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3. COME BACK TO JERUSALEM

A Personal and Business Letter sent from Jerusalem to Fustat
(ca. 1051)

Interminable wars between the various Muslim states and sects, as well as terrible devastations by bedouin hordes had laid Palestine waste long before the advent of the Crusaders. The *Geniza* correspondence of the eleventh century is replete with lamentations over the ruin of the country. In particular, complaints about economic conditions in Jerusalem were legion. Few writers were as outspoken as this one: "Life in cities is hard, especially in Jerusalem, a city of many curses. Provisions ^o came here from afar and the possibilities for making a livelihood are limited. Many arrived here rich and became poor."¹

Most complaints concluded with some religious consolation: "The difficulty of finding work in this place and its dire living conditions are well known. Those who can count on their good health and their money complain, let alone he who has neither. But the Master of the House instills into the soul delight of beholding the holy place and into the body the faculty of seeing little as much, as well as perseverance in distress and hardship."² Not everyone, however, was content with religious blessings. No wonder, then, that some of

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Jerusalem's sons were seeking greener pastures. Our letter endeavors to induce such an emigrant to return. Another letter, addressed by the same writer to the same person helps to elucidate some obscurities in the first.³

The recipient was a native of Jerusalem, ~~and~~ his father had been a member of the academy. A court record from Jerusalem, in which a young couple confirms to have received from him and his mother valuables deposited with them shows him still living in that city in 1045.⁴ Our letter was written in 1051 or, shortly after that year, see n. 19. Thus the unpleasant experiences and financial difficulties which caused the recipient to leave his native country for Egypt must have occurred around the middle of the century.

DK18⁵

I am writing to you, my lord and master, may God prolong your life and make your honored position permanent, from Jerusalem; may God rebuild it. I am well, praise and thanks to God for his beneficence.

God, the exalted, knows how much disturbed I was by the news from you and by the losses about which you complained. But God, the exalted, compensates and replaces. Do not take

it to your heart too much, but plan to return to Jerusalem, the blessed. The Holy, blessed be he, will not forsake you. You, my lord, know what Barzilay has said: Pray let your servant return [that I may die in my own city, near the grave of my father and my mother].⁶ Success in business does not depend on efficiency. You are familiar with what the saint⁷ - peace upon him - has said: "The race is not to the swift [...nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the clever, etc.]"⁸ In short, there is nothing that may be quoted which you, may God keep you, do not know.

This very day I had a long argument with Thābit⁹ and received from him 5 dinars, 2 complete ones, and the rest in new, old, and fragmentary quarter dinars of the coinage of Sicily (i.e. Palermo). Had I someone this moment with whom to send them to you I would have done so. The sum is too small for issuing on it a bill of exchange.¹⁰ I shall try to give it to al-Arrajānī¹¹ and take from him a bill of exchange with little loss, if you confirm this, for he said to me that close business relations existed between him and Abraham, the son of Isaac the Scholar.¹²

You wrote me about [Hiba]¹³. Had he been present in Jerusalem I would have brought him to court and forced him to pay what he owes you but he is not here; he is in Zughar.¹⁴

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I asked someone to write to my lord, the member of the academy R. Eli,¹⁵ to assist in retrieving your money and also to my lord Abu Shāq Ibrāhīm, the Delight of the Yechiva,¹⁶ may God keep him, and shall now wait for what will happen. Please keep me informed.

I, on my side, wrote to my lord Abū Ishāq Barheūn,¹⁷ son of R. Moses ^hbe-hāvēr of blessed memory, in the same matter, may God, the exalted, help you. I enclose also a letter to my lord Abu 'l-Faraj Hiba, the Kohen, may God keep him; please, transmit it to him, and if he is out in the country, ^(side) forward it to him. He might be helpful in retrieving your money. And please write to me without delay about all you deem fit. By God, answer immediately.

The community send you their very special greetings. They miss you. May God bring you back in peace; peace be to you and to your house and to all you possess.¹⁸

It has been reported that 'Imrān¹⁹ reviles the memory of our lord the gaon Solomon, may the memory of the righteous be blessed and live forever.

