he is trustworthy. And Peace.

Address (upside down, as usual)

To my lord, the elder Abu 'l-Bishr, his honor,
greatness and holiness, our master and teacher Mevassēr ha-Kohen,
 son of R. ^WSōlmān, the tax[#]farmer in Bāb ...¹⁹

From his friend Zakkay, son of R. [Solom]²⁰

(In another, irregular hand using book script)

To my lord, the elder Abu 'l-Bishr, with
 R. Mevōrākh b. Solomon.²¹

NOTES

¹The deed of 1147 (TS 13 J 3 f 6v) is translated on pp. (BII, 4) above.

²The source referred to there speaks of folios, (which consist of two pages). But since in Arabic, as in our script, the letters of one word are connected, while in Hebrew they are not, one can easily make in Arabic two pages in the time needed for one in Hebrew.

³Four lines of the usual phrases.

⁴See below.

⁵The preparation of hides to serve as writing material was a special art obviously not cultivated in al-Mahalla.

⁶Text: tāqāt, a Persian word ^g ~~is~~ ^{with} the various meanings in Arabic. This detail also shows that the recipient knew the measures of the book ordered. Since book covers, then as today, were of greatly different values, the proprietor had to make the choice himself.

⁷The same phrase occurs on verso, l. 7. The writer emphasizes that he had to neglect more lucrative work for copying this book. As TS 8 J 21, f. 9, shows, Zakkay was active in the olive oil trade.

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⁸Because of the insecurity of communications, it was common practice to mention in letters ~~the~~ consignments sent, orders posted, and other business affairs of friends.

⁹About this "distinguished member" of the yeshiva see Med. Soc., II, p. 481, sec. 29.

¹⁰Ar. baqqam, a red dyeing stuff in wide use in the Middle Ages.

¹¹Ar. zābada (from which English civet is derived). The quantity sent was worth about 10 dirhems (money), cf. TS 10 J 15, f. 22, where 100 dirhems (weight) cost 10-3/4 dinars (in Fustat, 1117). Many other quotations in India Book.

¹²Of the various meanings of this word, only "earthen vessel" fits here. See Wehr, Dictionary, p. 1050 .

¹³This is a guess, based on the writer's remark above that he awaits orders concerning the binding.

¹⁴That is, R. Solomon, so often mentioned in the letter. He was a wholesale druggist and as such served also as a kind of banker.

¹⁵ Hebrew and Arabic scripts contain no letters for vowels. In sacred books, such as the text of the Bible, special signs for the vowels are added.

¹⁶ Ar. mv^callim. Obviously the only religious dignitary in the little locality.

¹⁷ See n. 12, above.

¹⁸ The membrane of the stomach of a calf is used for the preparation of cheese. Because of religious taboos, some people preferred to prepare cheese at home. These two postscripts are typical for a letter to a village: earthen vessels and rennets were to be had there.

¹⁹ The name of the place seems to be written in another hand or perhaps only with another pen. The last four letters are not identifiable with certainty.

²⁰ Here something strange occurred: the writer wanted to replace the Arabic name ^aSōlmān, of the recipient's father, by the Heb. Solomon but since everything was covered with writing, put it at the edge of the sheet, where it could be taken as the name of his own father, wherefore he deleted it. But there can be no doubt about the identity of Zakkay since his handwriting is known from numerous other manuscripts.

B, III, A

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13 J 20 f. 11

21 The Muslim messenger was unable to reach the addressee's place. He gave the letter to a Jewish acquaintance who might have been a respectable merchant, but not a scholarly person and who forwarded it with the man mentioned.

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B^{III} Employment

cap. 9. A Book is made.

{ Letter ^{of a} scribe ~~writes~~ to his Employer)

(Al-Mahalla, ca. 1145)

The writer of this letter, Zakkaq b. Moses, is known from documents dated 1127 through 1150 and wrote and signed himself legal deeds in al-Mahalla in 1143 through 1147.

In this letter too, we find him in that town. The recipient, ^{an} ~~tax~~ farmer who kept also a dyeing workshop, lived in a smaller town not far away from al-Mahalla, for he and ~~another~~ a friend of his, a druggist, received their supplies from that provincial capital, ^{as we also learn here,} ~~and sent from there~~

Normally, a book was copied from ~~an~~ ^{often} ~~order~~ ^{was made for the} ~~copying~~ ^{of a} ~~model~~ ^{provided} or recommended by the customer who gave the order.

~~Therefore~~ ^{when} Zakkaq writes that the book will comprise two volumes, because it is on parchment and its letters are ~~thick~~ ^{bold}. On first reading I

thought that Zakkaq was only asked to supply missing pages. But nothing in the wording of the letter justifies such an assumption.

