

may God keep him. Had I known that you did not like this, I would not have said so. I did it out of compassion for him so that it should not slip out of his hand. But I hope that God will grant the return of the messenger; then I shall personally assist him in the sale so that it will bring whatever God will grant.<sup>13</sup>

#### D. RECAPITULATION OF A PREVIOUS ORDER

In a previous letter I had asked you,<sup>14</sup> may God always be your support, to kindly buy certain textiles for me, namely: a Dabīqī<sup>15</sup> robe with a border, first class; a Dabīqī turban,<sup>16</sup> forty cubits long<sup>17</sup> with sparkling fine . . . and beautiful . . . and a Dabīqī cloak (*īzār*), first class, . . . (7-8 words) eleven by eleven. It was sent to me by you and in its basket there was a robe.

Also, three sets of *qaṣab*,<sup>18</sup> one pistachio-colored, one "ample,"<sup>19</sup> and one khalūqī.<sup>20</sup> The veils should be large.

Also a sumac-red veil, a lilac turban, a Dabīqī kerchief, and a towel.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The source referred to in n. 12 states that Ṭōv received a loan of 4 1/2 dinars. The writer assures the Tustarīs that he would try to get a good price and would pay no attention to Ṭōv's claims. People mostly preferred to keep business and charity separate, albeit religion taught otherwise. See *Med. Soc.*, II, 142.

<sup>14</sup> Here the writer goes over to the dual. Whether the original letter had been addressed to only two of the three brothers, or whether this change is due to the faltering Arabic grammar of the writer, cannot be decided.

<sup>15</sup> Fine Egyptian linen.

<sup>16</sup> Persian *sarpič*, lit., what is wound around the head. The Hebrew alphabet possesses no sign for č (tsh); it is expressed here by *g*, representing Ar. *j*, which substitutes for Persian č.

<sup>17</sup> During the time of the Fatimid caliph al-'Azīz (thirty years prior to the writing of our letter), Dabīqī turbans 100 cubits long were the great fashion in Egypt (see Mez, *Renaissance*, ch. 25, p. 433). Our business letter shows that the Muslim antiquarian Maqrīzī reporting this knew what he was talking about. The incredible fineness of the Dabīqī together with the predilection for huge, bulging turbans explains these strange measures. It is impossible to define the length of the cubits intended here exactly since they varied from town to town. Two feet might be a reasonable average. See Hinz, *Masse*.

<sup>18</sup> A wide-meshed linen interwoven with gold or silver threads, often mentioned in the Geniza. "Set," i.e., complete attire of a woman, containing at least one robe, hood, and veil.

<sup>19</sup> A *maufūrī*, not yet found elsewhere.

<sup>20</sup> Khalūq is an aromatic plant (*galia muscata*, Wahrmund, *Handwörterbuch*, s.v.); probably its color is intended.

<sup>21</sup> Text: *mshfḥ*, which is either *mishshafa* with *n* assimilated, or *minshafa*

Please do not stop writing me about your welfare and your concerns so that I may, God willing, deal with them as is incumbent on me.

(Address in Arabic characters:)

(To) my lords, the noble elders, Abu 'l-Fadl, Abū Ya'qūb, and Abū Sahl, (that is,) Sahl, Joseph, and Abū Sahl,<sup>22</sup> the sons of Israel b. Hdr.<sup>23</sup>

(From) their servants Ephraim b. Sa'īd and Šālīḥ b. Ephraim.

### 3 ITALIANS TRAVEL TO THE EAST

#### Beginning of Eleventh Century

This unusual letter is written on vellum in large, calligraphic characters, the like of which were used in books and Torah scrolls, not in letters. The writer no doubt was a professional scribe himself, for he sends greetings to his teacher, a copyist (*sōfēr*), and to another scribe. He was an Italian, whose native city cannot have been situated far away from Amalfi, for he refers to persons living there by their first names only and asks to forward greetings to a person in Naples. Since he was so pathetically shy of water, he was perhaps a landlubber, which would suggest Benevento, known as having a Jewish community as his hometown. His Hebrew betrays the high standard of biblical and talmudic studies among the Jews of Italy at the turn of the first millennium, to which this letter must be attributed.

with *n* omitted by the scribe. One "towel," often described as imported from Europe (Sicily), regularly appears in lists of trousseaux. It was large enough to serve as a wrapper for clothing sent overseas (TS NS Box 323, f. 1). This ceremonial family towel probably was destined only for guests wiping their hands after washing them before and after meals.

