

Li Guo



Commerce, Culture,
and Community in
a Red Sea Port in the
Thirteenth Century

*The Arabic Documents
from Quseir*

BRILL



COMMERCE, CULTURE, AND COMMUNITY IN A RED SEA
PORT IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

ISLAMIC HISTORY AND CIVILIZATION

STUDIES AND TEXTS

EDITED BY

WADAD KADI

AND

ROTRAUD WIELANDT

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AND COMMUNITY
IN A RED SEA PORT IN
THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

The Arabic Documents from Quseir

BY

LI GUO



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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

In memory of Franz Rosenthal (1914–2003)
scholar, teacher, and mentor

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PART ONE

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PREFACE

In February, 1982, the excavations at the Red Sea port of Quseir (*al-Quṣayr al-qadīm*) were winding down.¹ The ancient port lies eight km to the north of the modern town of Quseir and is located at the end of the Wadi Hammamat which connects the Luxor region of the Nile valley with the Red Sea. The third, and final, season's work was concentrated in what the archaeologists termed the "Islamic knoll," especially in one particular residential complex in the central area of the town. The complex was completely uncovered by the team, revealing a well-built house that had a number of storerooms and apartments as well as two stairways leading to the second floor or roof. The excavations provided constant surprises. Secreted under bricks in front of a doorway—exactly as if placed under a welcome mat of sorts—was a wooden key, on the obverse of which is inscribed, in black ink, something like "the key of *al-ḥājj* [so-and-so]," which might have contained the house owner's name.² Inside the house,

¹ The spelling most commonly used in archaeological works, Quseir, is used in this book throughout instead of the standard transliteration. The excavations, in the seasons 1978, 1980, and 1982, were sponsored by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago and funded by the Smithsonian Institution Foreign Currency Program and the National Geographic Society; see *QQ1* (season 1978); *QQ2* (season 1980). The final report of the 1982 season has yet to be produced. The present description of the "Sheikh's house" is based on Janet Johnson and Donald Whitcomb, "1982 Season of Excavations at Quseir al-Qadim," *ARCEN* 120 (1982): 24–30; "The 'Year of Stairways' for Dig at Red Sea Port," *The Oriental Institute News and Notes* 78 (April 1982); and unpublished field reports of the season. I thank Whitcomb for providing me with the reports.

² The last word on the key has yet to be deciphered to every one's satisfaction. The initial reading was *mftaah al-hj brkha* (sic.), which may be rendered as "the key of (or for) Hajj Baraka"; see Fredrik Hiebert, "Commercial Organization of the Egyptian Port of Quseir al-Qadim: Evidence from the analysis of the wooden objects," *AIS* 2 (1991), 157–58. However, judging from the drawing provided by the article, a problem of the reading of *baraka* is the visible *alif*, instead of the supposed *tā' marbūṭa*. In addition, there seems to be one more tooth between the presumable *k* and the *alif*. I propose two explanations: (1) The key was in fact reserved for this "ḥājj Baraka" (the same name also appears in one letter; see chapter 1), a customer of the warehouse; or (2) The word could be read as *mrliba*, thus *marḥabā*, that is, "the key of the ḥājj [Abū Mufarrij?]; welcome home!" But the phraseology is a little odd.

several hundred paper fragments, mainly personal and business correspondence written in Arabic, were found alongside other small objects. The paper fragments, as well as other objects, were clearly discarded trash, and were strewn all about the house, inside and out. They obviously had never been kept deliberately or in any order.³ In these shredded fragments, reference to a certain “shaykh” is being constantly made; the complex was thus named the “Sheikh’s house.”

This book is about the Arabic documents uncovered from the “Sheikh’s house.” These paper fragments form a private “archive,” in a loose sense of the term, that sheds light on the activities and operations of a family shipping business on the Red Sea shore during the late Ayyubid and early Mamluk era in the thirteenth century. The documents promise great potential as a mine of information for the study of social, economic, and maritime history of Islamic Egypt. They will also be beneficial to the general study of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade, and the economic history of the pre-modern world.⁴

Aside from their documentary significance for socio-economic historical inquiry, the fragments also bear testimony to medieval Muslim popular belief and communal rituals; among the codices unearthed are samples of block printed amulets, poetry, zodiac charts, prayers, and what appear to be words of magic. These will be of immense interest to specialists of the history of printing, Arabic paleography, letter writing, language, magic, astrology and astronomy.

This book, by examining and analyzing these fragments together, tells the story of Everyman in an interesting place at a significant time. The time was the thirteenth century, a remarkable era that saw revolutionary changes that would eventually shape the world economy for centuries to come.⁵ The place was a remote port town on the Red Sea, the trade routes to which played an essential role in mapping out the key territories within this “world system.” Since

³ Personal electronic communication with Katherine Burke on October 27, 2003.

⁴ The renewed interest in Quseir is evidenced not only by the continuing publications of the material uncovered by the Chicago team, but also by the ongoing excavations conducted by the Southampton and Leeds team; for up-to-date information, see the team’s website: <http://www.arch.soton.ac.uk/research/quseirdev//>.

⁵ For the significance of the thirteenth century in world economic history, see Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (New York, 1989), especially 3–24; Peter Spufford, *Power and Profit: The merchant in medieval Europe* (London, 2003).

all the activities described and reconstructed in this book are centered around one household, a local merchant and his extended family, our first goal in the following pages is to piece together the life and history of this merchant family. The family story provides us with a microscopic view of Quseir, a port that saw modest volumes of traffic and a relatively short period of prosperity but was nevertheless significant in its own right, having peaked at a critical juncture of the economic and commercial development in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. By making the key Arabic texts available, our second goal is to enable other researchers to further use these documents and answer questions in related areas.⁶ The book consists of two main parts:

Part One is an introductory essay on the historical and cultural context of the documents in question. Descriptive and conceptual in method, the three chapters deal with, respectively, the “Sheikh’s house” and its inhabitants, the Red Sea commerce as reflected in the textual evidence of the trade activities around the house, and aspects of popular belief and culture as revealed through the non-commercial texts. Chapter 1 sets the stage and introduces the characters, major and minor. The focal point is men and women living and working in and around the “Sheikh’s house.” Who are they? When did all of this happen? What were their relationships to one another? Chapter 2 begins with technical aspects of commerce and trade, such as weights and measures, commodities and prices, and so forth. Special attention is then given to larger issues of trade patterns, business practices, and the monetary situation, as well as trade routes, both domestic and international. By asking questions such as, “What was being traded, and how?” this chapter explores the commerce-oriented material culture in this Red Sea port against the international backdrop of Mecca pilgrimage caravans and Indian Ocean trade routes. Chapter 3 deals with a different arena: life, death, and everything in between. Based on an examination of the

⁶ For preliminary reports on the documents uncovered in the 1978 season, see Michael Dols et al., “Arabic Inscriptions,” *QQI*, 247–49; Gladys Frantz-Murphy, “The Red Sea Port of Quseir: Arabic Documents and Narrative Sources,” *QQ2*, 267–83. Fragments from the 1980 season remain to be examined. Some of the material from the 1982 season was used by Jennifer Thayer in “Land Politics and Power Networks in Mamluk Egypt” (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1993), and “In Testimony to a Market Economy in Mamluk Egypt: The Qusayr Documents,” *al-Masāq* 8 (1995): 45–55.

non-commercial textual material found in the “Sheikh’s house,” it sets out to look into aspects of the spiritual culture of the community: the things people did, or believed in, or worried about, besides selling and buying. The texts—charms, amulets, prayers, sermons on behalf of the dead and the dying—give the modern reader a rare chance to glimpse the mindset and practices held by ordinary men and women in this small provincial town, the way they went about their daily business, and, more importantly, the way they coped with disasters and anxieties. The seemingly all-too-human desires—healing ailments, mourning the dead, and seeking God’s protections in the affairs of this world and the hereafter—may have less to do with orthodox religiosity than with popular belief and communal rituals, but are nevertheless significant for our better understanding of the culture, and psyche, of the time and place. This chapter also maintains that in many ways magic practices and prayers were not divorced from trade and economy. In the concluding remarks of Part One, the “big picture” issues are addressed, those concerning the significance of the documents in question for historical inquiry in general, and for the study of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean commerce in particular. While our focus is on the case study of the rise and fall of a particular merchant family, references will be made, and comparisons will be drawn, to Islamic legal writings on business practices and commercial partnership as theory, and to contemporary documents (especially the contemporary Cairo Geniza papers) as reflections of the reality.

The core of Part Two is a critical edition, in chapter 5, of eighty-four original Arabic texts, with translation and commentary. This is preceded by chapter 4, which is devoted to paleographic and linguistic matters, chief among them the classification of the various types of documents, and the features of the “Middle Arabic” language as seen in these particular documents. While in chapters 1–4 attempts were made to utilize *all* the available (that is, decipherable) documents found in the site, the criteria for choosing only eighty-four documents for edition lie largely on the utility, that is, the relative completeness, of the manuscripts; those too fragmentary to make any meaningful context were therefore left out. The focus on editing and analyzing these “economic texts” is justified by the fact that they form the overwhelming majority of the textual findings. Selected pieces of non-economic texts, such as private letters and

miscellanies—prayers, words of magic, poetry, amulets and charms (discussed in detail in chapter 3)—are represented in the editions as well.

Some of the material in chapters 1 and 2 first appeared in my articles “Arabic Documents from the Red Sea Port of Quseir in the Seventh/Thirteenth Century, Part 1: Business letters,” “Arabic Documents from the Red Sea Port of Quseir in the Seventh/Thirteenth Century, Part 2: Shipping notes and account records,” *JNES* 58.3 (1999): 161–90, and *JNES* 60.2 (2001): 81–116, and “Golden Dinars and Silver Dirhams in the Red Sea Trade: In light of the Quseir documents,” *Proceedings of the Red Sea Trade and Travel Conference* (forthcoming). It has since been thoroughly revised. Of the Arabic texts included in chapter 5, eleven have been published in the above-mentioned articles; however, new reading of certain words and slight amendments to the translation have been made throughout.

Research at the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, where a substantial portion of the Quseir documents is currently housed, was supported by a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities through the American Research Center in Egypt. During my stay in Cairo in the summer of 1999, I managed to examine, hand copy, and take measurements of all of the fragments that could be accounted for (RN 964–RN 1093). The bulk of the writing was done during a sabbatical leave from my teaching duties at the University of Notre Dame in the academic year 2002–2003, sponsored by a generous grant from the American Council of Learned Societies. For the generous financial and logistic support of these institutions, I express my sincere gratitude.

The list of the persons to whom I owe a large debt of gratitude is not short but sweet. My thanks first go to Janet Johnson and Donald Whitcomb, the directors of the Quseir excavations, for giving me the opportunity to study the material. Whitcomb not only provided me with the microfilms of the original material, but also has diligently kept me informed over the years about any new finds, new publications, new ideas, and new anything “Quseirian.” I would also like to thank Katherine Strange Burke for sharing with me her thoughts and ideas on the project; her diligent and skillful editorial assistance is greatly appreciated as well. Katherine is currently writing her dissertation at the University of Chicago under the supervision of Whitcomb, on archaeological findings from the “Sheikh’s

house.” I wish her all success and hope that cooperation between the textual scholar and the archaeologist will contribute to a new approach of interpreting archeological findings with the direct help of textual evidence.

In Cairo, I would like to thank Dr. Farouk Askar, the director of the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo; Mme. Su‘ad Muhammad Ibrahim, the deputy director of the Museum; and Mr. Salah Sayour, curator of wooden objects (formerly curator of manuscripts) at the Museum for their kind assistance, along with hot mint tea and cool Cairene jokes, during my regular visits to the Museum over a period of three months. My thanks also go to Mme. Amira al-Khatib of the American Research Center in Egypt and to her able staff for all kinds of help I received while an ARCE fellow.

Portions of the research were presented at the annual meetings of the American Oriental Society (New Orleans, 1998), the American Research Center in Egypt (Chicago, 1999), and the “Red Sea Trade and Travel Workshop” at the British Museum (2002). I would like to take this opportunity to thank members of the audiences for feedback, encouragement, and suggestions. Many colleagues and friends have shared with me their enthusiasm for this project and supported me along the way, among them Dionisius Agius, Paula von Bechtolsheim, Lucy Blue, Remie Constable, Wadad Kadi, Donald Little, Paul Lunde, Carl Petry, Warren Schultz, Francine Stone, John Sutton, and Daniel Martin Varisco; my sincere and heartfelt gratitude to all. Special thanks are also due to the anonymous reviewer for his/her insightful suggestions to improve the manuscript. Needless to say, all the remaining errors are solely mine.

Finally, a few technical notes on transliteration and signs are in order:

- (1) For the Arabic documents, the “RN” represents the original registration number assigned to each *cluster* of fragments; sub-division of a, b, c, and so forth, of each fragment was my own device. During the course of discussion in chapters 1–4, the RN number of the texts to be published in this volume is marked with an asterisk. The texts are arranged according to topic, and within each topic, a loose chronological order is being followed when possible.
- (2) A simplified version of the Library of Congress system is used to transcribe Arabic terms, with two exceptions: the unpronounced *tā’ marbūta* is omitted altogether, and the *alif maqṣūra* is spelled as *ā* not *á*.
- (3) The following signs have been used in preparing the Arabic texts:

[]	lacuna in the manuscript
.....	illegible text
< >	conjectural additions by the editor
<< >>	deletions in the manuscript
{ }	deletions by the editor
(?)	uncertain reading
/ \	text written above, or below, the line

- (4) In the English translation, the square brackets [] are used to indicate additions suggested by the editor, while the parentheses () contain explanatory content.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- AB* = Albert Dietrich. *Arabische Briefe: aus der Papyrussammlung der Hamburger Staats- und Universitäts-Bibliothek*. Hamburg, 1955.
- ABPH* = Werner Diem. *Arabische Briefe auf Papyrus und Papier aus der Heidelberger Papyrus-Sammlung*. Wiesbaden, 1991.
- AI* = *Annales islamologiques*.
- AIS* = *Archéologie islamique*.
- ALAD* = Geoffrey Khan. *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents in the Cambridge Genizah Collections*. Cambridge, 1993.
- APEL* = Adolf Grohmann. *Arabic Papyri in the Egyptian Library*. 6 vols., Cairo, 1934–74.
- APK* = Geoffrey Khan. *Arabic Papyri: Selected material from the Khalili collection*. Oxford, 1992.
- ARCEN* = *The American Research Center in Egypt Newsletters*.
- BSOAS* = *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (University of London).
- CHE* = Carl Petry, ed. *The Cambridge History of Egypt*. Vol. 1, *Islamic Egypt, 640–1517*. Cambridge, 1998.
- CHSH* = Donald P. Little. *A Catalogue of the Islamic Documents from al-Haram aš-Šarīf in Jerusalem*. Beirut, 1984.
- DAA1* = Werner Diem. *Arabische Geschäftsbriefe des 10. bis 14. Jahrhunderts aus der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek in Wien*. 2 vols., *Documenta Arabica Antiqua*, Band 1. Wiesbaden, 1995.
- DAA2* = Werner Diem. *Arabische Privatbriefe des 9. bis 15. Jahrhunderts aus der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek in Wien*. 2 vols., *Documenta Arabica Antiqua*, Band 2. Wiesbaden, 1996.
- DAA3* = Werner Diem. *Arabische amtliche Briefe des 10. bis 16. Jahrhunderts aus der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek in Wien*. 2 vols., *Documenta Arabica Antiqua*, Band 3. Wiesbaden, 1996.
- DEA* = El-Said Badawi and Martin Hinds, eds. *A Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic*. Beirut, 1986.
- Dictionary* = Werner Diem and Hans-Peter Radenberg, eds. *A Dictionary of the Arabic Material of S. D. Goitein's A Mediterranean Society*. Wiesbaden, 1994.
- Dozy* = Reinhart Dozy. *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*. Leiden, 1927.
- EI²* = *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition.

