

About the Estate of a Drowned Silkmerchant, Handed Over by the
Government to the Jewish Court
(Alexandria, January 1143)

T.-S. 13 J 3, f. 4

(The fate of the property of merchants who died in a foreign country was one of the main problems of international trade in the Middle Ages (cf.). In our document we find quite an orderly procedure: The Fatimid Government in Cairo instructs its "Officer of Inheritances" in Alexandria, who had first taken charge of the belongings of the drowned merchant, to hand it over to the Jewish court in that town. The court settles the liabilities of the deceased foreigner and draws up an estimate of his remaining assets in cash and kind. This document - as we know from many other similar instances - was then forwarded to the Jewish court in the hometown of the deceased for further action.

To be sure, the Government did not act automatically. Someone had to take the matter into his hands, and securing the rescript ordering the release of the foreign merchant's estate involved expenditure. However, the sum required was comparatively moderate and stood in favorable contrast to what was usual in more rapacious periods and states. Our document is valuable also for its details about the silk trade.)

A. ...A rescript was received from the sovereign - may God enhance his glory and exaltedness - with regard to the estate of Joseph b. Samuel Ben Šabāh, who was drowned in the sea near Alexandria. The estate was to be handed over by the Muslim officer of inheritances to the (Jewish) court of justice in Alexandria, which derives its authority from our lord and Nagid Samuel...(titles and epithets)... The rescript was brought by M. and R. Solomon ha-Levi, son of the

late R. Samuel.^{a)}

B. Following this, we assembled in the new (government) house, in the presence of the Kadi al-Makīn,^{b)} two trustworthy Muslim witnesses^{c)} and government scribes. A bundled up cover¹ of silk was produced, bearing a plate on which there was engraved in Arabic and Hebrew letters: Joseph b. Samuel Ben Šabāh, and this sign² was on the outside of the cover. Then its contents were weighed and found to be as follows:^{d)}

Khazz-silk of medium quality, 84 packages,³ weighing 41 3/4 pounds.

Khazzāsh-silk, "peeled" and "unpeeled," 198 packages, weighing 102 1/2 pounds.

C. Of the Khazzāsh, we sold 12 1/2 pounds for 14 1/4 dinars, while the rest was deposited with the court of justice. These fourteen dinars^{e)} were put together with the proceeds from the sale of the deceased's belongings, which were 236 dirhams, converted into 6 dinars and 15 qīrāṭs.^{f)} These two sums together make 21 dinars less 1/8.^{g)}

D. From this, the following expenditure was made:

Customs	7 dinars	1 1/2 qīrāṭs
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Freight for the ship ^{h)}	3 1/2 d.	
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Payment for the man who brought the rescript, his expenses and what had to be paid in this matterⁱ⁾ 6 1/2 d.

Fees, ⁴ storage, cords, sundry expenditure ⁵	1 d.	1 q.
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Total Expenditure	18 d. less	1 1/2 q.
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Balance in cash ^{k)}	2 2/3 and 1/4 d.	and 1/2 q.
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E. We then estimated the value of the silk:

Khazz, after deduction of 1 1/4 d. for threads 78 d.

T.-S. 13 J 3, f. 4/Silkmerchant Alexandria 1143

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Khazzāsh, "peeled"

112½ d.

Total value of the silk

190½ d.

Balance in cash from the other
belongings

2⅔ and 1/4 d. and ½ q.

F. We completed⁶ this and set it down in a document, in two copies, in the last decade of Teveth, in the year 490/3 of the creation in Nō Amōn, which is situated on the coast of the great sea, under the jurisdiction of our lord Samuel, the great Nagid...(titles, etc.)
(Three signatures, the first being that of Aaron b. Yeshū^ca, the physician, who is none else than the famous Ibn al-^cAmmānī, who was for many chief justice of the Jewish community of Alexandria, and at the same time a poet and a public figure (cf. p.).)

Notes

- a) The signature of this man appears in three documents, dated Fustat 1156 and 1158, and Cairo 1170. Therefore, he must have been a person of some public standing. In addition, his hand is that of a trained scribe.
- b) About this famous Muslim judge of Alexandria, see p. .
- c) These witnesses - cadl in Arabic - were permanent adjuncts of the Muslim courts, and are almost comparable to modern notaries (see p.).
- d) In the original, all the numbers are given in words, and there is no tabulation as made here. For the various types of silk mentioned and the prices usually obtained for them in that period, see p. . The estimates made here are fair and in accordance with the prices normally attested.
- e) The quarter listed before is not mentioned again, but is, of course, included in the following account (see Note g).
- f) The dirhams referred to here are the so-called black dirhams, which had the value of only one-third of the full silver coin. For these dirhams, the ratio dinar:dirham = 1:36 approximately, as here, was normal (see p.).
- g) A dinar has 24 qirāts. Thus, the two sums add up to 20 din. and 21 q., which is indeed 21 din. less 3 q. or 1/8 din.
- h) For freight and passage, a small sum was paid in advance, but the main payment was made after safe arrival (cf. p.).
- i) It is easy to understand why even a court could not be too specific concerning this item.
- k) 17 d. and 22½ q. plus 2 d. and 22½ q. make 20 d. and 21 q., which is indeed 21 d. less 1/8 d.

