

Fūṭa. A garment frequently mentioned in the Geniza as sent from Egypt to Aden and from there to India is the fūṭa, an untailored lengthy piece of cloth, worn either around the loins and legs similar to the sari, or covering the shoulders. Two fūṭas, one for the upper, and one for the lower part of the body, formed the customary apparel of the Indians, as reported by an early Arab traveler.<sup>1</sup> Farther east, in Malaya, as noted by the same observer, rich and poor left the upper part of the body uncovered, while wrapping a fūṭa (known there as sarong) around the waist, from where it hung down like a skirt.<sup>2</sup> When fūṭas were ordered, sent, or carried in pairs, they were probably intended to form a complete outfit, although this should not be assumed for all cases.<sup>3</sup> Only the goat's hair fūṭa, which obviously served to protect the entire body from the cold, always appears in the singular.<sup>4</sup>

At first <sup>glance</sup> blush it appears strange that pieces of cloth which formed the national costume of India should be imported to that country.<sup>5</sup> However, as the small quantities listed indicate, those fūṭas were destined for the westerners living or sojourning in India, who adapted themselves to the clothing habits of their environment, but wished to be distinguished from it by the special types of fūṭas they used.<sup>6</sup>

The locally manufactured fūṭas of India were generally made of cotton.<sup>7</sup> Those imported, as far as indicated, were of silk, even those for children,<sup>8</sup> or of silk and linen woven together,<sup>9</sup> or of a linen of high quality.<sup>10</sup> Linen fūṭas were sent from Aden to a business friend in India as presents for his children.<sup>11</sup> Goat's hair fūṭas have been noted above; but (sheep's) wool is never mentioned as material.

Fūṭas "of six" and "seven" (namely cubits in length) occur in the Geniza. These are the same measurements as those given by Abbé Dubois

at the beginning of the nineteenth century, namely the first for the cloth wound around the shoulders and the second for that girded around the waist. But since two orders from Aden list these measurements in pairs, the lengths of the upper and lower fūṭas were perhaps not always different.<sup>12</sup>

The fūṭas exported to India were made in Miṣr (Fustat-Cairo), where one manufacturer seems to have enjoyed particular fame; in Sūsa, Tunisia, the most prominent center of the Mediterranean textile industry in Geniza times; in Spain, the country of choice silk; and perhaps in Sicily, also renowned for its silk products.<sup>13</sup>

As from the middle of the eleventh century, that is, at a time when the Geniza does not yet have material about the India trade, fūṭas are repeatedly mentioned in both business and private correspondence as sent from Tunisia and Sicily to Alexandria and from there to Cairo. When a Sicilian husband divorcing his Egyptian wife gets back from her "the fūṭa with which I clothed her," and when in Fustat in 1139/40, at a distribution of clothing to the poor, fifteen out of a total of fifty-seven persons receives fūṭas, it is evident that this was a piece of apparel, as it was in India, and not a mere kerchief or towel, as in later Arabic usage.<sup>14</sup>

The prices of fūṭas in the Mediterranean area around 1050 <sup>and those</sup> in the Arabian-Indian region of the first half of the twelfth century also indicate that the term refers to objects of the same type. An example for the first is a sale of two shipments, each containing forty-five fūṭas, one sold for 25 23/24 dinars and the second for 24 1/6 dinars, slightly above half a dinar per piece, as was noted for Aden in note 6, above.<sup>15</sup>