- GQQ* = Carol Meyer. *Glass from Quseir al-Qadim and the Indian Ocean Trade*. Chicago, 1992.
- Hava* = J. G. Hava. *Arabic-English Dictionary*. Beirut, 1915.
- Hinz* = Walther Hinz. *Islamische Masse und Gewichte: Umgerechnet ins metrische System*. Leiden, 1955.
- Ighātha* = Adel Allouche. *Mamluk Economics: A study and translation of al-Maqrīzī's Ighāthah*. Salt Lake City, 1994.
- JESHO* = *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*.
- JNES* = *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*.
- Lane* = Edward W. Lane. *An Arabic-English Lexicon*. 8 vols., London, 1863–93.
- MK* = ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Shīth al-Qurashī. *Kitāb Ma‘ālim al-kitāba wa-maghānim al-iṣāba*. Beirut, 1913.
- MS* = S. D. Goitein. *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish communities of the world as portrayed in the documents of the Cairo Geniza*. 6 vols., Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1999.
- MSR* = *Mamlūk Studies Review*.
- QQ1* = Donald Whitcomb and Janet Johnson, eds. *Quseir al-Qadim 1978: Preliminary Report*. Cairo, 1979.
- QQ2* = Donald S. Whitcomb and Janet Johnson, eds. *Quseir al-Qadim 1980: Preliminary Report*. Malibu, 1982.
- QS* = Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Qalqashandī. *Ṣubḥ al-a‘shā fī ṣinā‘at al-inshā’*. 14 vols., Cairo, 1963.
- QSM* = Muḥammad Qundīl al-Baqalī. *Al-Ta‘rīf bi-muṣṭalaḥāt Ṣubḥ al-a‘shā*. Cairo, 1984.

LIST OF PLATES

Plate 1: *Block printed amulets and astrological dials*

Plate 2: *Peculiar orthography and various handwriting styles*

Plate 3: *The "mysterious sign"*

Plate 4: *Manuscripts tied with cord, bilingual (Coptic and Arabic) accounts,
and "magic figures"*

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CHAPTER ONE

THE “SHEIKH’S HOUSE”

To the shore of Quseir, the warehouse (shūna) of Shaykh Abū Mufarrij—may God prolong his prosperity!—a letter found in the house¹

The building must have been cleaned out before abandoned, as most of the floors were clean of artifacts. Paper and small objects, however, were found against the south walls, blown there by the seasonal north winds.—an archaeologist’s note²

The Family: A Household Divided

As mentioned above, in light of the ubiquitous word “shaykh” appearing throughout the documents, the main site of the excavation, the Central Buildings, was called the “Sheikh’s house,” a name that has since become an archaeological term. There were, as it turns out, several “shaykhs” that are known to have occupied the house; a survey of all of the fragments from the “Sheikh’s house” confirms that the documents in question are all concerned with a family business, insofar as the majority of them were addressed to, or written on behalf of, a certain “Shaykh Abū Mufarrij,” his son “Shaykh Ibrāhīm,” and, to a lesser extent, other people apparently associated with the family business. It should also be pointed out here that Abū Mufarrij is the shaykh’s only name mentioned in the documents; it remains unclear whether this *kunya*-nickname, “the father of Mufarrij,” ought to be taken at face value insofar as the name Mufarrij, the supposed son, never occurs in any documents. One letter (RN 1066a*) also gives the shaykh’s *nisba*-surname as “al-Qiftī,” of Qift, an ancient town near Qūṣ and Quseir and renowned for its trade link to the

¹ RN 1019d.

² Hiebert, 128–31.

Red Sea and Indian Ocean;³ whereas another letter (RN 1063b*) adds another surname al-‘Abāwī (?), the reading and origin of which is uncertain. The son Ibrāhīm is frequently addressed in the more formal form as “Shaykh Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Shaykh Abū (sic.) Mufarrij,” Ibrāhīm being his *ism*-given name and Abū Ishāq his *kunya*. A tally of the fragments yields the following statistics:

More than thirty documents bear Abū Mufarrij’s name as the direct recipient of the business letters or shipping notes; these are: RN 966d, 967c, 970a*, 970b*, 971*, 972a*, 972b, 975a, 982a, 1001a*, 1003a*, 1004a*, 1004b*, 1017a*, 1018a*, 1019d, 1024*, 1026a*, 1026d, 1027b*, 1029d, 1033a, 1033c, 1034, 1036a, 1059*(?), 1063b*, 1064a*, 1077a*, and 1083b. The actual number could be much higher insofar as in most of the cases the recipient’s and sender’s names are missing from the manuscripts. Other types of texts are also marked with the shaykh’s “fingerprints,” so to speak: RN1021a*, for example, is a certificate (*bayān*) of the price of flour issued on behalf of Abū Mufarrij. RN 1027e* is a receipt (*tadhkira*) issued by Abū Mufarrij to confirm the arrival of a shipment.

An approximately equal number of letters and notes contain the address “to Abū Mufarrij’s warehouse (*shūna*),” but not necessarily to the shaykh in person (e.g., RN 973, 979*, 984b, 1031d, and more). Some of the letters sent to the warehouse name the shaykh’s associates as recipients or as persons in charge of the shipment in question. Even so, the shadow of the “boss” still looms large, and his presence is pervasive: “Say hello to Shaykh Abū Mufarrij,” one letter requests (RN 1015b*), and “Tell Shaykh Abū Mufarrij that we will forward the goods to him without delay,” reassures another (RN 1026b*). It is apparent that many of the associates named in the documents were working at the warehouse, in the vicinity of the shaykh.

The shaykh may have had a large family as well. In one letter (RN 1016a*), the author requests the recipient, whose name is missing from the manuscript, to “say hello to Shaykh Abū Mufarrij and his children (*awlādihī*)!” One of Abū Mufarrij’s sons was, as mentioned

³ For the ancient town of Qift, see Muḥammad Ramzī, ed., *al-Qāmūs al-jughrāfi lil-bilād al-Miṣrīya min ‘ahd qudamā’ al-Miṣrīyīn ilā sanat 1945* (Cairo, 1963), 4: 177–78; Jean-Claude Garcin, *Un centre musulman de la Haute-Égypte médiévale: Qūṣ* (Cairo, 1976), 66–70.

above, named Ibrāhīm, to whom the next largest chunk of documents belong. In all likelihood, Ibrāhīm was probably the shaykh's eldest son. (Again, his *kunya*-nickname Abū Ishāq is by no means necessarily an indication of him having a son named Ishāq.) Nearly thirty letters and notes are addressed to Ibrāhīm by name, and they are: RN 967b*, 976*, 981b, 983*, 996a, 997*, 998*, 1008*, 1011, 1013a, 1014a, 1015a*, 1020a*, 1020b*, 1022*, 1025, 1029a*, 1033b, 1037a*, 1040b, 1042a*, 1050a, 1055a*, 1058a, 1060a, 1063a*, and 1068a.

Among the most important discoveries from this group of texts are three letters that not only bear Ibrāhīm's name, but also dates, a linchpin that would "nail down" the approximate time of the documents and, by extension, of the "Sheikh's house." One letter (RN 967b*) dates from "the end of Jumāda I, the year 612," that is, the second half of September, 1215. More significant is perhaps another letter (RN 1063a*), which, in addition to a date of the year 612/1215f, contains an address "to the port of Quseir, to the care of Shaykh Abū Ishāq [Ibrāhīm]. . . ." This is crucial because not only does it prove that Ibrāhīm was at the time already his own boss, independent from his father, but also provides the parameters to calculate his age. If by the year 612/1215 Ibrāhīm was already being called a "shaykh," a mature man at least in his twenties, then he must have been born no later than around the year 592/1195f. The father, Abū Mufarrij, himself an adult by the time the elder son was born, naturally could not have been born later than, say, the year 572/1176f. In all likelihood, the father may have stayed active into his sixties. One document (RN 988*), dated "the 14th, the month of Ṣafar, the year 633," namely 29 October, 1235, is addressed to "the *shūna* of Abū Mufarrij"; an indication that he was by then still alive. Even if we take into account some margin of errors, it is reasonable to assume that the father flourished during the last two decades of the sixth/twelfth century, and the first two decades of the seventh/thirteenth century, whereas the son Ibrāhīm had been active at least since 612/1215f.

To narrow down the period of active occupation of the "Sheikh's house" to the first half of the seventh/thirteenth century is further supported by other dated documents. One letter (RN 1020a*) has a date of "the month of Jumāda, the year 62 . . .," that is, the second decade of the seventh century A.H./A.D. 1224–31. There are more: one fragment (RN 1017g), for example, contains a date of 626/1228f.

In addition, other dated documents uncovered in other loci outside of the “Sheikh’s house” also point to the same time period. Michael Dols and Gladys Frantz-Murphy have each separately published a letter (RN 592) dated 615/1218f.⁴ Thus far all of the dated evidence, in and out of the “Sheikh’s house,” comes from the first four decades of the seventh/thirteenth century, the period of the reigns of the Ayyubid sultans al-Malik al-ʿĀdil (d. 615/1217) and his son al-Malik al-Kāmil (d. 635/1238).⁵

Numismatic evidence found at the site where the documents were recovered is consistent with this dating. Of the twelve Ayyubid coins, three bear the name of Sultan al-Kāmil, and others are identified as having been minted in Ayyubid times.⁶ No Mamluk coins were found; although archaeological interpretation of the glass as well as other artifacts date the site to the thirteenth and perhaps early fourteenth century, that is, the Ayyubid and early Mamluk periods.⁷

There is also some indirect evidence suggesting that the site dates from the late Ayyubid period. From a paleographical viewpoint, the Quseir documents fit the writing practice of the Ayyubid period as we know it. As will be discussed in chapter 4, fragments from Quseir reveal some striking similarities to the documents from the Cairo Geniza that were produced at approximately the same time.

So much for the father and the elder son as individuals. What do we know about their relationship? What about other members of the family?

From the textual evidence, it can be inferred that the shaykh’s children were living with him in the same residence, that is, the

⁴ *QQ1*, 248; *QQ2*, 273.

⁵ The most recent general survey of the reigns of the two sultans is Michael Chamberlain, “The crusader era and the Ayyūbid dynasty,” *CHE*, 220–24 (with bibliographical references).

⁶ A total of twenty-one coins were recovered in the “Sheikh’s house”; among them three are untraceable, one is dated from the reign of Agrippina the younger (A.D. 67), two Roman, two Fatimid, and one Crusader. All the Islamic coins were verified by Michael Bates and Warren Schultz (unpublished field report of season 1982).

⁷ There were two occupation periods of the site: early Roman, first-second centuries, and Islamic, thirteenth-fourteenth centuries; while the Eastern Area is dated to the fourteenth century and later, the remainder of the site, including the “Sheikh’s house,” dates from the thirteenth and perhaps early fourteenth century; see Whitcomb and Johnson, “Quseir al-Qadim,” 26. For the dating of glass and the glass trade from Quseir, see *QQQ*, 8–9, 75–131.

"Sheikh's house," at least during the time a number of letters, including the above-mentioned RN 1016a*, were written. A shift is noticeable, though, in that the son Ibrāhīm would appear to have become more important, while his father seems to have gradually become less so. Or perhaps the two went their separate ways at some point. In RN 998*, for example, a business letter sent to "Shaykh Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm, the son of Abū Mufarrij," in the concluding greeting section the author asks Ibrāhīm to convey his "regards to" a number of people, among them Ibrāhīm's own father. The tone and protocol indicate that when the son was in charge of his own business the father was still alive, but not necessarily actively involved in its operations.

In an intriguing letter to Ibrāhīm (RN 1029a*), the sender asks him to say hello to "your children and elders (*ṣighārīka wa-kibārīka*)," that is, Ibrāhīm's own children and parents. Oddly enough, "special greetings" are specifically meant to honor Ibrāhīm's "dear mother," that is, Abū Mufarrij's unnamed wife. There is no indication, however, as to why the mother was singled out here while the father was left out.

Nevertheless, it is evident that Ibrāhīm was at the time still living with, or close to, his parents, in that the father and mother are also mentioned in several other letters addressed to the son. In one letter (RN 1015a*), for example, the author asks Ibrāhīm to send his "greetings to your parents (*‘alā wālidāka* [sic.])"

As for the shaykh's other sons, three names, Ḥusayn, Muḥammad, and ‘Umar, were featured in a letter (RN 1059*) sent on their behalf to "the father," presumably Abū Mufarrij, asking for his help, as their boat had been stuck near a place called al-Qaṣr al-Yamānī on the Red Sea. Among the three, we hear from Muḥammad more often, a letter (RN 1062a*) sent to one Abū ‘Uthmān Mithqāl also names Muḥammad, "the dear son (*al-walad al-‘azīz*) of Shaykh Abū Mufarrij," as co-recipient. The implication is unmistakable: Muḥammad's role in the shipping business was by that time reduced. In other words, he did not operate independently, at least not at the "Sheikh's house."

We also hear more from, and about, another of Ibrāhīm's brothers, Ḥusayn. In a letter addressed to him (RN 969*), business issues such as the selling of clothes and payment arrangements are discussed in minute detail. The sender of the letter did not forget to add a long list of good wishes to "your father," "Muḥammad" his brother, and one unidentified *faqīh*, "jurist," among others. In another letter, both

the father and Ḥusayn are greeted by an anonymous sender in his letter to Ibrāhīm (RN 998*). In yet another letter (RN 1017e) with an address “to Quseir,” the sender asks the recipient Ḥusayn to “say hello to Muḥammad and Ibrāhīm,” presumably Ḥusayn’s two brothers. However, given the general lack of attention paid to the brothers in the documents, their share in the whole enterprise must have been very limited, if any.

