

A Deal in Antimony

Deposition in Court, Made on February 25, 1098

Cambridge, Westminster College, Fragm. Cairens. Misc. 50a

(For the wide use of antimony, kuhl, as an eye-powder, (see p. 1409

The document is of interest, as it throws light on the roles of both the representative of the merchants, wakīl, and the broker, dallāl.)

21

On Thursday, the ~~twenty-first~~ <sup>in</sup> of Adar, of the year ~~one thousand~~ <sup>1409</sup> ~~four hundred and nine~~ of the era, according to which we are accustomed to reckon in Fustat of Egypt, which is situated on the Nile river, the following occurred: There appeared before the court, instituted by ...  
(epithets) our lord Mevōrākh<sup>a</sup>) ... (titles) M. Sāsōn b. Nathan, and M. Moses ha-Levi b. Moses. The former claimed that the latter had come with him to his storehouse and asked to be offered a basket of antimony; he opened it and looked at it, and the price was fixed at five dinars for one <sup>Y</sup>Laithī qintār,<sup>b)</sup> payable after four months. The accused called a weigher and porters, but while the basket was transported, it burst, whereupon he said: "There is much earth in this basket. How much reduction do you grant me?" I said to him: "I have bought a number of such baskets; I shall grant you the same reduction as that made in my favor by the representative of the merchants." Upon this, the accused said: "I bought antimony through Ben Salmān, the broker, and he reduced the price by the value of thirty pounds' weight per basket." I replied

that I agreed to accept the evaluation of Abū °Alī b. Salmān. Then the accused, after having divided the load into two baskets and having them transported away by porters, met Ḥusain, the Damascene, who asked to be offered some of the antimony; he gave him a sample and, winking his eye,<sup>c)</sup> <sup>1</sup> said to him: "It was bought from that man, twenty (pounds) for a dinar."<sup>d)</sup>

On the following day, the accused came to me and asked me to fetch Abū °Alī, that he should evaluate the reduction. I brought Abū °Alī to his house, and in the presence of Ishāq b. Ḥunain, Abū °Alī evaluated the antimony and ruled that the reduction should be fifteen, but the accused swore that he agreed solely to thirty, whereupon I said that I would grant only what the broker had fixed. I waited until the stipulated time of payment, which I now demand from him.

Asked about this, N. Moses declared that he had agreed to buy the antimony for the price mentioned. However, at the time of the weighing, the basket burst, and I saw the antimony, and its weight was three hundred and eighty-four pounds.<sup>e)</sup>

Notes

- a) The Nagid or Head of the Jewish communities in the Fatimid empire then in power (see p.     ).
- b) 100 pounds of the gross type used for weighing less valuable goods, 62 kg (see p.     ).
- c) The translation is not sure (cf. Note 1 at the end of this volume).
- d) This statement was correct (see Note b)). The claimant mentioned it to prove that the accused had actually bought from him the antimony for that price.
- e) And not full four qintārs (400 pounds). There are no signatures on this record. It was intended as a preliminary statement, obviously made redundant by the two parties coming to an agreement out of court. On the backside, there are two records of depositions in court, made by the same M. Sāsōn against the same M. Moses b. Moses on March 29 and April 12, respectively, of the same year. However, the goods concerned were saffron and robes, sold by the latter for for former on a business trip to Upper Egypt.

Comments

1. Text: wadafa<sup>o</sup> lahu minhu jamjamat<sup>o</sup> ain (cf. Dozy, Supplément II, p. 211, jamjama<sup>o</sup> alā, faire allusion à). The letters are clearly visible. For jamjamat, of course, jamjama and ghamghama(t) can be read. Perhaps jamjamat<sup>o</sup> ayn is a colloquialism meaning "a little bit?"