<sup>22</sup> Abu 'l-Fadl was the kunya of Sahl; Abū Ya'qūb, that of Joseph; and Abū Sahl, that of Sa'īd. The repetition of the kunya Abū Sahl instead of inserting the name Sa'īd probably was a mistake.

<sup>23</sup> The father of Israel was called Jacob. I take *Hdr* as Heb. *Hadār* (*ha-yeshivā*), "Splendor (of the yeshiva)," an honorary title conferred on him because of his donations.

The writer describes the double punishment he received for leaving his parents against their wish: his complete disenchantment with his Eastern teachers, in the search of whom he had undertaken the perilous journey, and the suffering of shipwreck with its horrors and losses. But he concludes on an optimistic note. He hopes to settle in the Land of Israel and finally to be united there with all his beloved.

The top and bottom of the parchment sheet are eaten away and large holes extend crosswise throughout its midst where it was folded. A translation of the highly interesting first part would require too long a commentary because of the many deft allusions to talmudic texts. In short, he says that the would-be great teachers whose publicity had deafened his ears and caught his eyes proved to be fakes living on the work of preceding generations. Like most travelers our scribe carried merchandise with him.

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter  
Collection, TS 12.144<sup>1</sup>

I faced death and unbearable dangers from the day I parted from my parents, whom I disobeyed. Likewise, when I visited Amalfi,<sup>2</sup> there were difficulties when I was preparing to leave the city. Disturbances surrounded [it?] and I wondered why all that should happen. M. Hananel and M. Menahēm—may they be remembered with a thousand blessings—were very good to me. [They introduced me] to the merchants, and all my dealings were carried out according to their instructions; also all other matters, such as the customs to be paid to the city, [. . .]. They also tried to persuade us<sup>3</sup> not to continue our way. But we did not listen, for thus it was destined by God.

We arrived in Palermo<sup>4</sup> on the [. . .] and paid customs for everything in addition to duties imposed on us for the . . . of the sailors

<sup>1</sup> Ed. Assaf, *Texts*, pp. 134-137. The translation begins in l. 10, where I read *we-hinnē rā'ū 'ēnay shahat*.

<sup>2</sup> Spelled *m'lfy* (Malfi), as fitting an Italian writing Hebrew, and not *mlf* (Malf), as in the letters of Jews whose mother tongue was Arabic.

<sup>3</sup> The writer was accompanied by two fellow travelers.

<sup>4</sup> Called by its Arabic name (Ṣiqilliyya "Sicily"), spelled Ṣoqiliyāh. For the Italian ear Arabic *ṣ* colored the following *i* to *o*.

of the ship.<sup>5</sup> We were [there] a week and waited. Finally we found a large ship there which sailed to Alexandria, Egypt. We paid the fare and embarked before the New Year Holiday. But on the fifth of the month of Tishri,<sup>6</sup> on Monday at noon time, a storm broke loose upon us [. . .], storming upon us for three days. On the third day the ship began to leak and water penetrated into it from all sides. [We worked hard] to reduce its load and to bale the water out, for there was a big crowd on the ship, about four hundred persons [. . .]. The sea became ever wilder and the ship was tossed about with its entire load. All the people lay down, for no strength was left to anyone, [and cried to] God. Then they approached the captain and pleaded with him, saying, "Save us! Turn the ship toward the land as long [as there is daylight], before the sun sets, when everything will be lost." And all cried with a loud voice. The ship was steered toward the coast and all embraced one another, trembling.<sup>7</sup> I am unable to describe how we<sup>8</sup> cried. For when I saw that those who knew how to swim had given up hope for life, what should I do who cannot stand water as high up as the ankles?

Finally, the ship touched ground and cracked asunder, as [an egg] would crack when a man presses it with his two hands. Passengers began to drown here and [there and pieces from] the ship floated above them. We three stood on a cabin on the uppermost part of the ship and did not know how to escape. People from below called us saying: "Come down quickly, each of you, catch a piece of wood and ride upon it, perhaps God will grant you rescue." [We] cried to God with a bitter voice, but when [I] saw that everyone was riding on a piece of w[ood I said to . . .] and to Elijah:<sup>9</sup> "Why should we sit here, let us do as they do." I emitted a loud cry [and moved. We went down] together, one helping the

<sup>5</sup> There is a hole at this point caused by the middle fold of the sheet and only the remnants of the letters are visible. It was customary for passengers to pay a small compensation to the sailors, but this had to be done at embarkation.