The brothers must have lived not far from each other, and this is attested to once again in a letter (RN 976*). Addressing Ibrāhīm, the letter concludes,

Peace be upon you. God’s mercy and blessings be upon my children. Peace be upon the dear [brother] Muḥammad and Ḥusayn’s son [. . .] Ṣubayḥ. Please send my regards to Ḥusayn, and tell him, “Your uncle Abū ‘Alī sends his best wishes to you!”

What do we learn from this? Firstly, the brothers Muḥammad and Ḥusayn were perhaps living with, or in close proximity to, Ibrāhīm at the time. Secondly, Ḥusayn had a son who was named, in part, Ṣubayḥ. Thirdly, Ḥusayn’s “uncle,” Abū Mufarrij’s brother Abū ‘Alī was also somehow involved in the family shipping business. Finally, while this uncle Abū ‘Alī was away on business trips, his children stayed with their cousin Ibrāhīm.

This uncle Abū ‘Alī proves to be a person with some degree of prestige and prominence in his own right. One letter (RN 1003b*), for example, was sent to this Abū ‘Alī Ḥusayn, who is addressed as *al-shaykh al-ajall al-afḍal al-akmal al-amīn*, “the most noble, virtuous, perfect, and trustworthy master,” quite a bundle of feathers on his hat. The letter bears an address of “the shore of (*sāḥil*) Quseir,” but not Abū Mufarrij’s warehouse. On other occasions, this Abū ‘Alī Ḥusayn is linked with one Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far, the recipient of a letter (RN 1027a*), which concludes with “Peace be upon you and Shaykh Abū ‘Alī Ḥusayn!” Once more, a fragmented mention of a certain *al-shaykh al-ajall*, “the most noble shaykh,” named Abū ‘Alī is spotted in RN 1012b. Although the role played by this Abū ‘Alī, Shaykh Abū Mufarrij’s brother, in the family business is not entirely clear, based on the information pieced together here, he might have helped with Abū Mufarrij’s business, and his own children might have been close to their cousins, Ibrāhīm and his brothers, as well. The “Sheikh’s house” apparently accommodated quite a crowd at the time, a large extended family indeed.

And then there is the third generation of the family, the members of which are also featured in the documents, albeit in a much less significant fashion. In one letter (RN 1056a*) the sender, one of Ibrāhīm's nephews, by the name of Nūh (Noah), asks the recipient to say "hello to my uncle Abū Ishāq!" It is worth noting here that the letter is addressed to his "dear mother (*al-wāliḍa al-‘azīza*)," whose name, as usual, is not given. At least we may infer that Ibrāhīm was close to his unnamed brother and his sister-in-law, the parents of the letter writer. It is also an indication that this brother and his family still lived in the same house when the third generation, Shaykh Abū Mufarrij's grandchildren, were mature enough to embark upon long-distance travels and business journeys on their own.

Another interesting point raised by this letter is the fact that it was originally a response to an earlier letter the mother had sent to the son. In it, the son, apparently traveling at the time, tells his mother:

Your letter to me arrived. It was delivered by Khalīfa ibn al-Ḥāwī. [From it we learned that] you have been ill. Everyone was very upset about that. We thank God Almighty [for granting] you all good health, for seeing to it that you will only be in thankfully [improved conditions], and that there will be no [more] mistrust between you and me.

The fact that the mother was engaged in correspondence with the son sheds some light on the status and condition of the women in the "Sheikh's house." Unlike men, who are predominantly represented in the texts, women seldom make their appearance; and even when they do so, they remain nameless. However, women were by no means ignored.⁸ The fact that women participate in correspondence is itself proof that their voices were not silenced at all. It is apparent that some female members of the Abū Mufarrij family were either themselves literate, or if otherwise (they might have dictated the letters to professional letter writers), had enjoyed certain power or leverage in domestic matters. In the above-mentioned letter, the son's concerns over his mother's well being and some kind of rift between mother and son are unveiled in a poignant, personal, way rarely seen in the otherwise overtly dry and business-like documents found in the house.

⁸ For a general discussion of the Ayyubid household and women's status, see Chamberlain, 237–40.

In this connection, aspects of family life can be glimpsed through some textual evidence, showing that mothers and daughters in the “Sheikh’s house” seem to have been well taken care of. In one letter (RN 1018d*) a mother asks her son, the recipient of the letter, “to go see the druggist and ask him . . . about the ‘happy drink’ (*shirāb mufriḥ*), because my daughter is severely ill, suffering from tremors and shudders.” One manuscript contains a charm that deals with childbirth and other fertility matters (RN 1031a*). In yet another letter (RN 1018c*), the author sends his condolences on the death of the recipient’s daughter. (Could she be Abū Mufarrij’s, or Ibrāhīm’s, daughter?) Due to the incompleteness of the manuscripts, we are not absolutely certain whether the “mothers” and “daughters” in question were women of the Abū Mufarrij clan or otherwise, but such probability is highly likely. This is, after all, the personal as well as the business correspondence of Abū Mufarrij and his family.

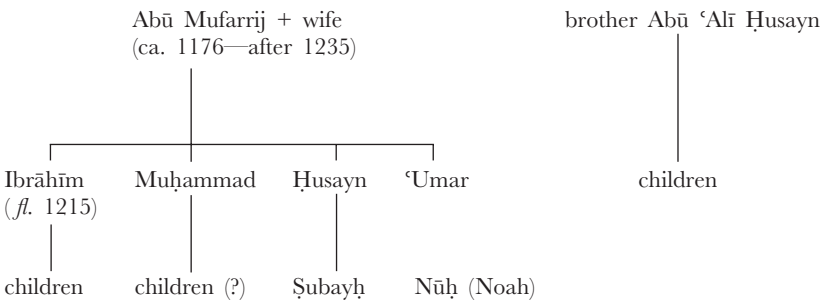
Women in the household seem to have played quite an active role not only in domestic matters, including magic practices (to be discussed in chapter 3), but also in the business world. Some of them were seemingly involved in some aspects of trade activities. In the aforesaid letter (RN 1018d*) that contains, on the verso, a mother’s desperate need to buy medicine for her severely ill daughter, one also learns, on the recto, about a woman’s—in this case, perhaps the “mother” in question—direct involvement in business dealings. The author of the letter informs the recipient,

O my Master, you should know that she informed (*kh-b-r-t*) the tax collector (*ṣāhib al-zakāt*) and showed (*w-r-y-t*) him the letter that says. . . .

The “letter” in question contains the tidbits about a delayed, or denied, payment installment. The unnamed woman no doubt played a considerable role in negotiating the terms or cutting the deal. To add to the confusion concerning business practices is the minimalist orthography and irregular spelling of the so-called “Middle Arabic,” the spoken language (to be discussed in chapter 4). The undotted verb *kh-b-r-t* < *khabbarat*, “she informed,” can also be read as *ḥayyarat*, “she tried to confuse,” which makes perfect sense if an alternative reading of the second verb, *w-r-y-t* < *arat*, “she showed,” is rather < *warrat*, “she concealed”; that is to say, the woman might otherwise have attempted “to trick” the tax collector by “holding from him” the letter containing the crucial information. In either case, exposing or concealing, the performance this woman put on is nothing short of a spectacular in the scheme of things.

There are also indications that women in the family participated in long-distance business travels as well. RN 991a*, for example, contains a prayer for the well-being and safe return of a group of men and women, apparently travelling with a trade caravan or a pilgrimage mission, or perhaps both. Among the members of the caravan, the prayer mentions "your niece (*bint akhūka* [sic])." Although it is unclear whose "niece" that might be, she was certainly one of the daughters, or sisters, in the family.

To sum up, based on the information afforded in the texts, we may draw the family tree as follows:



Who, then, is this Shaykh Abū Mufarrij? And who are those people in, and around, his house? Attempts to identify these individuals through literary sources, especially biographical dictionaries, have failed to yield any results, probably because they were only provincial merchants and perhaps petty government functionaries. Our sole source, scattered information afforded by the paper fragments found in the "Sheikh's house," indicates that Shaykh Abū Mufarrij was the owner of an apparently prosperous transit warehouse (*sāhib al-shūna*) in the Red Sea port of Quseir. The fact that he is addressed on several occasions with the formal honorific titles of *al-mawlā al-wālid al-muwaffaq al-shaykh al-ajall*, "the master, the father, the successful, and the most exalted shaykh" (RN 1026a*), and *al-shaykh al-ajall*, "the most noble shaykh" (RN 1064a*), implies the respect he enjoyed in his community. He was also a *ḥājī*, one who had gone on the pilgrimage to Mecca (RN 1020b*).

The résumé of the shaykh's elder son Ibrāhīm looks even more impressive; not only did the junior work as a merchant and broker, rising to the rank of *rayyis*, "trade head," but he was also a *khaṭīb*, one who gave the sermon at the local mosque. He is crowned with

a legion of honorific titles, surpassing those of his father's: *al-mawlā al-akh al-khaṭīb al-muwaqqar al-rayyis*, "the revered master, dear brother, the sermon giver, and trade leader" (RN 1020b*), *al-shaykh al-ajall al-aʿazz al-akram*, "the most exalted, the mighty, the most noble shaykh" (RN 996a), *al-akh al-ʿazīz al-muwaffaq al-saʿīd al-muḥtaram al-amīn*, "the dear brother, the successful, auspicious, respectable, and trustworthy" shaykh (RN 998*), *al-mawlā*, "the lord" (RN 1013a), *al-shaykh al-ajall*, "the most noble shaykh" (RN 1014a), and *al-shaykh al-ajall al-muwaffaq al-saʿīd al-muwaqqar*, "the most noble, successful, auspicious, and reverent shaykh" (RN 1029a*). Ibrāhīm might also have acquired a certain official, or semi-official capacity. In one receipt (RN 1058a), Ibrāhīm refers to himself as a *mamlūk*, "slave, servant," a standard expression of modesty, but also a common protocol while addressing a higher authority. (This aspect of his career will be discussed in more detail below.)

As mentioned above, at some point the father Abū Mufarij and the son Ibrāhīm seem to have gone their separate ways, at least in a business sense. The division of the household into two entities must have taken place gradually. That there was a split in the household was first suggested by archaeological interpretation of the building, which has postulated from the viewpoint of architecture that the "Sheikh's house" was once one and became divided into two households, or two residential units. In light of the textual information, a further speculation would be that the son Ibrāhīm occupied the newer part until the death of the father.⁹ Our reading of the texts consistently reveals two things. One is the observation that Ibrāhīm has nothing to do with the *shūna*, or the warehouse, insofar as not a single letter sent to Ibrāhīm ever contains the address of the "*shūna*," which exclusively bears the father's name. Another is that, as will be taken up in detail below, there seem to be two different sets of people, partners and clients, who were associated with the father and the son, respectively. As for the living arrangements of the third generation, there is not enough evidence to allow further speculation, but one thing is rather clear: when Ibrāhīm was alive, his brothers' families were most likely living in the same house.

⁹ Personal electronic communication with Donald Whitcomb on October 28, 2002; also see Katherine Burke and Donald Whitcomb, "Quseir al-Qadim in the 13th Century: A community and its textiles," *Ars Orientalis* (forthcoming).

Based on both archaeological and textual interpretations, we may propose the following scenario: both Shaykh Abū Mufarrij and his elder son Ibrāhīm were evidently what Goitein would label "stationary merchants" engaged in long-distance commerce, "those who stay put and send shipments with others."¹⁰ The "Sheikh's house" at Quseir was then their major work-station which functioned as both living quarters and warehouse. It was most likely occupied by at least two, but no more than three, generations of the Abū Mufarrij clan, whose permanent home was, as suggested by archaeologists, most likely in the Nile Valley.¹¹ Despite the possibility that as mentioned above the name of the patriarch, Abū Mufarrij, may imply an eldest son named Mufarrij, given that the name never occurs in any documents, he could either have died as a child, or he could have been left to look after the family's interests in the Nile Valley. In any case, he is unconnected with the "Sheikh's house" at Quseir. Ibrāhīm, then, was next in line and was able to take over the Quseir end of the shipping business. As such, he may have worked for, and with, his father in his earlier years, and then may have inherited the family business after his father's retirement or death. A more drastic interpretation would have him splitting with the father at some point to run his own business alongside his father's *shūna*. There is also some indication that Ibrāhīm was dividing his time and energy between his duties as a businessman and a *khaṭīb*, or sermon giver. In any case, Ibrāhīm's business was, as it appears, on a much smaller scale in comparison with that of his father's; this is evidenced by the number of the employees he had, and the clientele he accumulated over the years, an aspect of the family business to which we next turn.

The Company: Associates and Employees

A considerable number of documents are addressed to individuals that seem to have been associated with the Abū Mufarrij clan and the warehouse in the probable capacity of associates, partners, or employees.

The name of a certain Shaykh Najīb, for instance, appears in more than ten letters and notes. His full name, Najīb ibn Mabādi

¹⁰ MS, 1: 156–60 (the quote is from 157).

¹¹ Personal electronic communication with Katherine Burke on March 20, 2003.

al-Sayyidī (al-Fayyūmī), is mentioned in RN 968a* as the addressee of a letter concerning the delivery of two loads of wheat to “Abū Mufarrij’s *shūna*.” Another letter (RN 968b*) makes it clear that it was intended for “Abū Mufarrij’s warehouse, to the care of Brother Najīb,” from one client named ‘Alī ibn Badr. This complex working relationship is further illustrated by yet another letter (RN 1017c) with an address that reads, “To the port of Quseir, the *shūna* of Abū Mufarrij, to the care of (*sallimhu li*) Najīb, my master (*mawlāy*). . . .”

This Shaykh Najīb was obviously a senior assistant to Shaykh Abū Mufarrij, in that not only were letters sent to Abū Mufarrij’s *shūna*, “to the care of (*yusallamu li*) Shaykh Najīb,” but they also sometimes contain “greetings to his master (*mawlāhu*),” that is, Abū Mufarrij. Although Shaykh Najīb seems to be a man with status in his own right, adulated with honorific titles such as *al-sayyid al-ajall*, “the most noble master” (RN 1003c/1004d*), and *al-shaykh al-ajall al-muwaqqar al-sa‘īd al-mawlā*, “the most noble, revered, and auspicious shaykh, the master” (RN 1015b*), the impression is that this is someone acting under the auspices of his employer, Shaykh Abū Mufarrij; not only do the letters to him all bear the address of the shaykh’s warehouse, but also often include “greetings to Shaykh Abū Mufarrij.” Sometimes, this say-hello-for-me goes the other way round; in letters and notes to Abū Mufarrij, the senders would, occasionally, ask the shaykh to “say hello to Brother Najīb” (RN 1004b*, 1004c*).

