

## 16 FROM TYRE, LEBANON

University Library, Cambridge, University Library Collection,  
ULC Or 1080 J 42

A. AFTER ARRIVAL IN TYRE, THE PAPER WAS TAKEN OVER BY THE  
REPRESENTATIVE OF THE MERCHANTS

I am writing to you, my lord, the elder—may God prolong your life and make your honored position and prosperity permanent—from Tyre on Dhu 'l-Qa'da 16.<sup>1</sup> I am well, praise to God alone.

I hope my letters have arrived and that you have read them. I informed you about what I had sent with Salāma b. Jaysh<sup>2</sup> and what I paid for the transport, namely 5 1/2 dinars per camel load, plus payments to the guard, 1/8 dinar per camel load. You are not unfamiliar with the security situation in Damascus and the whole of Syria.

When, by God's favor—may he be glorified—the camel driver arrived in Tyre, he was induced by Abu 'l-A'lā Ibn Abī Ḥaffāz to unload the paper, for the latter wished to get hold of his partnerships,<sup>3</sup> take the paper, and forward it on his own. A man from Aleppo, called Abū Muḥammad the Aleppan, traveled in the caravan with goods of the size of your partnership consignment—I do not know the exact number of the camel loads, but I have no doubt that he paid the same freight as I did, namely 5 1/2 dinars per load. He, too, left them in Tyre.

My lords, the elders in Damascus,<sup>4</sup> received a letter from my master Abu 'l-A'lā, the agent, informing them that he had received from Salāma b. Jaysh 15 dinars.<sup>5</sup> He had carried twenty-eight camel loads for us, seven for the partnership with Abū Naṣr, and twenty-one loads for our partnership. I wrote you, my lord, may God preserve your honored position, to get hold of Salāma b. Jaysh and sue him

<sup>1</sup> Five and a half months after the preceding letter.

<sup>2</sup> No. 5, n. 6, above.

<sup>3</sup> This representative of the merchants had a share in some of the paper sent from Damascus and intended to sell part of it in Tyre. See below.

<sup>4</sup> Those who had sent paper to Egypt in the caravan and had paid the entire or the major part of the freight.

<sup>5</sup> This was, of course, only a small fraction of the sums paid for the transport to Egypt.

for the balance. My lord, the elder Abu l-Ḥusayn<sup>6</sup> also wrote a number of letters to my lord and master Abū Naṣr.<sup>7</sup>

B. DEFENSE AGAINST FALSE ALLEGATIONS

When, however, I arrived in Tyre, two letters from my master Abu Naṣr Ṣadaqa arrived there which put me and him to shame. He writes that I had informed him that I had paid a freight of 4 1/2 dinars per load to Sālamah b. Jaysh. In another letter he says: "I know that the camel driver paid the entire freight due from him in Tyre." And this after I had written to him every week to get together with you, my lord, and to cooperate in suing the camel driver. Nothing has come out of this. He should have asked the camel drivers, he should have asked you, my lord, for how much his partnership consignment was transported, and then, if it was established that I had given too high a price, then let him suspect me.

Such behavior evinces little intelligence and piety. But nothing can be done. Everything is foreordained.

I paid to Salāma b. Jaysh 5 1/2 dinars per load for freight; to Tammām, 6; and to 'Alā, the camel driver, 6.<sup>8</sup> He should have asked the camel drivers and the merchants about the freight before writing and casting suspicions.

On this very day a letter of his arrived to my master Abu 'l-A'lā Ibn Abī Ḥaffāz, in which he says: "Mūsā b. Ya'qūb stays in Fustat for five years until he settles accounts with his partners and lists the purchase of merchandise belonging to them in Tyre thirty times, but he does not have money."

This is the talk of an irresponsible<sup>9</sup> person. If possible, please meet him and explain to him what is proper. Also, please sue the camel driver for the balance and be circumspect and exert yourself to sell

<sup>6</sup> One of the elders of Damascus referred to above. See nn. 4 and 11.

<sup>7</sup> While the kunya Abū Naṣr is extremely frequent, the combination Abū Naṣr Ṣadaqa has been noted by me only once: a man called thus and bearing the family name Shāmī (from Damascus or Syria in general) carried a letter from Qayrawān to Cairo in 1022. See Mann, *Texts*, I, 143, l. 13; S. D. Goitein, *Tarbīz* 36 (1967), 369.

<sup>8</sup> He wishes to stress that on earlier occasions the freight was even higher. The abbreviation *al-q.* cannot mean, as usual, *al-qinṭār* (100 pounds), since the average of a camel load was 500 pounds. It stands probably for *al-qima*, "the price."