<sup>6</sup> This day always falls in September. The New Year is celebrated on the first two days of Tishri.

<sup>7</sup> The text clearly has *we-hōrēd* (for the more common *hārēd*), and not *hūrād*, as in the printed edition. My summary of the account in *Med. Soc.*, 1, 321, is to be corrected accordingly.

<sup>8</sup> The writer and his companions; see nn. 3, 9.

<sup>9</sup> One of his companions.

other, [praying] to Him who hears Israel. [. . .] and he got upon a piece of wood.

(Here the first page of the manuscript breaks off. On the reverse side the remainders of six lines are preserved, which despite their entirely fragmentary character are not without interest. Line 2: "... much from the sea," alluding probably to the fact that many of the goods were salvaged, as happened often with ships foundering near the seashore. Line 4: "Money is nothing . . . I shall replace," which shows that the traveler had suffered losses, but felt himself able to recover. Finally, he announces that his companions would settle in Tyre, then the greatest port on the Lebanese coast, which he, however, defines as situated in the Holy Land,<sup>10</sup> and expresses the confidence that God would place him<sup>11</sup> there, too, to become "a plantation of pride."

Thus it seems that the letter was written in Egypt. The disappointing teacher was perhaps Elhanan b. Shemarya (first quarter of the eleventh century), who created much publicity for his school, but whose eminent position was mainly inherited from his renowned father.

The persons in Italy to whom greetings were extended bore Hebrew names, with one exception: Benin(et)to, spelled *bynyntw.*)

#### 4 FROM AMALFI, ITALY, TO AL-MAHDIYYA, TUNISIA

Middle of the Eleventh Century

Both literary sources and the Geniza documents indicate that close relations existed between Tunisia and (then Muslim) Sicily on the one hand and the seaports of southern Italy, such as Amalfi and Salerno, on the other. But no correspondence illustrating these relations has been preserved, since the recipients of letters from either side had no reason to carry them all the way to Fustat, where the Geniza chamber was located. The fragment translated below

<sup>10</sup> This confusion originated through the ambiguity of the Arabic term *Shām*, which comprised Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan.

<sup>11</sup> The manuscript clearly has *we-yiṭṭā'ēnī*.

escaped destruction for a simple reason: its reverse side is almost completely blank. The recipient, on his way from Tunisia to Egypt (as anticipated in the letter), took it with him in order to use it as scrap paper; and he had already done so, as we see, for the upper part of the sheet (the reverse side of which also contained the address) is torn away.

The fragment begins in the middle of a sentence. The writer is a merchant from Alexandria who had bought pepper, *lubān* (see n. 9), and other Oriental goods in order to sell all or part of them in Amalfi on his way from Egypt to Tunisia. The ship in which he traveled, pursued by pirates or an enemy, was forced to flee as far north as Constantinople and again had to take refuge in Crete. Thus, instead of the fifteen to twenty-five days normally required for the journey from Alexandria to Amalfi (see *Med. Soc.*, I, 325-326), they were on the high seas for over seventy days. When they arrived in Amalfi they found the economy of the city ruined by a heavy imposition. The writer and his companion, or perhaps companions, waited now until business in Amalfi would revive and meanwhile sent instructions to his business friend in al-Mahdiyya regarding the disposition of his goods that had been sent directly from Egypt to al-Mahdiyya. He was sure that his business friend would leave for Egypt long before he himself would be able to leave Amalfi for al-Mahdiyya.

In a postscript, he reports that he and one of his companions went to see Yuḥannā (John, an exclusively Christian name), presumably a merchant in Amalfi who owed something to the person referred to, and that, as of that time, John had neither given a reply nor delivered anything.

Whether Yuḥannā was an Arabic-speaking Christian, perhaps originating from Tunisia, who had settled in Amalfi, or a native Amalfian, I am unable to decide. During the eleventh century, Christianity was still very much alive in Tunisia, as is evident from the material presented in Idris, *Zirides*, pp. 757-764, and index, p. 872, s.v. *christianisme*.

An Italian version of this letter was provided by me as an appendix to a paper by Armand O. Citarella, "Scambi commerciali fra l'Egitto e Amalfi in un documento inedito della Geniza di Cairo," *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane*, 10 (1970),