It is not entirely clear why some letters would be addressed to Abū Mufarrij directly and others indirectly, via Shaykh Najīb. Two things stand out, however, as regards the role this Shaykh Najīb played in the warehouse and his relations with the family. One is the unmistakable indication that this Shaykh Najīb only worked for the senior, the father, insofar as all the documents having to do with him are also linked to Abū Mufarrij. Letters to Najīb (e.g., RN 971b, 1017c, 1018b) either contain the address of Abū Mufarrij’s *shūna*, or mention Shaykh Abū Mufarrij by name. In other words, Shaykh Najīb was exclusively involved in the business at the *shūna* that bore the father’s name, and had nothing to do with Ibrāhīm the son. (This distinction is made all the more clear if we consider the fact that letters to Ibrāhīm do not, as a rule, bear the address “to the *shūna*.”) Another observation concerning this Shaykh Najīb is that the man was more than merely a clerk working under the supervision of his boss, but rather was someone with considerable clout in decision-making and execution. In a sense, he was more like a business

partner than a clerk. Not only was he the sole recipient of many business letters and notes (often with a passing acknowledgement, or salute, to Shaykh Abū Mufarrij), but, more tellingly, his handling of some business deals would run side by side with those of Abū Mufarrij's. RN 1026b*, for example, reveals that while the ordinary business, in this case a shipment of grain, was to be handled by Najīb, other business, such as buying swords for the pilgrims, would be referred to Abū Mufarrij in person. There was a sense of dividing tasks with individual responsibilities between the two shaykhs, Najīb and Abū Mufarrij.

Regarding the Cairo Geniza papers, Goitein described two kinds of partnerships common in the era, one involves cooperation with equal or proportional responsibilities,¹² another is "based on imponderables such as the benefit from a partner's social position," among others. The latter type of partnership, Goitein allowed, served two purposes: "[It] provided a dignified form of employment and the most popular means for the investment of capital."¹³ Based on our understanding of the written records from the "Sheikh's house," the relationship between Shaykh Abū Mufarrij and his employee/partner Shaykh Najīb ought to be thought of as such.

Obviously, Shaykh Najīb, who perhaps originated from Fayyūm in Middle Egypt (RN 977* has one of his *nisba*-surnames as al-Fayyūmī), was not the only one working for the family shipping business. More than ten such persons were named in the documents. Among them is one named Khalaf, who was evidently working together with Shaykh Najīb. In one letter (RN 1004c*), for example, the author asks the recipient send his regards to "Najīb" and "Khalaf." Khalaf's name is mentioned again in RN 1027a*, this time alongside another familiar figure, "Uncle Abū 'Alī," that is, the brother of Abū Mufarrij mentioned above. As a clerk, Khalaf was apparently engaged in buying and selling; a fragment (RN 987a), for example, mentions clothes having been "sold to (*mabyū' li*) Khalaf," presumably on behalf of Abū Mufarrij.

Less frequent are other names that appear sporadically in the documents. Following are a few examples:

¹² That is, the commonplace partnerships such as the proprietary partnership (*sharikat al-milk*) or the *commenda* partnership; see Abraham Udovitch, *Partnership and Profit in Medieval Islam* (Princeton, 1970).

¹³ *MS*, 1: 174–75 (the quotes are from 174).

RN 966c* is a shipping note concerning the delivery of nuts “to Abū Mufarrij’s warehouse.” The note is addressed to one “Brother Aḥmad.”

In another note of delivery (RN 988*) to the warehouse, a person named ‘Alī ibn ‘Addāl is mentioned as the “handler” (*al-musallam*, literally “he who is to be delivered to”) of the shipment.

RN 1058c is a letter to one *al-sayyid al-ajall al-‘ālī*, “the most exalted lord,” whose identity remains unknown due to the incompleteness of the text. The verso contains an address: “the port of Quseir, to the care of (*yusallamu li*) Abū ‘Alī Nu‘mān ibn ‘Aṭīya.” The letter was most likely sent to Abū Mufarrij’s *shūna* in that the Abū ‘Alī Nu‘mān mentioned herein must be the same Abū ‘Alī Nu‘mān who is identified in another shipping note (RN 984a*) as someone working for “Abū Mufarrij’s *shūna*” at the time.

A certain ‘Arafāt is yet another person to whom a shipping note (RN 1066a*) to “the *shūna* of Abū Mufarrij” was named as the “handler” (*musallam*). Still another note, sent to Abū Mufarrij, mentions the “handler” ‘Alī al-Baṭawī (RN 1017a*).

All told, this seems to be a commonplace practice in that business letters and shipping notes addressed to Abū Mufarrij’s *shūna* would designate someone other than the shaykh himself as the “handler” of a specific shipment and cargo. An operational machinery is at work here: to divide the voluminous daily tasks among individuals seems, on a practical level, to be aimed at assuring personal accountability and avoiding confusion, but also hints at some sort of hiring practice, the possibility that these individuals were under some form of contract. In other words, they might well be some kind of seasonal workers who were hired on temporary bases. Although the details of such labor-owner relationship warrant further probing, it is certain that these individuals were hired by the warehouse.

There are also, on the other hand, letters and notes that were addressed to people other than the Abū Mufarrij clan and did not contain any direct link to Abū Mufarrij’s home and the warehouse. These people’s relationship with the shaykh and other family members, and the reason why letters bearing their names were found in the house in the first place, can thus only be established indirectly, that is, by circumstantial evidence of association in varying degrees.

Oftentimes the association is evidenced through place, namely “the shore of Quseir,” a nexus of trade and pilgrimage routes. (We will

return to this point later in chapter 2.) RN 1093*, for example, is a letter to one Hibat al-Mun‘im that contains the address “to the shore of Quseir,” but not “Abū Mufarrij’s warehouse.” The vague address of “the shore of Quseir” is found in another letter (RN 980a*) to one “noblest shaykh, the *qādī*, the municipal judge (*al-ḥakam*)” named Abū Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Mu‘awwal.

More often, the association is seen through personal relationships outlined by the texts. A case in point is one Abū ‘Uthmān Mithqāl, whose name appears twice in various fragments; once in RN 1062a* as the co-recipient with Abū Mufarrij’s son Muḥammad, of a letter regarding a shipment of flax. This evident proximity to the shaykh’s family explains why a fragment (RN 1078) containing such contents as “Shaykh Abū ‘Uthmān has paid to the carrier [on account of] the ten pounds of perfume (*tīb mufriḥ*) . . .” and so forth would end up in the “Sheikh’s house.” In light of this kind of loose affiliation, we may be able to pin down those letters and notes sent to persons who appear to have held some form of contract with Abū Mufarrij and/or his family. In these letters (e.g., RN 1003c/1004d*, 1016a*), the addressees would be asked to “say hello to Shaykh Abū Mufarrij.” In a letter (RN 1027a*) from one Sunqur ibn ‘Ayyāsh to one Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far, the author sends his greetings to our familiar figures, such as Khalaf the clerk, and “Uncle Abū ‘Alī,” among others.

The family had obviously become, over the years, part of the fabric of the local community and had a far-reaching impact throughout the town, in that a considerable number of learned men, jurists, judges, and other office holders were among the family friends and/or business partners. One unnamed jurist (*faqīh*) seems to have developed a quite cozy partnership with the family patriarch and the *shūna* (RN 969*). A certain *faqīh* ‘Uthmān was the client of the warehouse in the year 633/1235 (RN 988*). Still another *faqīh*, named ‘Alī, is mentioned in a note to the warehouse (RN 984a*). We are not sure which of these *faqīhs* is the one that got himself into some dispute about which Ibrāhīm was informed by a letter (RN 998*); the other party of this dispute was one ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, a family friend who was also featured in RN 1003c/1004d*. What we witness here is a web of local networking and community politicking the details of which are largely lost, given the fragmented nature of the extant documents. One thing for certain is that the Abū Mufarrij clan was well connected in Quseir.

There are, of course, some cases for which no links to the “Sheikh’s house” can be established; these are the documents from which the addresses are either missing or not given at all, and the documents that list names to which no concrete connection with the shaykh and his family can be established. The fact that these fragments with unknown provenance would end up in the “Sheikh’s house” is itself strong evidence to indicate a certain degree of association with the family and the house. We may never be able to connect all the missing dots, but the connection was there, right in the “Sheikh’s house.”

Clients: Suppliers, Buyers, Officials, Pilgrims, and Others

Aside from the people on the receiving end, that is, the Abū Mufarrij clan and their business associates, there are, of course, people on the other end, namely those who sent letters and notes, or those whose names are mentioned, or whose activities are described, in the documents. More than one hundred names of those who evidently had business ties with “Abū Mufarrij and Co.” are recognizable throughout the fragments. All of these may be considered “clients” of the family business in one way or another. The majority of these persons seem to have sent shipments or cargo to the warehouse, whereas others may have used the services provided by the family, such as buying, trading, shipping, and perhaps revenue collection. These services, as will be discussed below, cover both the public and private spheres of the community at large.

The extant texts are often too fragmented to allow coherent conclusions regarding the complicated web of association and network centered around the “Sheikh’s house.” There are, however, some traceable patterns—such as the recurrence of certain personal names, and the repetition of certain technical terms used to delineate these persons’ roles in business dealings—that may enable us to piece together the big picture and discover what made the business work, and what kept the family and the community together.

In this respect, certain textual descriptive “qualifiers” of the persons in question reveal additional helpful information about them, chief among these their occupations: we have *al-tājir*, “merchant,” *raʿīs al-tujjār*, “head of the merchants,” *ḥammāl*, “cargo carrier,” *kātib*, “letter writer, clerk,” *al-qāḍī*, “judge,” *amūr*, “military officer,” *al-ʿarīf*, “superintendent,” *muḥtasib*, “market inspector,” *al-wālī*, “the mayor,” and so forth.

To exemplify how complex human relationships can be unveiled through the usually terse and formulaic wording of the documents, let us first take a look at RN 967a*, a shipping note:

Having arrived, in the company of the assistant to the accountant (*musā'id al-ḥisābī*), for Shaykh Abū al-Ḥamd are: six containers of flour and two sacks of rice. The rice is for Abū al-Qāsim al-Nājī. He who is to receive them (i.e., the flour and rice) for safekeeping (*musallam*) in a timely manner is [you,] the master (Shaykh Abū Mufarrij²). Please write, on account of them, a receipt. . . . The recipient is (*wa-hwa*) Abū al-Ḥamd, the son-in-law of Yūsuf Zaytūn.

The short note comprises all the ingredients typical for business communication in Quseir at the time: the shipment in question had been sent from an unknown source to perhaps Abū Mufarrij, who, in turn, would relay the items, flour and rice, to one Abū al-Ḥamd and one Abū al-Qāsim al-Nājī, the designated recipients. The shipment was accompanied by the unnamed "assistant" to an anonymous "accountant." That this Abū al-Ḥamd is the main recipient is underlined by the fact that his name is repeated three times in the beginning, middle, and end of the shipping note.

In light of the pattern illustrated by the above example, we may put the persons who did business with the "Sheikh's house" into the following categories:

- (1) Suppliers: those who sent letters, notices, and commodities to the "Sheikh's house." In the present case, his identity is unknown. But more often, the name would be given.
- (2) Workers: those who escorted, or "accompanied" (*suḥba*) the shipment in question. These were employees of the above-mentioned "suppliers." In the present case, he is the unnamed "assistant" to an unnamed "accountant." But more often, the names are given.
- (3) Buyers: those who are designated as the eventual recipient(s) of the shipment through the transfer of the warehouse at Quseir. In the present case, they are one Abū al-Ḥamd and a certain Abū al-Qāsim al-Nājī.

In addition, there are two more categories that are not featured in the present case but can be identified in other documents:

- (4) "Official Interest Groups": those who are linked with official, and semi-official, petitions, to be found among the documents, but are evidently not members of the family, nor associates working for the family.

- (5) “Clients at Large”: those whose business transactions, requests, and other activities—legal, civil, and so forth—are described, or discussed, in the documents.

Now, let us examine these five groups, one by one, in light of the textual evidence:

The first group, the “suppliers,” are the senders of letters, notes, and, more importantly, of course, the goods. Some of them wrote the letters and notes themselves, whereas others used scribes, insofar as the mention of the “*kātib* (clerk, scribe) of so-and-so wrote this letter” is common.¹⁴ Their relationship with the Quseir end of the family business is perhaps best illustrated by RN 1015a*, a letter from one Ḥājj ‘Asākir to Ibrāhīm regarding his dispatching of a cargo of grain to the latter. Ibrāhīm’s reply is found on the verso of the same fragment, informing ‘Asākir about the payment arrangements.

We have more than twenty such named suppliers to either Shaykh Abū Mufarrij or his *shūna*: ‘Alī ibn Iḥsān (RN 966c*), ‘Alī ibn Badr (RN 968b*), al-Muzaffār and Abū Bakr (RN 970a*), *al-‘arīf* Abū ‘Umar . . . Daylam al-Mālikī (RN 970b*), ‘Alī ibn Ḥusayn al-Jābirī (RN 972a*), ‘Abd Allāh (RN 972b, 1003c/1004d*), ‘Umar al-‘Adī (RN 975), ‘Ajlān Abū Maḥmūd (RN 982a), Muḥammad ibn Sharīf al-Iṣṭākhrī (RN 1001a*), ‘Alī ibn Ḥijāzī (RN 1003a*), Nājī (RN 1004a*), Mu‘īn [al-Dīn] (RN 1004a*), Mubārak (RN 1005a, 1018a*), Ibrāhīm ibn Naṣr Allāh (RN 1026a*), Rāshid ibn Najm al-Dīn (RN 1026b*), ‘Abd Abū al-Sa‘āda ibn Riḍwān and Ibn Kīlān (RN 1063b*), Faraj al-Ḥāṭibī (RN 1064a*), ‘Asākir ‘Alī al-Mamlūkī (RN 1037c, 1066a*), the ‘Umar ibn Muḥammad family (RN 1090a), Murtaḍā ibn al-Ka‘bī (RN 1093*), and more.

Some of Abū Mufarrij’s suppliers were women. Their names, as a rule, are not given. RN 1021a*, for example, is a certificate of flour prices to be sold by a certain “woman” (*qīmat daqīq al-mar’a*). (On the other hand, we do see women’s names listed in individual accounts [e.g., RN 966a*, 1023*].)