Is it not time²⁰ that he desists from his ugly ways? "gray hair is sprinkled upon his head and still he has no reason."²¹ I do not say more about this.

Covenant of Peace!²²

Address (in Arabic characters):

To my lord Abū Ya'qūb Ishāq ^b Ya'qūb, the hāvēr, the Jerusalemite,
Ya'qūb

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may [God] prolong his life and always [... and] support him.

From Ḥayyīm ^b ~~q~~. Sālim.²³

To be delivered at the House of Exchange, Fustat, if God will.

Note ^{of} ~~at~~ the forwarding postal agency (Ar. characters):

(To) al-Ḥusayn ^b ~~q~~. Mufrij and ^{ibn} ~~son~~ al-Dahhān

(From) ^u ~~U~~ma ^b ~~q~~. Yūsuf al-Zubayrī and Company.²⁴

The free space left on the reverse side of this letter and of TS 12.374+ were used for the enigmatic lists discussed in Med. Soc., II, pp. 472-47³, Appendix C, sections 5 and 6.

NOTES

¹Mann, II, p. 190, ll. 28-30. In Hebrew:
^g ha-gelālā mesū³ā bāh. Probably written in the 1050's. This
 is an official letter by Daniel ^b ~~q~~. Azarya, the head of the
 yeshiva, who spent indeed most of his time outside Jerusalem.

²Dropsie 411, Nahray 254, ll. 22-26. The writer was
 the same as that of the important business letter No. ¹¹ ~~8~~,
 translated below.

³TS 12.374, Nahray 222.

⁴TS 13 J 1, f. 11, ed. S. Assaf, Gaonica, Jerusalem,
 1933, pp. 208-209. The printed text needs revision.

⁵Ed. S. D. Goitein, Epstein Jubilee Volume, Jerusalem,
 1950, pp. 191-196. This was my first Geniza^z publication, and
 research, naturally, has widely expanded since. At that time
 the manuscript did not have a mark. It appears as No. 18 of the
 D^x K^y Geniza fragments discussed in that paper. *Reprinted in*
Palestinian Jewry, 205-211

⁶2 Samuel 19:37. It is noteworthy that the rationale
 given for the return to Jerusalem was not its holiness, but
 its being the recipient's native city.

⁷King Solomon, who was regarded as the author of the
 Book of Ecclesiastes.

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⁸Ecclesiastes 9:11.

⁹"Steadfast", a common Jewish name. Several merchants bearing this name are known from this period.

¹⁰The agio for a general suftaja made its issue expensive.

¹¹A Persian Jewish banker in Jerusalem. Arrajān, once a flourishing city in south-west Iran, has entirely disappeared. See El², I, p. 659.

¹²About this member of the Exchange in Fustat, who served also as a judge, see Med. Soc., I, pp. 238-239, II, p. 512, and passim. From TS 12:374⁺ (see n. 3, above), ll. 3-8, we learn that al-Arrajānī did not accept the coins because they were of poor quality (nagd muqārab).

¹³Hiba, "gift", Arabic equivalent of Heb. Nathan and extremely frequent like this. The writer had arrived here at the end of the line and forgot the name, but it can be restituted from the reference in 12:374^v, l. 1.

¹⁴A town on the southern shores of the Dead Sea, the biblical Zoar, a three days' journey away from Jerusalem, see Yāqūt 2, p. 934, ll. 13-14. It was notorious for its murderous climate, but was called "Little Basra", because it was a Matjar, an emporium and desert port, connecting northern Arabia with the Mediterranean area, see Muqad^dasi, p. 178, ll. 1-5. ~~A~~

~~Hebrew court record from Zoar dated Decr. 12, 1023, is preserved.~~

in TS 13 J 14, f. 24. In DK18 the name is written Zghrr, with two r's it seems, a mere slip.

¹⁵Probably the spiritual leader of the Jewish community of that place.

¹⁶An honorary title given to donors.

