

## 20. EXPORTS FROM SICILY.

### An Account

Second only to Tunisia, Sicily takes the place of pride in the Geniza overseas correspondence of the eleventh century. The short account reproduced here represents its main exports: finished textiles, silk, rubā'īd (quarter dinars), hides, agricultural products, especially fruits such as almonds, and transit goods of all descriptions, for instance, lead. See S. D. Goitein, "Sicily and Southern Italy in the Cairo Geniza Documents," "Archivio Storico per Sicilia Orientale," 77 (1971), 9-33.

The sheet is folded so as to form four columns. Parts of columns III and IV are torn away. Col. I is left blank. Col. II contains the account translated here. On cols. III and IV arithmetical computations are written, which, because of their incompleteness, are not fully intelligible. Col. IV has this remark:

Total for the partnership and me personally	4410 rubā'īs
Plus profit made in Demona	25 "
Total	4435 "

For the latter remark see note 18, below.

All the amounts in the following account are in Sicilian quarter dinars.

Bought for this:

63 Syracusan hides, price	...
20 Pieces of lead, weighing 24 qin. <sup>1</sup>	
Price with customs and <u>birtīl</u> <sup>2</sup>	260 1/2
2 Bales of shelled almonds and 76 buckskins <sup>3</sup>	
Weight 10 qin.; Price with customs	253
Prepayment <sup>4</sup> on freight for all this	26
3 Narrow <u>farkhas</u> <sup>5</sup>	23

# TS Arabic Box 54, f. 88.

1 Wide farkha	8 1/2
1 Turban ( <u>imāma</u> ) <sup>6</sup>	14 1/3
2 Turbans	28 1/2
4 Brocade blankets ( <u>malāḥif</u> ) <sup>7</sup>	38
238 gold leaves ( <u>jild dhahab</u> ) <sup>8</sup>	...
4 Dustari gowns ( <u>athwāb</u> ) <sup>9</sup>	68
11 Blankets <sup>10</sup>	110
2 Indigo "wrappers" ( <u>mīzar</u> ) <sup>11</sup>	6
1 Silk "wrapper"	20
1 Dustari gown	12
19 1/4 pounds of silk <sup>12</sup>	206
He noted them in this, the latest, account <sup>13</sup>	
2 Purses of Ṣamsāmiyya <sup>14</sup> rubā'īs, numbering <sup>15</sup>	800
Total, inclusive of the rubā'īs	2025 and
(corrected from the original 2105)	1 qīrāt
Deduct from this for silk beads ( <u>ḥubūb ḥarīr</u> ) <sup>16</sup>	20
Balance	2005
Add to this what was placed to our credit from	
the sale of 3 ... from the	
partnership of Barhūn and Abu 'l-Ḥasan, <sup>17</sup> namely	[30]
and the price of Rūm (Christian) rubā'īs, numbering	42
Balance	2077
We have in cash	2000 [+...]
Balance in our favor	...
For the balance from Demona <sup>18</sup>	25

One item of export from Sicily not mentioned here should be added: timber. A list of belongings received in 1128 by a widow after the death of her husband mentions "a large table made from Sicilian khalanj wood" (an aromatic wood from which also bowls and the beads of the Muslim rosary were manufactured). That list contained also a Sicilian turban, the Sicilian textile most popular in the East (TS NS J 392).

## Notes

1. The word qintār (hundred pounds) is abbreviated in the account throughout to qin.
2. Literally "bribe", but in the Mediterranean trade of those days denoting a small consideration given to the sailors of the boat on which a consignment was sent.
3. The almonds were covered with the buckskins in order to protect them from the seawater. It is impossible to decide whether the number of the skins is to be read ʿw = 76, or ṭw = 15.
4. Sulfa. A part of the freight used to be paid before dispatch and another after arrival. But often the whole was paid in advance and was still called sulfa.
5. Farkha is a Sicilian textile often mentioned in the Geniza, but absent from our Arab dictionaries. Dozy, *Supplément*, II, 249b, has only the meaning "sheet of paper." No connection seems to exist between our farkha and the obscure textile farakh of Yazd in Iran, noted by R. B. Serjeant, "Islamic Textiles," *Ars Islamica*, 10 (1943), p. 86. Barhūn b. Sālih Tāhertī writes from Fustat to his cousin Barhūn b. Mūsā in Alexandria: "When the ships from Sicily arrive, buy me two narrow farkhas for a price of about 2 1/2 dinars." (TS 13 J 18, f. 8, l. 33). The narrow farkha cost here slightly less than 2 dinars (3 cost here 23 rubāʿīs of 5 3/4 dinars). But there were also cheaper ones, e.g., for 1 1/4 dinars, TS NSJ 127, col. I, l. 6. The farkha, like the thawb, was both a sheet of cloth and a garment. It was traded in large quantities, e.g. "111 wide farkhas," TS 12.389, l. 6; "125 bleached wide farkhas," TS 12.229, l. 9. In two other letters, 100 farkhas are sent. All these letters are roughly contemporary with our account.

6. People used to spend more on their headgear than on their clothing: the turbans cost twice as much as the farkhas. The small quantities show that these were personal orders accompanying the commercial consignment.
7. The malḥafa served as a blanket at night, but was also used by some as a garment during the day. Very frequent in the Geniza. The price (ca. 2 1/2 dinars) was that of a malḥafa of good quality.
8. Perhaps some gilded sheets of parchment. The price is obliterated, but cannot have been high, since the total given below is 2105, while the numbers preserved add up to 1850.
9. Dustari stands for Tustari as in TS 24.12, l. 9, a marriage contract from the year 1034. This precious textile was originally manufactured in southwestern Iran, but was early imitated in the West.
10. Approximately same price as above.
11. Mīzar (classical mi'zar), a wrapper, a piece of cloth in which one wraps oneself. Indigo mīzars are imported to Egypt from the West also in TS 8 J 22, f. 18. Prices similar to those of the silk mīzar here in TS 8 J 18, f. 21. Both letters from approximately the same time. Mīzar was also the name of a coarse type of cloth, in which one transported dust after cleaning and which cost only 3 dirhems or about one third of a quarter dinar: TS Arabic Box 6, f. 3, l. 11 (same period).
12. The average price for a pound of silk was 2 dinars per pound.
13. The silk probably had been sent in an earlier consignment.
14. Samsām, the last Kalbite amir of Palermo, was driven out of that city in or around 1052/1053, see M. Amari-Nallino, Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia, II, Catania, 1935, p. 484. Our account might have been written during his rule or somewhat later.

15. Their weight was certainly less.
16. The Geniza is extremely rich in information on silk, see Med. Soc., I, p. 547, s.v. Silk. But I have never seen this term and am therefore reluctant to try an explanation.
17. Barhūn is Abraham in Maghrebi Arabic and Abu 'l-Ḥasan is the kunya most commonly found in the Geniza. No attempt at an identification should be made therefore.
18. This corresponds to the detail about Demona noted on col. IV, see above. From a former transaction an amount of 25 rubā'īs was due to the writer of our account in the small Sicilian town of Demona.