The named “suppliers” to the son Ibrāhīm are less in number: Abū Hāshim (RN 967b*), ‘Abd al-Akram (RN 981b), Shaykh Ḥasan, “the merchant of Alexandria” (RN 997*), Ḥājj Ja‘far (RN 1022*), Abū ‘Uthmām (RN 1029a*), Yaḥyā (RN 1037a*), Sa‘d al-Jamālī

¹⁴ Cf. *MS*, 1: 162–64.

(RN 1042a*), Aḥmad (RN 1025), ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Abū Ḥamd (RN 1040b, who collected grains from ‘Asākir ibn ‘Umayr, Muslim ibn Mufarrij, Jalīl, Muḥsayn ibn ‘Āmir, and others), and more.

There are also a few "suppliers" known to have sent shipments to Ibrāhīm's brothers Ḥusayn and Muḥammad; among them are one ‘Uthmān al-Nājī (RN 1003b*) and one Abū al-Qāsim Yūsuf Mukhallaf (RN 1062a*).

It might be a stretch to lump together the random fragmented texts and then to jump to conclusive quantitative statistics of the exact traffic flow through the warehouse. However, the trend as reflected in the texts is quite coherent. If changing volume is any indicator, then the decline of the overall enterprise at the "Sheikh's house" is quite evident. The patriarch Abū Mufarrij started on a high note. Ibrāhīm the junior was able to maintain some momentum, but by his retirement, or death, it was but all gone. (This decline may also have to do with the general decay of the port of Quseir over the time, which will be discussed in chapter 2.)

At times, the suppliers were themselves personally involved in the shipping and delivery of the goods, in that they would either escort the cargo, boats, and caravans, or would closely monitor the shipments in person. In RN 1064a*, the sender, after listing all the items he had bought for his client, assures the latter that all the items "will be brought over by myself (*hiya wāṣila ṣuḥbatī*), God willing!" There are also occasions when the sender would safeguard the shipment in question by travelling with the cargo. This is made clear in a shipping note (RN 966c*) where the sender announces that he "will arrive [immediately] after this shipment (*warā’ hādhihi al-rawḥa*).” Such an announcement was perhaps more indicative of practical concerns than a request for special treatment. In the above-mentioned case, the sender's assurance of his immediate arrival is a guarantee that if any defects (*al-‘aybī*) are detected in the shipment, he will be able to remedy this in a timely fashion.¹⁵ This kind of assurance is reaffirmed in another shipping note (RN 1093*), but this time with a different kind of urgency. "Don't delay the sale [of the shipment]," the sender warns his client, for "I am travelling behind this cargo (*khalf hādhihi al-ḥamūla*)!" Reading such wording, one cannot help but notice the

¹⁵ For the treatment of defects found in commodities (*‘ayb*) in Islamic legal discourse, see Udovitch, 109, 136.

existence of some sort of routine cycle of seafaring and overland transport, in that the next trip was always to be expected. It also sheds light on the personal trust, or perhaps lack thereof, between the parties on both ends of the trade route.

Some individuals' names do not appear explicitly as the sender of letters or notes, but rather are mentioned in other types of documents, receipts or accounts. RN 1024*, for instance, is a receipt that reads, "Abū Mufarrij has received ten *irdabbs* of grain from Maṭar ibn 'Imrān al-Qādirī." Those from whom the warehouse had received the deliveries should be considered as belonging to the same category as the "suppliers."

The next group is made up of "employees" of the aforesaid "suppliers" as well as other "clients" of the family enterprise. Those workers, and laborers, are consistently identifiable thanks to distinct technical terms such as *al-wāṣil 'alā yad . . .*, "to be delivered by (literally "by the hand of") so-and-so," *al-musayyar ṣuḥba . . .*, "to be delivered, in the company of so-and-so," and the like. As a rule, the name of the person who sent the shipment and the name(s) of those who accompanied it are always diligently recorded, reflecting the medieval Near Eastern pattern of commercial partnership between the merchant advancing the goods and the partner who accompanied the goods and saw to their disposition at the point of sale.¹⁶

At times, the shipment might be escorted by the sender himself, as the above-mentioned cases show, but more often it would be "accompanied" (*ṣuḥba*) by professional porters, known as *ḥammāl*, or by young apprentices, known as *ṣaby*,¹⁷ or, for the most part, slave boys, known as *ghulām*. Patrons and owners of these slave boys are sometimes identified by the documents; among them was one superintendent (*al-'arīf*; RN 997*), and a certain Shaykh Baraka (RN 983*; the same name appears in the wooden key found in front of the "Sheikh's house").¹⁸ On occasions, the shipment would be escorted by clerks, known as *kātib* (e.g., RN 1008*), or deputies of officials, known as *mawlā*. One shipping note (RN 968b*), for example, mentions Abū Sulaymān, "the deputy (*mawlā*)" of an unidentified "Judge Jamāl al-Dīn," as the escort of the cargo.

¹⁶ *MS*, 1: 346–48; Udovitch, 97, 103 (based on Goitein); Abu-Lughod, 16–17 (based on Goitein and Udovitch); *GQQ*, 99.

¹⁷ Cf. *MS*, 1: 161–64.

¹⁸ See Preface, note 2.

Some escorts' names appear more often than others, indicating some kind of routine engagements. A certain Khalīfa ibn al-Ḥāwī, for example, is linked to several deliveries (RN 1015a*, 1056a*). On the other hand, one single document could, occasionally, cover multiple shipments escorted by different individuals. Such is the case with RN 1015a*, where two shipments, one "accompanied by Salāl al-Kaljī" and the other "by Khalīfa," are claimed. The same manuscript also reveals that sometimes the task was divided between the *ḥāmīl al-kitāb*, "the carrier of the letter," and the *ḥammāl*, "the porter." In other cases, such as RN 1017a*, the letter carrier was the same as the porter of the shipment, this time none other than a man with the nickname "Old Porter" (*al-ḥammāl al-ʿajūz*). A division of tasks and responsibilities among the various carriers is also seen in another case (RN 1026b*), which mentions one fellow named Rājī whose status is defined as *ḥammāl al-ʿalāma*, "carrier of the trade mark," probably labeled on a separate piece of paper, or on the letter in question,¹⁹ whereas Rājī's son is named as the "carrier" proper (*ṣuḥba*) of the shipment.

The documents also imply that the "designated escorts" often traveled with other people who might not necessarily have business ties to the shipment, or cargo, itself. This peculiar phenomenon is underscored by the phrase "so-and-so has arrived (*ḥaḍara*) and says hello to you," usually to be found at the conclusion of a letter or a note. The verb *ḥaḍara*, means "has come," but also "is present"; it is perhaps to be understood within the context of someone "having arrived" together with the escort(s) and the shipment, and caravan, in question. Since such references are ubiquitous in the documents, it must have been common practice, although the exact status of these "tag-alongs," perhaps part of the escort or simply fellow travelers, remains to be determined.

The third group—the direct beneficiaries of the goods and services provided by "Abū Mufarrij and Co."—is perhaps the more

¹⁹ The documents suggest that one had to pay for this kind of trademark (RN 1027g*). It should not be confused with the scribe's motto, also called *ʿalāma*, which is seen in several letters as well (e.g., RN 964a*). For the trademark on paper in business letter writing, see Jonathan Bloom, *Paper before Print: The history and impact of paper in the Islamic world* (New Haven, 2001), 57–58, 88. For *ʿalāma* as an autograph signature or the scribe's motto in Fatimid and Ayyubid chancery writing, see S. M. Stern, "Petitions from the Ayyubid Period," *BSOAS* 27 (1964), 28–31. For the use of the *ʿalāma* in Mamluk documents, see *CHSH*, *passim*.

elusive bunch. They may be identified by textual devices such as *wa-hwa*, “he (i.e., the recipient) is,” *li*, “it (i.e., the shipment) is for,” or *maktūb ‘alā*, “it (i.e., the shipment) is destined for . . .,” and so forth. Unfortunately, for reasons to be discussed below, such information is not always provided in the documents.

From the texts, we may know some of Abū Mufarrij’s clients by name: one “jurist” ‘Uthmān (RN 988*), one Abū ‘Arūs, “Father of the Bride” (RN 1004b*), one Ḥājj ‘Abd al-Karīm and one ‘Abd al-Muḥsin (RN 1017a*), ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm (RN 1026b*), Yūsuf ibn Bartūṭ (RN 1027e*), Abū Bakr and al-Ṣalāḥ (RN 1093*), among others.

The list of Ibrāhīm’s clients is much shorter: Abū Zayd (RN 998*), ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, “the fuller’s son” (RN 1042a*), Shaykh al-Ḍiyā’ (i.e., Ḍiyā’ al-Dīn) Abū al-Ḥajjāj (RN 1055a*), among others. Again, the trend of slowing down, or decline, that took place at the warehouse as discussed above is reaffirmed here, in light of the lesser number of Ibrāhīm’s clients in comparison with that of his father’s.

The general lack of information about the “clients” may also underscore the nature of the business of brokerage and shipping embarked upon by “Abū Mufarrij and Co.” As far as the so-called “clients” are concerned, they might have never existed *en masse* in the first place. A point that can be made is that first of all, the warehouse at Quseir may well be just one link on the long chain of transport on the Red Sea, of which no particular client need be defined on either end of the long-distance routes. In other words, this enterprise is something much larger than the “Sheikh’s house” on the shore of Quseir. Secondly, if we take the mechanism of market economy into account, much of the grain and other goods may be traded upon arrival, going with the flow in the market; and as a result, it would be more profitable if a great portion of these goods were not “destined (*maktūb ‘alā*)” for any given parties but simply changed hands instead. In other words, the “recipients” of these goods could not possibly be a fixed group of people. (The same goes for prices as well, in that they are seldom quoted in the documents; for details, see chapter 2.)

The fourth group consists of the persons that were recipients of official, and semi official, petitions, and whose relationship to Shaykh Abū Mufarrij and Shaykh Ibrāhīm is not all that clear. A typical such official petition is RN 1057*, submitted to the high authority *al-majlis al-sāmī al-‘ajallī al-‘alī al-muwaqqar al-sa‘īd*, “the sublime, the

most exalted, the lofty, the reverend, and auspicious seat." The petitioner, Abū 'Alī Munajjā, complains about the shortage of "funds" (*al-naḥaqa*), apparently for an expedition or mission, and that his people (*ahl*) suffered. He urges his "master" (*al-mawlā*), that is, the holder of the "seat," named Abū Zakarīyā, to come to the rescue.

The similar *ʿunwāns*, or titles, of *al-majlis al-sāmī al-ʿālī al-muḥtaram al-amīn al-akḥaṣṣ*, "the sublime, the lofty, the respectable, the truthful, and the most special seat," is found in RN 1069*, which is addressed to a certain "Amīr Nāṣir al-Dīn." The anonymous sender stylishly introduces himself as "the loving servant, the one who salutes your Majestic Youth" (*al-mamlūk mawadd masrūr li-shabābika*).

More pompous titles *al-majlis al-sāmī al-ʿajallī al-mawlawī al-makhdūmī al-muḥtaramī al-ṣadrī al-amīrī al-ʿālimī al-ʿāmīlī* [] *al-amjadī*, "the exalted, the most noble seat, the master, who is to be served, the highly respected one, the superintendent, the amīr, the knowledgeable, the practical, . . . the most glorious," occur in RN 1049*, a petition to one Rashīd al-Dīn.

Equally grandiose and pompous titles are all that is left in yet another fragment (RN 1092a*), a petition submitted to one *al-majlis al-ʿālī al-sāmī al-ʿajallī al-ʿafḍalī al-makhdūmī al-muḥtaramī al-muwaffaqī al-saʿīdī al-mufaddalī sayf al-dawla wa-al-dīn kanz al-fuqarāʾ wa-al-masākīn*, "the high, the noble, the most exalted, the most reverend seat, who is to be served, the respected, the successful, the auspicious, the favored, the sword of the State and the Religion, the treasure for the poor and needy." The sender is a certain Abū al-Faṭḥ ibn Maʿālī.

There are more decorative elements to be added to the title of *majlis*. RN 986b, for example, opens with the titles attributed to the addressee *al-majlis al-sāmī al-ʿajallī al-mamlūkī*, "the high, the most noble, the loyal seat." This last reference, of *al-mamlūkī*, is not necessarily an indication of the Mamluk regime, but rather a generic term in the sense of "servant" of God or of the sultan.

The title *al-majlis*, "seat," a metonymic reference to the person who held the seat, was first used in 'Abbasid and Fatimid chancery communiqués as one of the honorific titles designated to maliks and sultans. It was used later in the Ayyubid court, mostly by the sultan, to address those who were below him, i.e., high ranking statesmen, such as viziers, amīrs, and the like.²⁰ According to al-Qalqashandī

²⁰ QS, 7: 19–20.

(d. 1418), a Mamluk court observer and author of the official manual of the chancery protocols from the Fatimid to the Mamluk times, the title *al-majlis al-sāmīy*, with a *shadda* on the letter *y*, was used as the title of military generals (*alqāb al-‘askarīyīn*), while the title *al-majlis al-sāmī*, which ends with a plain *y*, was reserved for lower-ranking provincial officers with the rank of *al-ṭabalkhāna*, in Upper and Lower Egypt.²¹ It may not be out of place to note that the governor (*wāṭī*) of Qūs, the capital of Upper Egypt, was of the *ṭabalkhāna* rank,²² and thus would have fully deserved to be called *al-majlis al-sāmī*. Further, al-Qalqashandī also cites one case in which *al-majlis al-sāmī al-ṣadrī* was used as an honorific title for merchants.²³

As for the sender’s name and titles, the so-called *tarjama*, in Ayyubid chancery correspondence, a full *tarjama* was, according to Ibn Shīth, usually introduced by obeisance expressions such as *al-mamlūk*, *al-‘abd*, *al-khādīm*, and other similar terms. These are ranked according to the degree of humility (*al-khuḍū‘*) the sender of the letter would like to show to the addressee, ranging from *al-mamlūk*, the most humble, to simply an *‘alāma* autograph, the least humble.²⁴ One interesting point raised by Ibn Shīth is that this long list of humility was reserved only for the military generals (*al-ajnād*) writing to the rulers (*al-mulūk*), and that the petty functionaries (*al-mutaṣarrifīn*) of the government could only use *al-mamlūk*, the most humble, and most common, of all. The *‘ulamā’* elite, on the other hand, preferred to refer to themselves as *al-khādīm*, that is, the one serving the interests of a living ruler or master, rather than *al-mamlūk* or *al-‘abd*, which they considered to be reserved only for “slave” or “servant” of God.²⁵ The wide range of the *tarjamas* used in the letters and petitions uncovered from the “Sheikh’s house” sheds considerable light on the identity of the senders, adding another proof of the close ties between the shaykh and his family and the government authorities.