¹⁷A member of the great Tāherti family, see Med. Soc. I, pp. 181-182, and passim. Also the index of this volume. The writer of our letter was a merchant of higher standing than the recipient, who obviously had no access to Barhūn.

¹⁸1 Samuel 25:6. Greetings from the community also in 12:374 v,⁺ 1. 2.

¹⁹This ʿImrān (= biblical Amram) might be identical with ʿImrān ^{b.} ^h ⁱ ^j ^k ^l ^m ⁿ ^o ^p ^q ^r ^s ^t ^u ^v ^w ^x ^y ^z ^{aa} ^{ab} ^{ac} ^{ad} ^{ae} ^{af} ^{ag} ^{ah} ^{ai} ^{aj} ^{ak} ^{al} ^{am} ^{an} ^{ao} ^{ap} ^{aq} ^{ar} ^{as} ^{at} ^{au} ^{av} ^{aw} ^{ax} ^{ay} ^{az} ^{ba} ^{bb} ^{bc} ^{bd} ^{be} ^{bf} ^{bg} ^{bh} ^{bi} ^{bj} ^{bk} ^{bl} ^{bm} ^{bn} ^{bo} ^{bp} ^{bq} ^{br} ^{bs} ^{bt} ^{bu} ^{bv} ^{bw} ^{bx} ^{by} ^{bz} ^{ca} ^{cb} ^{cc} ^{cd} ^{ce} ^{cf} ^{cg} ^{ch} ^{ci} ^{cj} ^{ck} ^{cl} ^{cm} ^{cn} ^{co} ^{cp} ^{cq} ^{cr} ^{cs} ^{ct} ^{cu} ^{cv} ^{cw} ^{cx} ^{cy} ^{cz} ^{da} ^{db} ^{dc} ^{dd} ^{de} ^{df} ^{dg} ^{dh} ^{di} ^{dj} ^{dk} ^{dl} ^{dm} ^{dn} ^{do} ^{dp} ^{dq} ^{dr} ^{ds} ^{dt} ^{du} ^{dv} ^{dw} ^{dx} ^{dy} ^{dz} ^{ea} ^{eb} ^{ec} ^{ed} ^{ee} ^{ef} ^{eg} ^{eh} ^{ei} ^{ej} ^{ek} ^{el} ^{em} ^{en} ^{eo} ^{ep} ^{eq} ^{er} ^{es} ^{et} ^{eu} ^{ev} ^{ew} ^{ex} ^{ey} ^{ez} ^{fa} ^{fb} ^{fc} ^{fd} ^{fe} ^{ff} ^{fg} ^{fh} ^{fi} ^{fj} ^{fk} ^{fl} ^{fm} ^{fn} ^{fo} ^{fp} 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^{hq} ^{hr} ^{hs} ^{ht} ^{hu} ^{hv} ^{hw} ^{hx} ^{hy} ^{hz} ^{ia} ^{ib} ^{ic} ^{id} ^{ie} ^{if} ^{ig} ^{ih} ⁱⁱ ^{ij} ^{ik}

²¹Hosea 7:9.

²²This way of concluding a letter (ḥerit shālōm) was used by Kohens, cf. Malachi, 2:5. But here it might have been adduced to emphasize the writer's friendship.

²³He signed, together with five others, a power of attorney issued in Ramle on Oct. 17, 1056, TS 13 J 1, f. 14, ed. S. Assaf, Tarbiz 9, pp. 199-200. Facsimile in Sefer ^hḥa-Yishuv, p. 57. He signed above the others (not evident in the edition, where also the many small letters above and beneath the signature are omitted) and is reverently referred to in the validation of the court as a member of the academy. His signature is slightly monumental, but there can be no doubt in the identify of the hand with that of our letter. In the signature the name of his father appears, of course, in its Hebrew form (Solomon).

²⁴Discussed in Med. Soc. I, p. 292. where the family names had not yet been deciphered. Dahhān, "seller of, or painter with, oil", Zubayrī, a name going back to ancient Islamic times.