The Tafsir, that is, the Arabic ^{by Saadya Gaon} translation ^{of} the Five Books of Moses, written in Hebrew ^{gross} characters, ^{which forms the object of this letter,} comprises about 400 pages of ^{thirty} lines. Assuming that ~~the~~ Zakkaq could

make ten pages a day, like his ~~colleague~~ colleague, the Muslim judge, mentioned Med.

he refers to the model from which he copied ~~was supposed to copy~~

$\sqrt{2}$
 Soc. II, p. 229, and that the exchange rate ^{of the dinar} (was approximately
 1:40, as in Med. Soc. T, p. 381, secs. 55-57, he would earn
 $2\frac{1}{2} \times 40 = 100$ ^{dinems} ~~denars~~ _{denars} 40 days = $2\frac{1}{2}$ dinems per day. This appallingly
 low remuneration of the scribes' work was the rule, see p.
 (Or 1080) 200) ^{see} above.

It is also noteworthy that a ^{discount} ~~reduction~~
 (from 3* to $2\frac{1}{2}$ dinars) was granted during the work.
 The parchment was ~~paid~~ ^{paid} on account of the
 employer; nothing is said about pens and ink.

TS 13720, f. 11

I am writing to my lord, the illustrious
 Kohen, may God prolong his life... $\sqrt{3}$

Report about the Progress of the Work.

The preceding letter of my lord, together
 together with the ten sheets of parchment, has arrived,
^{in which}
 you asked me ~~to~~ to copy ~~for you~~ the
^{Tafsir}
 translation of the Torah, \downarrow \uparrow As soon ~~soon~~
 as I had ~~read~~ ^{read} the letter, which
 was forwarded to me by R. Solomon $\sqrt{4}$,
~~started~~ work, I cut the parchments
 I set to

in the way

Copied.

As I thought suited best and started copying. The ten sheets were sufficient for about one third of the Torah. When R. Solomon was about to travel to (Fustat) Misr, I informed him about the situation and said to him: "I need parchment for the completion of the work." Said he to me: "The Kohen's concerns are dear to me. I shall buy the parchments in Fustat and bring them with me and you will select from them what you need for your work." When he returned from Fustat, he brought the parchments, I selected the best of them and am now bent on completing the work. ✓

The Tafsir will comprise two volumes, since it is on parchment and in bold letters. If you wish that it should be bound in al-Matalla - for we have a bookbinder here - send us bindings ✓ for two volumes. Otherwise, convey your wishes to your servant and to the elder Abu 'b-Turajja R. Solomon. And please do not neglect the payment of the ^{fee} ~~edges~~, for I am in great [^{on my account}] ~~anxiety~~ of the work which I ^{have undertaken} do for you because I hold you in high esteem. ✓

Business Affairs of Common Friends ✓

R. Solomon told me that he had sent you
 with the hāver Ibn Tarif⁹ two packages of
 brazilwood¹⁰ weighing 14 pounds and that he had
 sent to the elder Abu 'l-'Alā' ^{nine} ~~9~~ pounds of
 pepper and ^{two} ~~7~~ pounds of ginger. Kindly confirm
~~the~~ arrival. Also, R. Solomon sends with
 the bearer of these lines, to the elder Abu 'l-'Alā'
^{three} ~~3~~ pounds less one quarter cinnamon and civet
 perfume ^{weighing} ~~of the weight of~~ $2\frac{1}{2}$ dirhems.

R. Solomon wrote to the elder Abu 'l-'Alā'
 and asked him ^{asking him} to buy for him ten to fifteen
~~more~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ mijār's¹² in addition to
 those he already has. Kindly let me know
 whether they have been purchased, for he intends
 to put in them some [... He will either fetch them]
 himself or send ^{his} ~~the~~ messenger.

Note about the Copyist's Fee

The completed sheets I shall leave here.]¹³
 If this is convenient to you, please send the
 fee. Otherwise, write to the elder Abu 'l-Murajja'¹⁴
 your instructions and he will pay out of his
 own money.

I had informed you in my first letter

that the fee was 3 dinars, for the writing of this Tafsir is like the writing of a Bible codex, the only difference being that it needs ^{signs for the} ~~no~~ vowels ¹⁵ ~~positions~~. But in view of the esteem in which I hold you, I remit from this half a dinar. You have sent me half a dinar ^{through} R. Solomon, the balance being 2 dinars. Please do not delay to remit them or to instruct R. Solomon to pay them for you and to charge you with them in addition to the price of the parchments.

Also, give him pleasure by honoring him with your orders; he is very grateful to you and ^{gives much} publicity to you and ^{to} the elder Abu 'l-'Alā'.

Conclusion

Best regards to you, ~~and~~ the elder Abu 'l-'Alā', the teacher ¹⁶ and to my lords, the masters, your boys - may they be blessed from Heaven.