<sup>9</sup> Ar. *ghayr muḥassil*, intended to mean perhaps: who does not grasp things.

what I have sent either for our partnership or on my personal account, for, after my arrival in Fustat, I shall stay only a short time, if God wills. You will put me greatly in your debt by this and earn my thanks and good prayers. And act immediately.

### C. VARIOUS BUSINESS NOTES

A little over twenty bales of paper from a partnership of mine had remained in Tyre. I sent them to Ramle, and they have arrived there safely. I also have sent fifteen bales from a partnership with you and shall, God willing, carry all the merchandise with me.<sup>10</sup>

Kindly inform me whether you have received a letter from my lord, the elder Abu 'l-Ḥusayn,<sup>11</sup> stating that the rose marmalade and the lubricating oil<sup>12</sup> are on my private account.

Also, let me know what God has granted you to sell. Write me a letter every week, and in Hebrew script, please.<sup>13</sup> If you have any order to make, please honor me with it. *And may your well-being wax.*

(P.S.) If it is difficult to sell the paper or anything else by weight, and you prefer to sell it at retail,<sup>14</sup> do whatever your propitious judgment suggests to you. But, God willing, act without procrastination.

Kindly inform me, my lord, about the price of Nizāriyya money<sup>15</sup> coined in Damascus, for a friend gave me some to sell on my journey.

<sup>10</sup> These bales (the word indicates that the consignments were sent by boat) had remained in Tyre unsold. On his way to Egypt, the writer would first try to sell some of them in Ramle, Palestine.

<sup>11</sup> Of Damascus, see n. 4, above.

<sup>12</sup> Ar. *duhn*, oil used for ointments, painting, etc.

<sup>13</sup> Mūsā, as a widely traveled merchant, certainly knew Arabic script. But since the clerks writing Arabic often regarded illegibility as an expression of refinement, he preferred Hebrew script, which lends itself less to ambiguity than does Arabic, especially when the latter was written, as was customary, without diacritical marks.

<sup>14</sup> Ar. *bil-takhrīj*, lit., "by taking out," as opposed to "by weight," that is, selling entire bales or packages. In *Tarbiḥ* 37 (1968), 179 I was unable to explain the term (as found in ENA 3793, f. 7, l. 5), because, unlike here, it did not occur in an explanatory context.

<sup>15</sup> The Heb. word used here, *ḥesāfīm*, means lit., "silver pieces." But I learned from G. C. Miles that Nizār, that is, the Fatimid Caliph al-'Azīz (975-996), coined only gold in Damascus. The writer of our letter inquires about prices in Fustat in order to decide whether he should sell in Tyre, or Ramle, or wait until he came home.

Also the price of the rose marmalade.

My master Abu 'l-Barakāt al-Sharābī, who has lapis lazuli here in Tyre, has five loads of (dried) plums,<sup>16</sup> which find no buyer, in Acre. If plums have a good price (in Fustat), write me if he prefers to transport by land, in which case it will cost first 2 (dinars) per load from Acre to Ramle by sea and the total price to Fustat will come to 5 dinars, more or less. Kindly inform me what I shall do in this matter.

God alone suffices me.<sup>17</sup>

(Address in Arabic characters: same as in no. 15)

(Note of postal agency:)

(From) Najā al-Anṣārī

(To) 'Alī b. Muḥammad and his two sons Muḥammad and Ḥusayn

Please answer immediately.

### 17 PUBLIC APPEAL OF A MERCHANT

1041-1042

This piece is not a letter, but a speech, an appeal made to the rabbinical court of Fustat. But it contains all one expects from a good business letter: rich information on the movement of goods and a strong personal note, introducing us directly to the parties involved.

The plaintiff, Abu 'l-Faraj Jacob Ibn 'Allān, was a big merchant for his time—judging by the volume and value of his consignments

<sup>16</sup> Ar. *ḥhawḥh*, which is "peaches" in Egypt and "plums" in Syria-Lebanon. In *Med. Soc.*, 1, 427, n. 3a I took it as "peaches," since our writer hails from Egypt. But I now prefer "plums," simply because dried plums (prunes) are common, while peaches are not, and our letter is written in Lebanon.

The proprietor was called *Sharābī*, seller of potions; he dealt in lapis lazuli, a half-precious stone serving as an ornament and also for medical purposes. But here he meddled in the difficult fruit trade—and without much success, it seems.

<sup>17</sup> This quotation from the Koran (e.g., 9:129) is occasionally found at the end of a letter.