This seems to have been the standard price for regular fūṭas, which was modified by the natural fluctuations of the market. "Seven red fūṭas" cost 146 1/2 dirhems in Qayrawān, Tunisia, in July 1048, almost exactly 21 dirhems per piece, or about two thirds of a dinar according to the exchange rates then prevailing.<sup>16</sup> A similar price was charged for shipments from Aden to India around 1140.<sup>17</sup> But when an Alexandrian merchant, on his way to the East, bought a fūṭa, perhaps a secondhand one, in the Red Sea port 'Aydhab, he paid only one third of a dinar.<sup>18</sup> Contrariwise, when an Adenese merchant put an order for the very best linen fūṭas available in Cairo, he added "one mithqāl [Egyptian dinar] per piece," and a young Egyptian dealer in precious textiles obtained prices of 1 1/2 to 1 3/4 Egyptian dinars for his fūṭas in Aden.<sup>19</sup> A goat's hair fūṭa sent to India cost 3 1/2 Maliki dinars, ~~also~~ *about* ~~somewhat more~~ than one Egyptian dinar.<sup>20</sup>

A particular difficulty is presented by the "Russian fūṭa made in Sūsa," which was sold in the Red Sea port Dahlak for 30 dinars.<sup>21</sup> If we disregard female dresses, which were sometimes studded with pearls and jewels, such a price for a single piece of clothing is practically absent from the Geniza.<sup>22</sup> Two fourteenth century Muslim antiquarians quote the Indian chief judge Sirāj al-dīn 'Omar al-Shibli as saying: "No one is permitted to wear the linen garments imported into this kingdom from the Russians and Alexandria<sup>23</sup> except one who has been clothed with them by the Sultan."<sup>24</sup> This statement might demonstrate the exceptional value of "Russian" linen in India, at least during the fourteenth century. It is possible, however, that already in the twelfth century rūsī was regularly imported there via Aden, for Abu Makhrama.

(1465-1540), the historian of that town, notes--seemingly referring to the Zuray<sup>4</sup>ids who ruled Yemen during most of that century--: "The rūsī is sold measured by an iron rod four cubits long."<sup>25</sup> However, even the Joseph Lebdi's sale of a rūsī in 1095 or so is not the earliest occurrence of the term rūsī. Ḥayyīm b. 'Ammār of Palermo (dated documents 1051-1066) sends eight costly textiles with a business friend, among them two "silk" fūṭas, one waṣaṭiyya (a "waist"fūṭa) and one, rūṣiyya.<sup>26</sup> If "silk" means that these fūṭas were made entirely of that material, it seems doubtful whether rūṣiyya refers to Russia. It might *rather* mean "with silk borders," or the like. I prefer to leave this question open.<sup>27</sup>

We hear little in the Geniza about export of fūṭas from India. But the occasional way in which they are mentioned among other textiles sent from India to Aden might indicate that in fact such shipments were quite common, at least on the route to Aden.<sup>28</sup> Indian garments are conspicuously absent from the trousseau lists of Egyptian brides. One, who had five such pieces, among them two fūṭas, was an exception. She possessed also many Yemenite items, for instance, a silk fūṭa from Zabīd.

Her father seems to have been an India trader. A silk fūṭa sent from

Aden to Cairo together with a small quantity of odoriferous wood in

*(and the same is expressly stated concerning)*  
1219 was probably a present; an Indian one given to a brother.<sup>29</sup>

One of the two fūṭas just mentioned was white, which, as well as green, was found by me only once each.<sup>30</sup> Red was popular, both in the Indian and the Mediterranean regions.<sup>31</sup> It is noteworthy, however, that subdued colors, such as grayish-blue ("lead-colored"), dark gray ("pepper-colored"), and grayish-brown ("partridge color") were also favored.<sup>32</sup>

Checkered ("chess board") and dotted ("chicken peas") patterns enhanced the variety of clothing, which, traveling from East to West and West to East, symbolized the interaction of two different worlds.<sup>33</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Sauvaget, Relation, 9, sec. 16, n. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 8, sec. 15, n. 3.

<sup>3</sup>For instance, II, 44v, ll. 23-24, 29-30 (seven such orders).  
II, 16v, l. 9; II, 21, ll. 49-50; II, 26, ll. 4-5 (all sent from Aden to India); VI, 16, l. 23 (found in the Red Seaport Suwākin among the belongings of a dead merchant); P. Heid. 917, ed. JESHO, 9 (1966), 53, C, l. 7 (bought in Fustat).