And please, make all of you an effort to get those mijārs ¹⁷. Also, if ^{you find} ~~can~~ ^{get} ~~reunets~~ ¹⁸, please buy ^{them} and inform me about their purchase in a letter with the Muslim, the bearer of these lines, or any ^{one} else whom you will find convenient. If you wish to send ^{something} ~~anything~~ with this Muslim, please do; he is trustworthy. And Peace.

Over

Address (upside down, as usual)

To my lord, the elder Abu 'l-Bishr, his house,
greetings and salutes, over-master and teacher,
Mevasser 'sha-Moken, son of R. Salman, the
taxfarmer in Bab... 19
in from his friend Zakariy, son of R. [Solom] 20

(In another, irregular hand, using book script)

To my lord, the elder Abu 'l-Bishr, with
R. Mevorakh b. Solomon 21

Notes

deed of ¹¹⁴⁷~~1147~~ on pp. (B II, 4) above,
 ✓ The ~~text~~ (TS 1373 f 6v) is translated Tax farming
~~for scribes by the scribe R. Moses see Mahabier II 594, n. 50.~~

✓² The source referred to there speaks of folios, ^{(as Lich} ~~that~~
 consist of ^{is} two pages). But since in Arabic, as in ^{our} ~~Latin~~ ^{Latin}
 script, the letters of one word are connected,
 while in Hebrew they are not, one can easily
 make in Arabic two pages in the time needed
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 cultivated in al-Mahalla.

✓⁶ # Text: tāqāt, a Persian word with various meanings
 in Arabic. This detail also shows that the recipient
 knew the measures of the book ordered. Since bookcovers,
 then as today,
 were of greatly different values, the proprietor had to
 make the choice himself.

✓⁷ The same phrase occurs on verso, l. 7. The writer

emphasizes that he had to neglect ^{more lucrative} ~~his regular~~ work for copying this book. As TS 8721, f. 9, shows, Zakkay was active in the olive oil trade.

8/ ^{Because of the insecurity of communications} It was common practice to ~~make~~ mention in letters of consignments, ^{sent} orders posted, and other business affairs of friends, see Med. Soc. I, p.

9/ About this "distinguished member" of the yeshiva see Med. Soc. II, p. 481, sec. 29.

10/ Ar. baqqam, a red dyeing ^{stuff} ~~material~~ in wide use in the Middle Ages.

11/ Ar. zābada (from which English civet is derived) The quantity sent was worth about 10 dirhems (iss money), cf. TS 10715, f. 22, where 100 dirhems (weight) cost $10\frac{3}{4}$ dinars (in Fustat, 1117). Many other quotations in India Book.

12/ Of the various meanings of this word, only "earthen vessel" fits here. ~~But I know this usage only~~ see Wehr, Dictionary, p. 1050B.

13/ This is a guess, based on ^{the writer's} ~~the~~ remark above that he awaits orders concerning the binding.

14/ That is, R. Solomon, so often mentioned in the

letter. He was a wholesale druggist and as such
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vowels. In sacred books, such as the text of the Bible,
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little locality.

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✓¹⁸ The membrane of the stomach of a calf is used
for the preparation of cheese. Because of the religious
taboos, some people preferred to prepare cheese at home.
These two postscripts are typical for a letter to a
village: earthen vessels and remnants were to be had there.

✓¹⁹ The name of the place seems to be written in
another hand or perhaps only with another pen.
The last four letters are not identifiable with
certainty.

✓²⁰ Here something strange occurred: the writer
wanted to replace the Arabic name Salman
of the recipient's father by the Heb. Solomon.

but since everything was covered with writing,
 put it at the edge of the sheet, where it could be
 taken as the name of his own father, wherefore
 he deleted it. The ^{handwriting} ~~writing~~ of Labkay b. Moses
 is well known from many other manuscripts. But there
 can be no doubt about the identity of the ^{Labkay} ~~writer~~
 since his handwriting is known from numerous
 other manuscripts.

21 The Muslim messenger was unable to reach
 the ~~addressee's~~ addressee's place. He gave the letter to a
 Jewish acquaintance ~~who forwarded it with~~
 who might have been a respectable merchant, but
 not a scholarly person and who forwarded it with
 the man mentioned.