In this connection, RN 1060b*, a petition in which the *majlis* itself is missing from the manuscript, reveals the senders’ intriguing back-

²¹ *QS*, 6: 107, 116, 142–43; 7: 156–62; *QSM*, 299–300.

²² *QS*, 7: 157.

²³ *QS*, 6: 116; *QSM*, 300–1.

²⁴ *MK*, 34; the ranking is as follows: *al-mamlūk*, *‘abduhu wa-khādīmuḥu*, *al-‘abd*, *mamlūkuḥu*, *al-‘abd al-khādīm*, *al-khādīm*, *‘abduhu*, *khādīmuḥu*, *‘abduhu wa-akhūhu*, *akhūhu*, *shākīr tafaddulīhi*, *shākīr ihsānīhi*, *shākīr muwallīhi*, *muḥibbuḥu wa-wādduḥu*, *shākīruḥu*, name only, and the *‘alāma* only.

²⁵ *MK*, 35.

ground. The petition was submitted by a group that identified themselves as "the servants from the Shayba tribe, the Pious Guardians of the Holy Mosque [in Mecca]" (*al-mamālīk banī Shayba ṣāliḥī bi-al-masjid al-ḥarām*).²⁶ As will be explored further in the next chapter, the Mecca pilgrimage connection may be reasonably established in light of this kind of direct textual evidence.

Another important aspect these *tarjamas* may prove significant is the military connection. In the interests of the social or military historian, not only are many of the *tarjamas* reserved for military personnel, but the "ajnad" writing to their superiors are found in our documents, as well as their activities, movements, and expeditions. One letter (RN 1027a*), which is addressed to neither Abū Mufarrij nor Ibrāhīm, divulges the movements and logistical needs of "troops (*al-ʿaskar*)" that were going to fight the "Franks," i.e., the Crusaders (for more details, see chapter 2). In another fragment (RN 1056b), we learn that certain items had been "sold to the troops (*mabyūʿ lil-ʿaskar*)" as well.

That the letters and petitions sent to the officials would end up in Abū Mufarrij's house and storerooms strongly suggests that the shaykh, and perhaps his son Ibrāhīm as well, was a government agent in charge of the grain distribution on the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade routes. It is also very likely that the "Sheikh's house" was at the same time used as a postal address, so that letters sent to other people or officials would be found inside the house. To use a prominent public place as the postal address has long been a tradition in the Islamic Near East. In the papyri era, letters were often addressed to "the care of" a certain person at a public place, such as a mosque or a *madrasa*, who was to deliver (*sallama*) it to the intended recipient.²⁷ From the Cairo Geniza papers, for example, we learn that the brokerage firms and transit stops, the so-called *dār al-wakāla*, also served as postal addresses.²⁸ If this proves to be the case here, then we might just add one more item to the list of services provided by the "Sheikh's house" for the community.

²⁶ For details, see chapter 2.

²⁷ See, for example, Yūsuf Rāḡib, *Marchands d'étoffes du Fayyoub au III^e/IX^e siècle d'après leurs archives (actes et lettres)* (Le Caire, 1982–1996), 5/1, nos. I, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, X, XIV, XVI, XVII; "Lettres arabes (I)," *AI* 14 (1978), no. VI; *APK*, no. 33. Evidence of such practices in later periods is seen in *ABPH*, nos. 69, 70 (letters dated to the eighth/fourteenth century) as well.

²⁸ Cf. *MS*, 1: 191, 291–94.

Finally, there are those who were neither suppliers nor recipients, but whose stake in the success of “Abū Mufarrij and Co.” was nevertheless as high as the groups mentioned above. The backgrounds of the members of this group are varied and their impacts on the business far-reaching.

Chief among them are apparently local citizens who had certain commercial and other business dealings with the Abū Mufarrij clan. There is, for example, a list that contains more than fifty names of individuals who evidently kept accounts with the warehouse (RN 1023*). Some of these are the notables of the community: the mayor (*al-wālī*), the municipal judge (*al-qāḍī al-ḥakam*), a trade head (*al-rayyis*), a *sharīf*, among others. Another list (RN 966b*) contains information on grain collecting from, or distribution to, ten people. Sometimes the term *bayt*, “household,” is used as a unit for individual itemization as well. In RN 965*, for example, one finds a grocery shopping list that names the households of one ‘Imrān the porter, and one Yūsuf al-Damanhūrī the carpenter, among others; their accounts cover items ranging from a half dirham’s worth of chickpeas and one dirham’s worth of onion, to two and a half and a quarter dirhams’ worth of “eggs and other items,” all produce of the type one would find in the local farmer’s market.

There are also accounts that contain familiar names as entries in the itemization of individual accounts. In the case of RN 966a*, it is hard to tell whether these refer to the same “Muḥammad,” Abū Mufarrij’s son, and the same “Shaykh Najīb” and “Khalaf,” the shaykh’s long time associates, or to other persons that bear the same names. The recurrent common names, such as “Muḥammad,” “Aḥmad,” or “Yūsuf,” do not necessarily indicate the same persons; but by the same token, such possibility cannot be ruled out either. Worth noting also are two women, one Umm Jafānī and one Umm Ismā‘īl, who made the list as independent account holders alongside their male counterparts.

Some of the people named in the documents, as mentioned above, have proved to be neither supplier nor recipient, but perhaps some type of middleman. One letter (RN 1015b*), for example, mentions one “Shaykh Hātim,” who was supposed to take the payment of oil, which was owed to a third party, one Sābiq ibn Iyās al-Badrī, from Shaykh Najīb, Abū Mufarrij’s senior clerk and partner. Apparently money and goods changed hands through these brokers. In another letter (RN 1083b), the sender asks Shaykh Abū Mufarrij to “receive,

on my behalf, the [payments in] dirhams from (*min 'inda*) Abū al-Majd, and send them [to me] in the company of Abū Bakr." This is followed by a monetary figure that is partially erased from the manuscript. Apparently Abū Mufarrij, himself a middleman, was supposed to deal with a chain of the same sort. Among these middlemen was one Yūsuf, introduced in one letter (RN 998*) as "the chief merchant," a technical term that may imply he belonged to the powerful and mysterious organized merchant group known as the Kārimīs, the details of which will be taken up in the next chapter.

Trade activities involving local judges are also documented. In a letter to a judge (RN 1064b*), for example, a shipment of wheat to Qūṣ is discussed, as is the "situation" of a certain municipal judge (*aḥwāl al-qādī al-ḥakam*). We also find a *maḥḍar*-court document (RN 1015c*) detailing a dispute concerning "two stores" in Quseir, to be brought up in front of one municipal judge (*al-qādī al-faqīh . . . al-nā'ib fī al-ḥukm*) named Zayn al-Dīn. (Does this tale of the "two stores," that is, two businesses, have something to do with the split of the father and the son discussed above?) The procedures for a judge's handling of a probable payment is described in yet another letter (RN 1017b*):

The carrier of the letter [should see to it] that the judge looks at it and seals it off with a stamp. And [then] you deliver it, by hand, to the person who pledges *commenda* property for a debt (*sāhib al-rahn*).²⁹

Activities of other office holders are also observed. RN 1070c, for example, is addressed to one *shaykh al-ajall al-mukhlis*, "the most noble and sincere shaykh," named Abū al-Faḍā'il ibn 'Alī al-Kināwī. RN 1083a contains a letter sent by one 'Aṭā' [Allāh], to "the port of Quseir," to the care of one al-ḥājj 'Alī, the market inspector (*muḥtasib*).

Among the "clients at large," special attention ought to be given to pilgrims to Mecca via the Egyptian Red Sea southern route. Two kinds of pilgrims are featured in the documents. One consists of individuals who had gone on the pilgrimage journey to Mecca and had business dealings back home in Quseir with Abū Mufarrij (himself a *ḥājj*), as well as other members of the family. Although their business is not insignificant, it is not different from that of the other "interest groups" dealt with above. The other kind of pilgrims are

²⁹ Cf. Udovitch, 9, 208.

those who for the most part spoke in a collective voice, as groups, and were perhaps customers of a substantial portion of the grain trade that took place at the warehouse. Naturally, it is this type of pilgrims that concern us the most here, for it was their needs that justified the existence of the “Sheikh’s house” in the first place. (This will be discussed in detail in chapter 2.)

In one letter (RN 1053a*), the sender describes his conversation with a group of “five pilgrims.” The main topic was the pilgrims’ intention to purchase grain and to find a way to pay for it. More telling is another letter (RN 1085*), which was not only “sent to Quseir,” but also discussed the demands of a “pilgrimage caravan,” thus establishing a direct link between Quseir and the *hajj* route to Mecca via the Red Sea. The state sponsorship and official patronage of the pilgrimage caravans are reflected in the documents as well. RN 1037d, for example, is an official letter addressed to a certain high-ranking officer [*al-majlis*] *al-‘alī al-ajall al-mālik al-sharīf*, “the elevated, most noble seat, the *mālik*, the *sharīf*,” named Rashīd al-Jamālī. It expresses the concerns of one *al-hājī al-mutawālī*, “administrator of the pilgrims (?),” by the name of ‘Alī, who was perhaps in charge of the logistical matters of the pilgrimage caravan in question.

The pilgrims apparently wanted more than basic provisions such as grain and water, which took up the bulk of business at the warehouse. One letter (RN 1026b*), for example, expresses their desire to purchase weaponry, swords (*sayf*) to be precise, perhaps for their self-defense. Another letter (RN 1083b) deals with their inquiry into renting riding animals (*al-kirā*) in preparation for the next leg of their journey. That, together with other issues related to trade and commerce, will be the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RED SEA COMMERCE AT QUSEIR

Quseir: a place near 'Aydhāb; between it and Qūṣ, the capital (qaṣba) of Upper Egypt, is five days' [journey]; and between it and 'Aydhāb is eight days' [journey]. There is a harbor (marfa') for ships coming from Yemen (sufun al-yaman).—Yāqūt (d. 1229)¹

To be dispatched, for Ḥasan ibn Jāfar, is a load (ḥiml) of fifteen containers (qit'a) of flour. Also to be dispatched are, for the son of Ayman, five containers [of flour].—a shipping note found in the house²

What kinds of commodities do the documents uncovered at the “Sheikh’s house” deal with? Where did these goods come from and where were they going? For what purpose were they traded? What was the scope of the trading traffic in this small Red Sea port? While it is hard to form an adequate and complete picture of the business practices and commercial activities in Quseir, given the fragmentary nature of the unearthed textual evidence, there is still a considerable amount of information that can be gathered. Archaeological finds³ may also help to substantiate some of the claims suggested by readings of the texts. But before going further, a brief discussion of weights and measures is in order.

Weights and Measures

In general, weights and measures in the medieval Near East are a thorny, and at times confusing, matter. Although the task is made easier by the existence of studies devoted to this subject,⁴ the Quseir

¹ *Muḥjam al-buldān* (Beirut, 1955–57), 4: 367.

² RN 1027d.

³ The issue of commodities at Quseir was first discussed by Jennifer Thayer; see “Testimony,” 47–50. Among archaeological studies, one may mention *QQ1*, *QQ2*, *GQQ*, and Hiebert.

⁴ For an overview of the subject matter, see Ashtor, “Makāyil,” *EF*²; major references consulted for this study are Hinz, *Ighātha*, *MS*, and Richard Mortel, “Weights

documents still pose challenges in that they sometimes reveal things that do not conform to the known norms. These “irregularities” may shed new light on the subject.

The Quseir texts as a whole are highly consistent when it comes to weights and measures. While wheat (*qamḥ*) and barley (*shaʿīr*) were uniformly measured by the conventional *mudd*, *wayba*, and *irdabb*, flour (*daqīq*) was often measured by an ambiguous unit called *qiṭʿa* (pl. *qiṭʿaʿ*), literally “a piece,” the exact meaning of which is still not very clear.⁵ One letter (RN 1018c*), for instance, mentions the delivery of “thirteen *qiṭʿas* of flour,” among other goods; another letter (RN 1004c*) deals with the shipping of “ten *qiṭʿas* of flour.” Similar cases can be found in RN 1066a*, where “two *qiṭʿas* of flour” are discussed. Sometimes both flour and rice (*aruzz*) are quoted with the same measure of *qiṭʿa*. RN 967a*, for instance, gives notice of the arrival of “six *qiṭʿas* of flour” and “two *qiṭʿas* of rice.”

The notion that wheat and flour were described in different terms is explicit throughout the documents and is consistent with the medieval practice in Egypt as we know it.⁶ In all the texts examined, wheat is never mentioned using the term *qiṭʿa*, whereas flour is never associated with the system of *irdabb/wayba/mudd* (one *mudd* of grain is 2.5 liter or $\frac{1}{96}$ *irdabb*, and weighs $1\frac{1}{3}$ *ratl*-pounds in Egypt).⁷ The distinction is made clear in RN 1003a*: “I have dispatched to you,” the author of the note advises, “ten *qiṭʿas* of flour and ten *irdabbs* of wheat. . . . Put them in a safe place.” Although more research is needed to establish what exactly the word *qiṭʿa* means as a unit of measure,⁸ one does get the impression that it may refer to some sort of container that was used for the more delicate flour, as opposed to the sacks or bags in which rough wheat was packed. One letter

and Measures in Mecca during the Late Ayyūbid and Mamlūk Periods,” *Arabian Studies* (1990): 177–85.

⁵ In the Red Sea port of Aden, indigo (*al-nīl*) was measured using the word *qiṭʿa*, “piece,” during the seventh/thirteenth century; see Ibn al-Mujāwir, *Taʾrīkh al-mustansir*, ed. Oscar Löfgren (Leiden, 1951), 140, 294–95; summarized in Rex Smith, “Have You Anything to Declare? Maritime Trade and Commerce in Ayyubid Aden: Practices and taxes,” in *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 25 (London, 1995), 132.

⁶ Ibn Mammātī, *Kitāb Qawānīn al-dawāwīn*, ed. ʿAzīz Sūryāl ʿAṭīya (Cairo, 1943 [reprint 1991]), 359–66; Ashtor, “Makāyil.”

⁷ *Ighātha*, 87; Hinz, 45–46.

⁸ It certainly is not a common technical term for a unit of measure, as none of the references I consulted included it.

to Abū Mufarrij (RN 1064a*), for instance, reminds him: "I have dispatched to you . . . two-thirds of the flour [as you requested? or that I owe you?], and they are in two *qiṭʿas*."

On several occasions, the *qiṭʿa* is also associated with a measure related to flax and thus may well mean "bundle" or the like. RN 997* offers one such example.