<sup>4</sup>I, 1, l. 10; II, 21, ll. 49-50; III, 3, l. 15; VI, 16, l. 15.

<sup>5</sup>The very word fūṭa, as was known to the Arabs, is Indian, see Tāj al-ʿArūs, 5, 200, quoting Ibn Durayd (837-933), who describes it as derived from "pōta in the language of Sind." (Since Arabic script has no ̣, Ibn Durayd says: a u not fully articulated.)

6

E.g., sixteen fūṭas of different makes and limited cost and one of exceptionally high value, sent from Fustat to Aden and India:  
I, 1, ll. 6-11. Thirty-one fūṭas sold in Aden for 15 dinars and 19 qirāṭs,  
IV, 1, l. 9. See n. 14, below.

<sup>7</sup>Spies, Ibn Faḍlallāḥ's Indien, 27. Al-Qalqashandī, Ṣubḥ, <sup>h</sup>ḥ,  
93 bottom (quṭn). See n. 29, below.

<sup>8</sup>VI, 28, l. 8: acknowledgment in Aden of receipt of a silk fūṭa from Egypt, II, 44, ll. 23-25: two orders for small silk fūṭas for children.

<sup>9</sup>I, 1, l. 6, II, 44v, ll. 23-24.

<sup>10</sup>II, 44v, l. 29.

<sup>11</sup>III, 1v, l. 17.

<sup>12</sup>"Of six," sudāsī: II, 44v, l. 29 (here two of this length are ordered); TS 16.339, l. 15, Nahray 179 (one, sent from al-Mahdiyya, Tunisia, to Egypt). "Of seven," subācī; II, 44v, l. 23 (also two). In Löfgren, Aden, I, 60, subācī does not refer to a fūṭa. Abbé Dubois, I, 455, quoted by Sauvaget, Relation, 45, n. 3.

<sup>13</sup>Miṣr fūṭas, e.g.: I, 1, l. 7; II, 21, ll. 48-49; II, 26, ll. 4-5; VI, 16, l. 23. See I, 1, n. 2. Sūsa: see n. 21, below. Spain: V, 16v, l. 9; II, 44, ll. 24-25; Sicily: see n. 26, below.

<sup>14</sup>TS 8 J 5, f. 16 (dated 1095). The story of the divorce is told in Med. Soc., III, 177. The distribution to the poor: Med. Soc., II, 448, sec. 33. An example of large quantities of fūṭas sent from Tunisia to Egypt: seventy-eight to one customer and fifty-two to another, TS 8 J 19 f 24, ll. 4-5, Nahray 151 (ca. 1060). Among his assets in Fustat Joseph Lebdi lists one hundred fūṭas, I, 23, l. 26.

<sup>15</sup>ULC Or. 1080 J 79, l. 25, Nahray 229 (ca. 1050, when Nahray just started business in Egypt). The same in Nahray's later years, Pitteid. 917<sup>+</sup> (see n. 3, above): 1 1/8 for two fūṭas.

<sup>16</sup>TS 20.96v, l. 25. Exchange rate: Med. Soc., II, 377/8, secs. 31-35. With this tallies Goitein, Letters, 241, where 10 red fūṭā

<sup>17</sup>II, 21, ll. 49-50; II, 26, ll. 4-5. In both cases two Egyptian fūṭas cost 4 maliki dinars. Assuming an average exchange rate of the Egyptian against the Maliki dinar as 1:3, we arrive at an approximate price of two thirds of an Egyptian dinar.

imported from the Maghreb cost 7-7½ dinars in Fustat around 1090.

18<sup>VI</sup>, 39, l. 12.

19<sup>II</sup>, 44v, l. 30. VI, 11, l. 7.

20<sup>II</sup>, 21, ll. 49-50.