9. מכתב של זכאי ברבי (משה) דיין אלמחלה אל מנשר הכהן

בענין העתקת תפסיר תורה ופרטים מסחריים של מכרם

המסותף ר' שלמה (בערך 1145)

TS 13 J 20, f. 11

- 1 כתאבי אלי מולאי אלכהן אלאול אטאל אללה בקאת
- 2 ואדאם תאיידה ונעמאה ומן חסן אלתופיק לא
- 3 אכלאה וכאן לה זמעה ולי וחאפט ונאצר פי במיע
- 4 אמורה אנה ולי דלך ואלקארר עליה טבחאנה.
- 5 כאן קד וצלני כתאב מולאי אולא מע אלעשר רקוק
- 6 והו ילחמס נסן תפסיר אלתורה פאול מא וקפת
- 7 עלי אלכתאב עלי יד ו שלמה באדרת באלשגל
- 8 ופצלת אלרקוק עלי מא חסן ענדי וכחכת פבלג
- 9 אלשגל פי אלעשר רקוק אלי תלת אלתורה וענד
- 10 ספר ו שלמה למצר אעלמתה באלאמר וקלת
- 11 לה אנא מחתאב אלי רקוק נכמל פיהא אלשגל פקאל
- 12 לי חאנה אלכהן ענדי עזיזה אנא אשתרי אלרקוק
- 13 מן מצר ואגיבהא מעי תנתקי מנהא חאגתך
- 14 וענד וצולה מן מצר גאב אלרקוק פאנתקית
- 15 כיארהא ועזמת עלי חכמיל אלשגל ואלתפסיר
- 16 יגי עלי קטעתין גזוין בחכם כונה פי אלרקוק
- 17 וגפא כסה פאן אכתרת תגליפה פי אלמחלה
- 18 מהמא אלמגלף ההנא פחגפד לנא טאקאת
- 19 לתגליפהא עלי קטעתין ואן למ ואלא תעלם כ[אדמך
- 20 גרזך פיהא ואלשיך אבי אלמרגא ו שלמ]ה
- 21 ולא חגפל עני פי אלאגרה לאנני בי]

22 כחיר כראמה לשגלך לעסם מ[ולצך ענדי

23 ודכר לי ו שלמה אנה אנפד לך צ[חבה

24 אלחבר בן טריף

שולים (בצד ימין)

קטעתין בקס | וזנהם יז רטל | ואנפד ללשיך | אבו אלעלא ס |

ארטאל פלפל | ורטלין זנגביל | תעלמנא פי | כתאבך בוצולהם |

וקד אנפד ו שלמה | ללשיך אבו אלעלא | צחבה מוצל | הרה

אלאחרף | קרפה ג | ארטאל | גיר רבע

שולים (למעלה)

ויון דרהמין | ונצף זבדה | וכאן ו שלמה |

קד כתב יטאל | אלשיך אבי אלעלא | אן ישתרי לה | עשר

מואגיר | או סו מע אלדי | ענדה פתחפזל | תעלמנא | אן

כאנת

עמוד ב'

1 קד חצלת לאנה מעול יסוי פיהא קליל]

2 חו או ירטל רסולה ואלדי יכמל מן אלד[פאתר אבק

3 פאן סהל עליך אן חנפד ~~לצפח~~ פתח ~~חבא~~ אלי אל

4 שיך אבי אלמרגא במא תכתאר פהו ידפע מן ענ[רה

5 וקד כנת אעלמתך פי אלכתאב אלאול אן אלאגרה ~~א~~ ת[לאתה

6 דנאגיר לאן כתאבה הדא אלתפסיר פהו מתל כתאבה

7 מצחף ליט יעוז אלא אלנקט ולמוצעך ענדי תרכת

8 מן דלך נצף דיגור וכנת קד אנפדת לי עלי יד ו שלמה

- 9 נצף דינר יתבקיין דינרין פלא תוכרהא עני [תכין]
- 10 או כתאבך לך שלמה באן ידפעהא ענך ויציפהא
- 11 אלי תמן אלקוק פכיף לה בחאגה וכדמת לך ותו שאכר
- 12 נאשר כתיב לחצרתך וללשיך אבי אלעלא חכך נפסך
- 13 באלסלאם ואלשיך אבי אלעלא אלסלאם ואלמעלם
- 14 אלסלאם ומואליי אלסאדה אלפחיאן יבורכו מן השמים
- 15 אלסלאם ונשחתי מסאעדתכם נמי ע פי תחציל אלמואגיר
- 16 ואן אתפס לכם איצא מנפחה תחצלוהם ותעלמונא
- 17 בחצולהם פי כתאב צחכה הדא אלגוי מוצל הדת אלאחרף או
- 18 מע מן יטהל ואן תצרת לכם חאגה תבעתוהא מע אלגוי
- 19 פהו חקה ושלום

סינאפה X

הכתובת

י צל הדא אלכתאב אלי מולאי אלשיך אבי אלבשר
 כגק מר ור מבשר הכהן ביר סלמאן נע
 אלצאמן בבאב נכו]
 מחבר
 זכאי ביר
 בן אלעסאל

נוסף באותיות ילדותיות גדולות

י צל הדא אלכתאב אלי מולאי אלשיך אבו

אלבשר מע ר מבורך בר ששלמה (1)

[ש] א