Comments

1. Literally: pillow, makhadda; used in the same sense in T.-S. 13 J 27, f. 22.
2. Ar. rasm. The usual word for the merchants' plates bearing their names was calāma.
3. Ar. luḥma, an expression reserved for the silktrade. Such a luḥma, as we see here, weighed about one half pound.
4. Small fees to customs officers, scribes, etc., Ar. rusūm.
5. Ar. pawā'ib.
6. Text: anhainā, which word is normally used in the Geniza papers in the meaning "to inform." Something seems to be written here above the line, but it is not clear whether it belongs to the original text.

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Comments

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The beginning of the year
1373 f 4 (List and value of goods carried by
a merchant from near Alexandria to the port of
and delivered to the Muslim king to the
January 1143 (1142 A.D. 1125))

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ה'תש"ח א' תמוז י"ח

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אברהם אבינו ואלהינו
ויהי ערב ויהי קרוב

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15 Nov 1966

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סחורות וחפצים של סוחר יהודי שטבע בימה של אלכסנדריה נמסרים

לביה דין ע"י הקאצי המוסלימי (ינואר 1143)

ט"ש 4. f, 3, 13

- 1 ~~מן וסדיא דחתימין~~ [קבא למחתא בכתבא דנן כן ה] וזה
- 2 למא וצל לתוקיע אלעאל זאדה אללה שרפא ועלוא פי מא יכתן בהרכה יוסף
בר שמואל דיד[יע
- 3 בן צבאח אלדי גרף פי אלבחר קריב מן סכנדרייה (!) תמאהא אללה תעאלי
ונקלת אלחרכה [מן
- 4 תחת יד צאחב מואריח אלגויים אלי תחת יד בית דין דבאכסנדריא (!) דמטנא
מפי
- 5 אדונינו נגידינו שמואל הנגיד הגדול נגיד עם יל צבאוח שר השרים
ונגיד הנגידים
- 6 פוז כל בית ישראל גביר הגבירים ימין המלוכה נזר הנשיאות ירום הודו
ויגדל כבודו
- 7 וכאן אלואצל בהדא לתוקיע מז וז שלמה הלוי ביר שמואל נע חזרנא פי אלדאר
- 8 אלגדידה בחזרה אלקאצי אלמכין וחזרה שאהדין עדלין ובמחצר מן כתאב אלדיואן
- 9 אלמעמור ואחזרה מכדה חריר מחזומה ופיהא לוח מנקוש עליה ערבי ועבראני
- 10 יוסף בר שמואל בן צבאח ודלך אלרסם עלי טאהרהא פוזן מא פיהא מן אלחריר
אלכז
- 11 אלוסט פכאן וזנה אחד וארבעין רטלא ונצף ורבע רטל עוד אללחם ותמנין
- 12 לחמה ואלכזאש אלמקשור וגיר אלמקשור מאיה רטלא ורטלין ונצף עוד אללחם
- 13 מאיה ואחדה ותמניה וחסעין לחמה פבענא מן אלכזאש בארבעה עשר דינארץ
- 14 ורבע אחני עשר רטל ונצף כזאש ואלבאקי מודע פי מודע ביה דין ואנצאפה
- 15 הדה אלארבעה עשר דינארץ ורבע אלי המן חואיג מטלטלין גא מבלג חמנהא
מאחיץ
- 16 דרהם וסתה והלאתינ ~~צרפחא~~ ^{דרהמא} צרפחא סתה דנאניר וכמסה עשר קיראט
צארה אלגמלחין
- 17 ואחד ועשרין דינארץ אלא חמן כרג מן דלך מכס סבעה דנאניר וקיראט ונצף כרי
מרכב

- 18 תלאתה דנאניה ותלת אלדי אחצר אלתוקיע ומונתה ומא יליהם סחה דנאניר
ונצף רסום
- 19 וכרי מכזן וחזאם ונואיב דינאר ואחד וקיראט אלגמלה חמניה עשר דינאר
אלא
- 20 קיראט ונצף אלבאקי דינאריין ותלתי ורבע ונצף קיראט וקומנא אלכז
פכאן קימתם
- 21 תמניה וסבעון דינאר בעד טרה דינאר ורבע ען כיוט וקימה אלכזאש אלמקשור
- 22 מאיה דינאר ואחדה ואתני עשר דינאר // ונצף // יכון קימה גמיע אלתריר
מאיה דינאר
- 23 ואחדה ותסעון דינאר ונצף וען באקי אלמטלטלין עינא דינאריין ותלתי
ורבע ונצף קימא
- 24 נאנהינא // 3 // דלך ואתבתנאה גסכחין פי אלעשר אלאכיר מן שהר טבת
דשנת דהחק
- 25 ליצירה בנא אמן דעל כיף ימא רבא מותבה רשוחיה דאדונינו שמואל הנגיד
הגדול
- 26 נגיד עם יז צבאות ירום הודו ויגדל כבודו נצח לזכו ולראיה שריר וקיים
- 27 אהרן ביר ישועה הרופא זצ"ל
י ר ו ש
יצחק ביר יוסף זצ"ל
ח ג
יפה הלוי זצ"ל עולה זצ"ל