

A House on the Jazīra

This note was copied from a document written in Arabic. Since the clerks were used not to provide diacritical points, Arabic t and y were identical; in ^{line 6} ~~lower case~~, the copyist wrote the senseless twmyd for ywmyd (yawma'idhin). As often, the sale of the house was made both before a Muslim and ^a Jewish court, and the Jewish court clerk copied here a part of the Muslim record in order to use it for the document to be written by him.

The seller of the house was a woman, probably a widow, to whose son an adjacent property belonged. As today (or perhaps, we should say yesterday), the Jazīra, or island in the Nile river at Cairo, was the domicile of high society. The house described here bordered on one which had once belonged to Ya'qūb Ibn Killis, the great Fatimid vizier (d. 991), and some other high standing persons.

As in "the Fortress of the Chandelis," the Byzantine nucleus of Fustat, the soil of the Jazīra was government property. Therefore the site was not included in the sale, and a ground tax had to be paid for it to the government.

Another Jewish house on the Jazīra, worth at least 660 dinars, is the object of a judge's note in Ms. Bodl. Heb. e 98, f. 63, dated 1136.

TS 8 J 34, f. 4

The borders of the al-Jazīra house.

It is situated on the island of Fustat, Egypt, between the two arms of the Nile and the two bridges, namely on the eastern side of the island. It looks on the large thoroughfare which abords into the bridge and the little market etc., and is surrounded by four borders.

The first border, namely the southern one, is formed by the house known formerly as the property of Ibn Killis, then that of the son of the superintendent of the Parades,¹ and finally, today that of the niter merchant (or administrator of niter deposits),² the native of al-Mahalla.

The second border, the northern one, adjoins the two stores and the open site which is known as the property of this (female) seller's son and as the property of³ the daughter of Muhsin, the son of 'Al[],⁴ whose father was known as "the Head of the Philophosers"⁵ Khān.⁶

The third border, namely the eastern one, adjoins partly the road on which one walks to the bridge and on which its gate and those of its two stores give and partly the place which divides it from the house of the Sharīf⁷ al-Haddād ("Mr. Smith").

The fourth border, namely the western one, adjoins the ~~house~~^{property}, known formerly as that of Ibn al-Bannā' ("Mr. Mason"), then known today as that of Tnjw,⁸ the daughter of 'Alī al-Nishānī,⁹ in which there is the orchard.

These are the borders of the entire sale described in this document with all its rights, its building, its gate, its hall on the ground floor, the apartments (?)¹¹ on the upper floor, its two stores, everything which belongs to it and all rights known as belonging to it and ascribed to it, except the ground which bears its building, for this is subject to a ground tax and therefore in no way included in the sale described in this document. The amount of the ground tax taken from its entire site is one half and one eighth of a dirhem per month.

Notes

1. Text: mushrif al-birāz. One expects burūz, the usual word for parades of troops or of the jubilant mass receptions extended by the population of a city to an arriving prince or governor. See Dozy, Supplément, I, 69 a-b. *prob. departure of caravan see TS 8.22 v. 1. A (in file)*
2. The usual Arabic form for the Persian word shōra, niter, was shawraj, here shawraq(i), see Dozy, Supplément, I, 801a. Niter was an important chemical used in tanning and other processes. The Arabs might have identified the Persian term with naṭrūn (derived from Greek niter). The natron deposits of Egypt were a state monopoly, and the man referred to here might have been involved in its administration. See H. Rabie, The Financial System of Egypt, p. 85.
3. A space was left since the copyist was unable to read the name.
4. Cut off. A female name like 'Aliyya.
5. Ar. al-falāfisa for falāsifa, either a nickname, or a mistake of the scribe.
6. Khān, might be read also kān, "he was," which makes no sense.
7. A nobleman claiming descent from the Prophet.
8. Hardly read correctly by the Jewish clerk. There are about twenty different possibilities to read the corresponding Arabic letters.
9. This Persian word has many meanings. The simplest: "maker of signs" (as hung on the stores of merchants).
10. Text: al-ma'ālim, clearly written thus. Meaning perhaps: "the accesses".

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