A common term of measurement, *ḥiml* (pl. *aḥmāl*), "a camel load," was also used in the documents for all kinds of grains: flour and rice as well as wheat and barley.⁹ In one note (RN 968a*), there is mention of "two *ḥimls* of flour," whereas in another (RN 983*), Ibrāhīm ibn Abū Mufarrij was to receive "one *ḥiml* of flour (*taḥīn*)." One delivery note to Shaykh Abū Mufarrij (RN 1001a*) claims "one *ḥiml* of chickpeas and flour." In a letter to Najīb, the senior partner working for Abū Mufarrij (RN 968b*), the author says that he dispatched "two *ḥimls* of flour, which was sifted in a sieve used for barley (*mugharbala bi-ghirbāl al-shaʿīr*)." Jennifer Thayer has suggested this indicates that the flour presumably was not ground very finely.¹⁰

The term *ḥiml* was widely used in medieval Arabic documents as a measure of dry volume, which had a normal capacity of five hundred pounds.¹¹ However, "the word *ḥiml*," Goitein observed, "seems to be used in the Geniza papers in the general sense of 'load,' 'bale,' without any implication of either weight or form of packing."¹² The same holds true in most of our Quseir documents, inasmuch as the mention of *ḥiml*, "load," is often followed by the exact measures in the *irdabb/wayba/mudd* system. A letter to Ibrāhīm ibn Abū Mufarrij (RN 1015a*), for instance, mentions that the author dispatched

[O]ne and a half *ḥimls*, accompanied by Salāl al-Kaljī, and one and a half *ḥimls*, accompanied by al-Khalīfa, thus a total of three *ḥimls* of fine wheat, which were ten *irdabbs*.

This is made even clearer in yet another note (RN 979*), which offers ratios of various measures in the following statement:

[I have dispatched] three and a half *ḥimls* [of grain], which equal (*badal ʿanhā*) eleven *irdabbs* [or] sixty and a quarter *waybas*.

⁹ Richard Mortel observed that *ḥiml* occurs almost exclusively as a unit of measure for flour in the texts he examined, "although barley, pepper and hides are each mentioned once in connection with it"; see Mortel, "Weights," 182.

¹⁰ Thayer, "Testimony," 49.

¹¹ Cf. *MS*, 1: 220.

¹² *MS*, 1: 486 (note 25).

In another example (RN 966b*), the distinction was made by listing the exact amounts of grain in the *irdabb/wayba* figures, side by side with the number of *ḥiml*-loads in each account. The same equation is again confirmed by RN 970b*, which states that the shipment consists of “fives *ḥiml*-loads [of wheat, which weigh] sixteen and two-thirds *irdabbs*.” Similar figures are given in yet another document (RN 1042a*) that claims “two *ḥiml*-loads of wheat, which weigh forty *waybas*,” that is, roughly 6.7 *irdabbs* (one *irdabb* is six *waybas*).

Taken together, a quick calculation of the quotes above shows that the *ḥiml*, in the Quseir contexts, designates a loosely measured “load” that is somehow a bit more than three *irdabbs* per *ḥiml*, which is twice the “standard” ratio of one and a half *irdabbs* (or nine *waybas*) per *ḥiml*, as it is commonly known.¹³

A much rarer measure of volume, *farda*, “load, sack, package, large parcel,”¹⁴ occurs in at least three texts. RN 1022*, for instance, is a note from one Jaʿfar to Ibrāhīm ibn Abū Mufarrij, informing the latter about the delivery of “two *fardas*” of goods, including “six minus a quarter *waybas* of wheat,” along with other domestic items. It appears that the *farda*-load is different from the *ḥiml*-load; one document (RN 984a*), for example, mentions the shipping of “two *ḥimls* of pure wheat (*qamḥ naqī*) and two *fardas* of rice” to Abū Mufarrij’s warehouse. It must be much smaller: fewer than six *waybas*, or several kilograms, of wheat were put in “two *fardas*.”

Other rare measures of volume, *bark* and *ʿidl*, also occur in a few documents. The term *bark* (or *barak*), “bales,”¹⁵ appears in RN 1018c* where inventories of “thirteen *qiʿas* of flour, two large bales (*barkayn kibār*) of rice, plus another two *farda*-bales of rice,” among other items, are registered. It is clear from the wording that the *bark* is different from the *qiʿa*. The word *ʿidl*, “ship bale,”¹⁶ but also, “the half of a load,” is seen on several occasions: once in RN 1004a*, which claims “one and a half *ḥiml*-loads and two bales (*ʿidlatayn*) [of grain]”; and again in RN 1004c*, but this time with a different connotation. “Be sure to keep all my half-share of the load (*ʿidlī*) in a warehouse, next to the rest of the merchandise,” the sender advises,

¹³ Hinz, 13; *Ighātha*, 87.

¹⁴ For *farda*, see Dozy, s.v.; the same usage is found in a Vienna manuscript, dating from the fourth/tenth century; see *DAAI*, 77–78 (no. 15).

¹⁵ See Dozy, s.v.

¹⁶ *MS*, 1: 220, 335, 336.

“[and] put all of my share of the half (*ʿidli*) [shipment] in one place, and use the crops to pay for taxes.”

Unlike the grains—wheat, barley, flour, and rice—which were measured mostly by volume, other kinds of produce were measured by weight, mainly by the *raṭl*, “pound.” RN 966c*, for instance, informs Abū Mufarrij’s warehouse about the delivery of “a total of five hundred *raṭls* of fine nuts (*zakīyat lawz*), good quality cake (*zakīyat kaʿk*), and pure flour (*zakīyat duqāq*.)” RN 1086, an account that resembles a grocery shopping list, mentions “four *raṭls*” of meat, among other items. But more often, foodstuffs and domestic items are listed only with their prices and without mention of their exact weights. RN 1077b* appears to be either an account or a shopping list, and registers the following:

- One dirham[’s worth of] henna. . . .
- Half and a quarter [dirhams’ worth of] bread.
- One silver dirham[’s worth of] onions.
- Four and a half [dirhams’ worth of] cooking butter (*samn*). . . .
- Ten and a quarter dirhams[’ worth of] saffron. . . .
- Two dirhams[’ worth of] rose water. . . .
- One and a half silver dirhams[’ worth of] Jew’s mallow (*mulūkhīya*). . . .

And so forth. Each item is crossed through with a line as if it had been checked off. No weight or unit of measure is given.¹⁷

Containers and other forms of packing were often used in the medieval Near East as equivalents for measures of volume and weight,¹⁸ but in our documents their use is somewhat ambiguous. For example, the term *baṭṭa* (or *buṭṭa*), literally a “leather bottle,” perhaps in the shape of a duck (*baṭṭa*),¹⁹ may mean different things in different contexts. Thus the *baṭṭat qitāra* in RN 1022* could mean either “a sugar/syrup container,” or “a *baṭṭa* of sugar/syrup”; that is, either the container or the volume measure. But in most cases it

¹⁷ It is true that the term *dirham* was also used in the medieval Near East as measure of weight but mainly for gold and silver (see Ashtor, “Makāyil”; Hinz, 1–7; *Ighātha*, 89); it is obvious that the term *dirham fidḍa*, which is used consistently in this manuscript, refers to the dirham silver coin, not any measure of weight.

¹⁸ *MS*, 1: 332–34.

¹⁹ It is made of glass, according to Edward Lane, but leather, according to J. G. Hava; most scholars are in favor of the latter explanation; see *MS*, 4: 422 (note 78); Richard Cooper, “Ibn Mammātī’s Rules for the Ministries: Translation with commentary of the *Qawāwīn al-dawāwīn*” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1973), 354.

appears that the term was only meant to be “container” per se. RN 1004c*, for instance, urges the owner of the warehouse, “send me *baṭṭas* as soon as possible (*surʿa surʿa*)! I need them urgently.” They seem, by the way, to have always been in short supply. Another seemingly desperate brief note (RN 1017c) requests, “O my master, [send] me *baṭṭas* by all means (*min kull budd*), and we need them to be delivered (*tusayyar*) [immediately].” A third note (RN 1027a*) acknowledges “the arrival of the *baṭṭas*.” It is by no means a surprise that such orders would have come from or to a warehouse.

Other forms of packing used as units for measures are: *barnīya*, “clay vessel, clay bottle (of oil)” (RN 988*, 1008*), *quffa*, “basket (of fruits)” (RN 1093*), *nizma*, “bundle (of flax)” (RN 1062a*), *jarra*, “jar,” and *shuwāl*, “large sack” (RN 1004c*). Nonetheless, their occurrences are exceedingly rare and their uses erratic. It seems best, therefore, to treat all these on ad hoc bases and not to base any generalization on them. The Cairo Geniza papers reveal that bulk quantities of silk and flax were traded in pounds or bales;²⁰ this does not, however, seem to have been the case in Quseir, where the volume of trade was apparently much smaller.

There are also a number of cases where one finds unknown jargon and unusual uses of conventional terminology. Sometimes, the unit itself is omitted altogether: RN 1037a*, for example, mentions the purchase and shipping of “six [units of?] medicine (*sitt wujūr*),” probably to be wrapped in “three cases (*qurub*, or *qirab*) and three leather-baskets (*hufūs*).”

But more often, one is faced with obscure terms denoting unit of measurement that are not found in the reference books. Following are some of these:

Jārib < *jarīb*?: the word *jarīb* can be used for dry weight (of wheat) or liquid measure,²¹ but it appears in the manuscript as *jārib* (RN 966b*), the reading and meaning of which remain uncertain.

Tillīs (or *tallīs*), “sack (related to French treillis and English trellis)”: the term, which usually denotes a volume measure for grain,²² is cited in one document as a measure or perhaps a form of packing, or both, for flax (*kattān*) instead. RN 1004c*, for instance, mentions

²⁰ *MS*, 1: 224–28.

²¹ Hava, s.v.; Hinz, 38.

²² See Hinz, 51–52; *Ighātha*, 88; Adolf Grohmann, *Einführung und Chrestomathie zur arabischen Papyruskunde* (Prague, 1955), 1: 163–64; *MS*, 1: 333.

the shipping of “six *talālīs* (pl. of *tillīs*) of flax.” This type of use, to my knowledge, is rare.

Wazn, literally “weight”: the use of the term as a measurement unit has not been found elsewhere. RN 1093* has “three *wazn*-units (*thalāth wazanāt*) of green watermelons.”

Grain: Quantity and Prices

Grains arguably constituted the core of the trade activities around the “Sheikh’s house.” This is attested to by ample textual evidence; grain—mostly wheat, and to a lesser extent barley, flour, and rice—is mentioned in most of the documents. The amounts of the grain dealt with range from a few “containers” (*qiṭʿa*) of flour to many *irdabbs* of wheat. One account (RN 966b*) records amounts totaling forty-three *irdabbs*, that is, approximately three thousand kilograms, of wheat.²³ A preliminary survey of all the recognizable figures relating to grains from the paper fragments recovered during the 1982 season at the “Sheikh’s house” has yielded the following statistics:

	500 <i>irdabbs</i> (35,000 kilograms)
	1,200 <i>waybas</i> (14,000 kilograms)
+	700 pounds (<i>ratl</i>)
	50,000 kilograms.

Since these figures reflect only the readable portion of the extant fragments—a considerable number of which are badly damaged, to say nothing of those that have not survived—the real scale of the grain trade/distribution around the warehouse must have been much larger. Compared with grain trade activities elsewhere in Egypt at the same time, these figures may not strike one as overwhelming. (In a contemporary document from Fayyūm, a rural town in Middle Egypt, six hundred *irdabbs* of wheat were just part of a deal mentioned in one document.)²⁴ If one bears in mind, however, that activities around Shaykh Abū Mufarrij’s warehouse in Quseir revolved

²³ One *irdabb* weighed seventy kilograms in thirteenth century Egypt; see *MS*, 4: 235.

²⁴ See, for example, *DA41*, 248 (no. 44); six hundred *irdabbs* weigh 42,000 kilograms, or forty-two tons, of grain.

around the accumulation of countless small sums, often several *waybas* here and a few *irdabbs* there, in an area that did not grow its own crops (one document makes this point rather explicitly),²⁵ the sheer amount is quite impressive.

The above-mentioned three tons of wheat in one account constituted at the time one year's provisions for four or five medium-sized households,²⁶ or a month's provisions for more than a hundred men or two hundred women and children, a range that is greater than the population at Quseir as we know it.²⁷ Most of the grain in question thus must have been connected with long-distance trade, especially with the lucrative business of provisions for the pilgrims traveling to Mecca.²⁸

While the majority of the crops dealt with here were raw wheat, ground flour was produced, and shipped, perhaps for better market value. One letter (RN 1003c/1004d*) makes this point clear by stating that the sender has "ground a small amount of flour and [other foodstuffs] that are worth ten dirhams." He then goes on to advise the recipient of the letter, Shaykh Najīb, Abū Mufarrij's chief assistant, to send the money, which must be a bundle, along with the "perfume" he ordered, presumably to be paid for in part by the money from selling the flour. On occasion, we are told that the flour has been "sweetened" (*fī hādha al-daḡīq al-sukkar*; RN 1053a*), likely aiming at a higher price than usual.

The commercial nature of grain collection and distribution around the "Sheikh's house" is also attested to by the prices that are occasionally given in the documents. One account (RN 966a*), for instance, quotes the total cost of twenty-four and a half *waybas* of wheat at two hundred and eighty dirhams, or approximately 1.72 dinars per *irdabb* (one dinar is forty dirhams). The value of this figure varied, of course, with the fluctuations of the market. In one lengthy letter (RN 1027a*), the grain prices are reported as the following:

²⁵ RN 1049b, which has *mā fihim shay zara'tuhu*, "not a thing in the shipment was grown by myself."

²⁶ According to Goitein, "twelve *irdabbs* per year . . . seem to have been the quantity of wheat needed for an average middle-class household" during the thirteenth century; see *MS*, 4: 235.

²⁷ Archaeologists believe that the town was maintained only to facilitate the transport of pilgrims and for trade; see Hiebert, 127.

²⁸ For the pilgrims mentioned in the documents, see chapter 1.

Prices have all changed except for wheat, which is two dinars minus two *qirāṭs* [per *irdabb*]. Flour can be had at [the price of] two dinars minus ten dirhams per *irdabb*.

As we are told later on in the letter, the wheat was eventually sold at a slightly higher price of two dinars per *irdabb* by one Hārūn to one Rājib Majd in the marketplace.

