

Q. About a Present, Sent from ~~Old Cairo~~ to Lucena, Spain

T.-S. 8 J 18, f. 2

was
 (This note is addressed to Almeria, the most important Mediterranean port of Spain at ^{that} this time (around 1130)). Its writer, Ḥalfōn b. Nathaniel - a great Cairine merchant, whom we find one year in India and the next in Spain - was expected to come to Almeria; therefore, a Cairine friend had sent him a present for his brother in Lucena (near Cordova) with the request to forward it. However, Ḥalfōn had changed his route and had either gone to another Spanish port, such as Malaga, or to North Africa. Therefore, he sent the present with the captain of a ship which went to Almeria, asking him to deliver it to one of three persons specified. He himself notified them by letters such as the one translated here. By chance, two of these letters have been preserved - most probably owing to the following circumstances: After having written them, Ḥalfōn found someone who was prepared to do the errand. Therefore, he did not dispatch these letters at all, but took them along all the way back from Spain or North Africa to Egypt. Thus, these little vignettes of life around the Mediterranean have been spared for us.)

My lord and master, my highest support and eternal treasure,^{a)} after having written my previous letter, an opportunity for a good deed has arisen, and I want to carry it out with your help. A consignment has arrived from ^{Fustat} ~~Old Cairo~~, from the illustrious judge R. Elazar ^{Ibn} ~~Ben~~ al-Qasabī,^{b)} to be sent to his brother in Lucena. I entrusted it to the captain, Said-ham^l b. Yaqqān, the captain of the Sultan's ship, who shares the command of the ship with Ibn ^cAbd al-Kāfī, and advised him to deliver it in Almeria either to R. Isaac b. Baruch - because he is so well-known in the town^{c)} - or to your

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excellency, or to R. Abraham b. Meninio,^{d)} the excellent scholar - m(ay his Rock) p(reserve him). Whoever of you will be in town shall undertake this good work and will be thanked (by man) and rewarded (by God).

The consignment has to be taken from the aforementioned captain, to be looked after until its delivery into the hands of the addressee in Lucena; the latter will confirm its arrival in a note which he will send from Lucena and which you will kindly forward to ^{Fustat} ~~Old Cairo~~.

May the welfare of my lord, the pupil of my eye, wax eternally.

This note was written on the coast (in the port); please excuse (its incomplete form).

(Postscript, written on the reverse side:)

The consignment consists of a Bagdadian,^{h)} ^{e)} half silk-half linen,² and a small bag, containing cloves, weighing, together with the packing, 430 ^e dirham of Egyptian pound, i.e. weight, i.e. standard,^{f)} please take delivery from that captain. He also carries two notes,³ one in Hebrew and one in Arabic, concerning it, please take everything and kindly forward it as a ^{entrusted} trust ~~confided~~ to you.^{g)}

May the welfare of your honor wax eternally.

Address:

To my master and lord and helper, the h(onored), g(reat) and h(oly) M(aster) and T(eacher) Joseph, the great and unique scholar, the most illustrious physician, known as "Ibn al-Khāzin the Physician" in the bazaar of Almeria.^{h)}

From Ḥalfōn ha-Levi, who is grateful for his favors and spreads his fame.

Notes

- a) These polite phrases are used exclusively in letters sent to or from Spain.
- b) A member of the rabbinical court in Cairo, who also came originally from the Muslim West, as his name indicates. *Fustat*
- c) A number of letters, sent by this important merchant, have been preserved in the Geniza. Our writer apologizes for mentioning this merchant first.
- d) A Romanesque name (cf. Spanish menino), a queen's page.
- e) This does not necessarily mean that the material concerned was made in Bagdad; it could designate its Bagdadian style (~~cf. p. —~~).
- f) The writer had difficulties in finding the right word (sanj). As the Egyptian pound, whose weight at that time corresponded roughly to the present American ~~(p. —)~~, contained ^{about} 140 dirhams, this bag held about three pounds of cloves, a very valuable present, as in Cairo, at that time, a pound cost 5,5 gold dinars (cf. S. D. Goitein, Geniza Documents on Trade and Travel to India, No. 213, verso l. 8). At least two other instances of cloves being sent as a present to a scholar are to be found in the Geniza.
- g) I.e. without remuneration.
- h) "The son of the treasurer" - a family, various sons of which are known from literature or from the Geniza.

Comments

- 1. Said-ham, clearly written as one word, both here and in T.-S. 10 J 15, f. 3, which is the letter sent to Isaac b. Baruch simultaneously with that to Ibn Khāzin.
- 2. Ar. nişfiyya, common in the Geniza. Dozy, Supplément II, 680b points it as naşfiyya, but for which ^{reason} it is not evident.
- 3. Text: ruq^catain tadhkira, literally: two slips containing a memorandum.