21<sup>I</sup>, 5, l. 12, rūsiyya sūsiyya, cf. I, 1, l. 8: sūsiyya  
rūsiyya. These 30 dinars represented one half of the total proceeds  
from sixty-two textiles entrusted to Joseph Lebdi on his trip to India.

22The price of 60 dinars offered for a hulla, or festive costume,  
sent from Egypt to Tunisia (Goitein, Letters, 76, top) is an exception  
proving the rule. The three senior Tustari brothers who had chosen it  
were the leading merchants of Fustat. The son of one of them,  
Abū Saʿd, became "vizier" of the mother of the baby caliph al-Mustangir.

23I take this as meaning: from the Russians via Alexandria;  
for "and from A." would have to be Arabic wa-min.

24<sup>Ibn Faḍlallāh</sup> Indien, Spies, 27, ll. 12-13 (transl. 53),  
Qalqashandī, Subh, 1, 93, bottom.

25<sup>Löfgren</sup>, Aden, I, 65, l. 14. This is a stray note, and it is not  
sure that it refers to the Zurayʿids mentioned in l. 10.

26<sup>TS NS Box 323</sup>, f. 1. For Ḥayyīm b. ʿAmmār see Med. Soc., I,  
374, sec. 22, and 455, n. 56. Since the writing of that volume ENA 2805,  
f. 14, dated 12 April 1051, has been identified. In both waṣaṭiyya  
and rūsiyya ṣ stands for s, as often in Maghrebi papers, especially  
in words containing sounds like ṭ and rū.



<sup>27</sup>The term rūsī might stand for ru'ūsī, "heads," the fūṭa with which people could protect also their heads. In this case one would hardly expect the plural, and since rūsī in India of the fourteenth century undoubtedly meant "Russian," it is likely that it had that meaning also in the eleventh.

<sup>28</sup>II, 10, 1. 3.

<sup>29</sup>TS K 25, f. 42, ll. 2 and 4. This manuscript forms one document together with TS Arabic 4, f. 4. Besides Indian textiles that bride possessed also an Indian bucket, saṭl, worth 1 1/2 dinars, ib. 1. 8. One silk fūṭa as present: VII, 52, 1. 14. One Indian fūṭa given to a brother: VII, 34, ll. 7-8 (thirteenth century). On Indian textiles in general see , above.

<sup>30</sup>Green: I, 1, 1. 7 (made of silk, sent from Cairo to India).

<sup>31</sup>Red I, 1, 6 (silken, sent from Cairo to India); IV, 16, 1. 23 (two red fūṭas made in Egypt, and being on the way to India). TS 20.69v, 1. 25<sup>+</sup> (seven; in Qayrawān, Tunisia); TS 8 J 25, f 19, 1. 14, Nahray 140 (three, in Alexandria).

<sup>32</sup>I, 1, 1. 10: raṣāṣī (five pieces); VI, 16, 1. 18: filfilī; I, 1, 1. 6: hajalī (eight pieces); VI, 16, 1. 16--all sent to India. Rudolf Mach drew my attention to French oeil de perdrix, "partridge eye," which designates the reddish-brown, or pink color of a certain wine, see Harold J. Goldman, Great Wines, New York, 1964, p. 61 (said also of the color of a ~~corn~~<sup>toe</sup>'s toe). In this case, however, the Arabic would probably be ḥayn al-hajala. Such composite attributes are common,

e.g. fūṭa fath al-ward, a fūṭa (ornament<sup>ed</sup> with) budding roses, TS 8 J 26,  
f. 5, l. 15, sent, it seems, from Alexandria to Fustat.

33TS NS J 414, ll. 4-5 (frag. of trousseau): fūṭa shatranjī bi-harīr  
bi-hawāshī zurq, a chessboard fūṭa, (linen) with silk and blue borders.  
I, 1, l. 10; II, 21, l. 48 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>himmīṣī</sub>, sent to India.