The prices quoted in these two cases are, as a matter of fact, very high, twice the “standard” wheat price of one dinar per *irdabb* in Cairo during the thirteenth century,²⁹ roughly the time when the port of Quseir was active. Compared with the wheat prices in other places, the difference appears even larger. Some recently published Arabic documents housed in Vienna, for instance, reveal that around the same period wheat was sold as low as one dinar per four and a half *irdabbs* in Upper Egypt,³⁰ seventeen dirhams per *irdabb* in Fayyūm, and eighteen to twenty dirhams per *irdabb* in Alexandria (and at some point in Cairo as well),³¹ which is nearly half the “standard” Cairo price or one-fourth of the above-quoted Quseir prices. One may, of course, argue that the comparison here may not be entirely reliable, given the random nature of the data, and that this price range nevertheless fits well the general pattern that grain was cheaper in Cairo than in the countryside, and that, after all, the price range of two dinars per *irdabb* might not have been extreme.³² But there is no doubt that, by any standard, grain sold at the “Sheikh’s house” in the Red Sea port Quseir was not cheap.

In this connection, activities of crop hoarding and price gauging are documented in our texts (e.g., RN 966a*), where discrepancies among various figures allude to the gaps between the going “standard” prices and the amounts the hoarders (*al-ḥukkār*) intended to charge.

²⁹ See *MS*, 4: 234–44.

³⁰ *DA11*, 329 (no. 48).

³¹ Most of the prices quoted are from manuscripts written in the sixth/twelfth century, but some are dated from the seventh/thirteenth century; see *DA11*, 245 (no. 44), 492.

³² See, for example, E. Ashtor, *A Social and Economic History of the Near East in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1976), 293–95, where the chart of “Prices of Grain (in *irdabbs*) in Egypt under the Bahrites” shows that the prices of wheat in the second half of the thirteenth century rose to as high as 2.25 dinars per *irdabb* (July 1264) and dropped as low as 0.25 dinar per *irdabb* during the depression (July 1277); see also *MS*, 4: 240.

Putting a price tag on everything, however, was by no means a common practice in Quseir as far as the textual testimony allows. The majority of the documents do not mention prices. Thayer has speculated that the reason that prices are rarely specified in the Quseir texts as a whole may be because the goods were “to be negotiated according to the market price at the time of delivery, or simply because the transaction has taken place and the goods are destined for storage until the time of delivery.”³³ All things considered, flexibility may be the key in this context in that not only would prices largely be left floating on the waves of the market, but the clientele of the warehouse, as discussed earlier in chapter 1, was also constantly changing.

Other Commodities: No More Spices?

Aside from grains, a variety of goods are dealt with in the documents, chief among them foodstuffs, domestic items, textiles, and, to a lesser extent, sailing equipment as well as livestock (as riding animals for transportation). Slave traffic is spotty at most, if at all.

Cooking oil, baked foods, and nuts are mentioned frequently in the documents. Quite often oil was strained, and so oil strainers (*gharbalat zayt*) were among the items in demand as well (e.g., RN 1027b*). The relatively large quantities of these products suggest their potential commercial purpose. The above-mentioned RN 966c*, for instance, deals with amounts of more than five hundred pounds of nuts and baked goods, hardly an average family’s snack.

If oil and dry foods were perfectly suited to long-distance trade,³⁴ there were also things that were not. One note (RN 965*) includes chickpeas (*ḥummuṣ*), onions (*baṣal*), carrots (*jazar*), lemons, butter (*zubda*), milk, and eggs in its shopping list, while another (RN 1077b*) mentions a wheat-and-meat dish (*harīsa*), clarified butter (*samn*), bread (*khubz*), onions, and Jew’s mallow (*mulūkhiya*). A third delivery note, to Ibrāhīm ibn Abū Mufarrij (RN 1008*), contains “high-quality butter (*zakīyat samān*), pure chickpeas (*zakīyat ḥummuṣ*),” along with “high-

³³ Thayer, “Testimony,” 48.

³⁴ Wheat, flour, rice, soap, syrup (*al-quṭāra*), olive oil, dried fruits and nuts, and lighting oil (*zayt al-ḥār*), among other items, were listed by Ibn al-Mujāwir as the main exports from Egypt to Yemen; see Ibn al-Mujāwir, 142–43; Smith, “Maritime Trade,” *passim*, especially 133.

quality almonds (*zakīyat lawz*), and fine eggs (*zakīyat bayād*).” The ubiquitous adjective *zakīya* seems to be a technical term used to classify and describe, almost uniformly, the foodstuffs and other items.³⁵ One note (RN 1090a), for example, lists lentils (*ʿads*) and “high-quality fine pickles (*zakīyat mukhallal ṣaghīra*),” in addition to dry crops (*ghalla*), among its shipped items. There are recorded instances in which crops and fruits were sometimes harvested, and then shipped, before ripe, perhaps for the sake of preservation. RN 1093*, for example, lists “green grain (*khadr al-ghalla*),” along with “a basket of apples, and three *wazn*-units of green watermelons (*biṭṭīkha khadrā*).” Beans (*al-fūl*) and watermelon are mentioned in one note (RN 1031e), and lemons in another, among other fruits (RN 1070c). These vegetables, cooked dishes, fruits, and dairy products were most likely for local consumption.

Some trade items are dubious, to say the least. The case of a mother’s inquiry about the so-called “happy drink” (*shirāb mufrīh*) for her severely ill daughter (RN 1018d*) has already been reported above (chapter 1). The intriguing “happy drink” here was probably meant for something used medicinally (perhaps some kind of remedy in the form of a syrup). But it is also possible that the “happy drink” (perhaps in the line of “happy dust” today) refers to wine, which, in Muslim society during the thirteenth century, could have been used legitimately for medicinal purposes.³⁶ The selling of alcoholic beverages is also evidenced by one note (RN 1086), which puts *al-ʿarakī* (for *al-ʿaraqī*?), a popular liquor made from grapes, on its shopping list, along with clarified butter (*samn*), flour (*ṭahīna*), saffron (*zafarān*), fresh butter (*zubd*), and meat (*lahm*). On the other hand, items for purely medicinal uses were bought and sold as well. One letter (RN 1037a*), for example, mentions the purchase of “*wujūr*,” which is some sort of “medicine poured into the mouth.”³⁷ Amulets and charms for healing purposes were found at the “Sheikh’s house” as well, and they will be discussed in the next chapter.

Next to foodstuffs and drinks—lawful or otherwise—come a variety of everyday domestic items: a sugar or syrup container (*baṭṭat qiṭāra*), an oil or juice presser (*kammād*), fine sprinkle or shaker bottles

³⁵ For the unusual morphology of this usage, see chapter 4.

³⁶ On wine consumption in medieval Cairo in general, and on wine being used for medicinal purposes in particular, see *MS*, 4: 253–61.

³⁷ Hava, s.v.

(*qumqum*),³⁸ and stoneware cups (*kūz*) are mentioned in RN 1022*. Brass and copper objects (*al-naḥās*, RN 986b), mirrors (RN 1027a*), soap (*ṣābūn*, RN 1004c*, 1008*), and pottery (*al-fakkkhār*, RN 1029a*), are also among the items to be traded.

There were, of course, things meant for more serious purposes. “Buy me twenty pens,” the author of one note demands (RN 1072*). But pens pale in comparison to the not-so-serious commodities meant for pleasure, rather than practicality, that unveil the lighter side of local life. One note (RN 1077b*), for instance, discusses luxury items such as henna, rose water (*māʾ ward*), perfume “in a porcelain bottle” (*khazaf ʿiṭriya*), and saffron. Another kind of perfume, of the *ṭīb* type, is also mentioned (RN 1003c/1004d*). Added to the list are coral (*al-marjāna*), which might have been used for decoration or other domestic purposes (RN 1027a*, 1040c), a necklace (*ṭawq*, RN 1023*), as well exotic items such as semi-precious stones (*ahjār*), pearls and beads (*ahbāb*), perhaps imported from Persia (RN 1085*). We are not certain to what extent these domestic and cosmetic items were sold commercially; at least some of them are confirmed by archaeological research as “domestic objects.” Among the finds at the site of Quseir, besides the obvious “trade items” which were largely intact, there are some items that bear signs of having been used locally.³⁹

Textiles carry considerable weight in the documentation, suggesting heavy traffic and a thriving market.⁴⁰ Flax (*kattān*) appears to have been a popular trade item (RN 1004c*, 1016c, 1033c, 1077a*, among others). One delivery note (RN 1055a*) informs Shaykh Ibrāhīm about the arrival of “one load of flax” (*ḥiml kattān*) in the company of one ʿUmar ibn Faḍāl al-Qifī. The warehouse obviously provided storage and/or brokerage services, as the sender made it clear that the flax was for a third party named Shaykh Yūsuf al-Rayāfarī (?) and instructed Ibrāhīm to “put it in a good place” (*fi mawḍiʿ jayyid*), a typical phrase commonly used in the Quseir texts to indicate that the goods in question were to be deposited at the warehouse and then redistributed.

³⁸ This is most likely made of glass. For a survey of the glass vessels found in Quseir, see *GQQ*, especially 103–5.

³⁹ Hiebert, 131.

⁴⁰ A full account of the textiles found at the “Sheikh’s house” and elsewhere in Quseir is to be found in Burke and Whitcomb, “Quseir Textiles”; also G. M. Vogelsang-Eastwood, “Two Children’s Galabiyehs from Quseir al-Qadim, Egypt,” *Textile History* 18 (1987): 133–42.

A tool called a flax comb (*mashshāt*) is mentioned as well (RN 1040c).⁴¹ Quantities of unspun flax were found in the “Sheikh’s house,” further supporting the textual evidence.⁴²

Cotton (*qutn*), the quintessential Egyptian product, is only mentioned once (RN 958b); and judging from the content of the fragmented text, it was perhaps part of the *ghalla* revenue payment, not necessarily a trade item.

Fabrics called *qumāsh*, literally “textile” (RN 1018c*), and *al-ṭarīz*, “textiles with woven or embroidered texts” (RN 1027a*),⁴³ were also traded in Quseir. Fine silk (*harīr zākhīr*) is also mentioned in one letter (RN 1004c*). Colors of fabric seem to be the topic of discussion in one fragment (RN 1033e), and the shipping of “bags of fabric indigo (*jirāb kasīya*)” is described in another (RN 1090a).

All kinds of tailored and manufactured clothing were purchased and sold at Quseir as well, chief among them the *thawb* (pl. *thiyāb*), the basic garment worn by men and women. In the RN 987 group, for instance, several torn fragments, apparently from one original account, are dotted with phrases such as “to be sold (or already sold, *mabyū*’),” “seven garments,” “eighteen garments,” “one garment,” and so on. Something similar is seen in the RN 1055 group, which was originally one account and is now torn into pieces; it contains phrases such as “three garments,” “four garments,” “to be sold,” and so forth. Occasionally, the size of the cloth is quoted; RN 1021b*, for instance, mentions the purchase of “two pieces of cloth (*thaw-bayn*), which are twenty-five cubits (*dhirā*’ long, of which only half has been delivered so far.”

Other sorts of clothing also abound. One long letter (RN 969*) discusses the selling of turbans (*al-ʿimāma*), children’s clothes (*kiswa lil-ṣighār*),⁴⁴ and the train of a robe (or perhaps long coat, *al-dhayl*),⁴⁵

⁴¹ For *mashshāt* as “[flax]-comber,” see *MS*, 1: 418 (note 32). The possible reading of *mishāt*, “combs,” however, should not be excluded. For the wooden combs found in the Quseir site, see Hiebert, 149–50.

⁴² Hiebert, 135; see also, Jonathan Brookner, “Textiles,” *QQ1*, 183–95.

⁴³ The term is usually spelled *ṭirāz*; for more details, see Robert Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles: Material for a history up to the Mongol conquest* (Beirut, 1972), 7–15; Y. K. Stillman, “Libās,” *EI*²; and Ghāda al-Ḥijjāwī al-Qaddūmī, *Book of Gifts and Rarities: Kitāb al-hadāya wa al-tuḥaf* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), 374.

⁴⁴ Various *aksīya* (sing. *kisā*), “robes, cloaks,” or “casual wraps,” are discussed in Serjeant, *passim* (index *kisā*’); *MS*, 4: 181 (411, note 234), 188; and al-Qaddūmī, 102, 189.

⁴⁵ Al-Qaddūmī, 420; for the suggestion of “long coat,” see RN 969* (Text No. 24, commentary to line 7).

which was sold for “twenty-six dirhams.” The author of another long letter (RN 1064a*) tells the recipient: “I have bought cloth (*al-kiswa*) for you and will deliver it myself.” Still another letter (RN 1004c*) deals with “fine (*zakīya*) *kiswa*-robe, tailored in pure silk (*ḥarīr zākhir*), fine shawls (*ashyāl*), and fine *galabiya* clothes (*jalālib*),” along with flax, ropes, and other commodities. It appears that sometimes clothing was traded in bulk volume; one letter (RN 1003b*), for example, mentions “two loads” (*ḥimlayn*) worth of women’s wraps with inlaid gold and gem ornaments (*milāyat ḥaram muraṣṣā’a*). Other kinds of clothing mentioned in the documents include winter clothing such as a *shamla*, “cloak, blanket cover” (RN 976*, 1059*), all-season wear such as ‘*abā*’, “cloak-like woolen wrap” (RN 1018c*), *fūṭa*, “waist-wraper” (RN 1018c*, 1054, 1077d, 1088), a kind of cummerbund popular with the Yemeni men (the Yemeni connection will be taken up later in this chapter). There are also articles for specific purposes such as a *kafan*, “shroud” (RN 986a). The *ṭirāz* textiles, already mentioned above, were also commonly used as wraps for burial.⁴⁶ (It may have something to do with the probable funeral services provided by the family, as it is alluded to in some non-commercial documents, to be discussed in chapter 3.)

Given Quseir’s location on the shore of the Red Sea, it is not surprising to see items relating to the maritime activities mentioned. Among these, the most frequent is *salab*, “ropes,” or “hawsers,” which are believed to have been used to hold boats together.⁴⁷ RN 988*, for instance, lists “ten hawsers” among the items to be delivered to the warehouse. Other documents dealing with the delivery of hawsers to Quseir include RN 1004c*, 1020a*, and 1049b, which also gives more details about the use of “special ropes for rotation (*mukhalkhalīn aslāb al-adwār*),”⁴⁸ which is most likely related to boat-building. Maritime activities as a whole are indicated by the frequent mention of the word *markab*, “boat, sailing vessels,” in many documents. It has been speculated that some boats were built in Qūṣ and then disassembled for camel transport to the Red Sea via Quseir.⁴⁹ In this connection,

⁴⁶ Irene Bierman, “Art and architecture in the medieval period,” *CHE*, 353 (with further references on textiles).

⁴⁷ See *GQQ*, 112 (citing Goitein and Ibn Jubayr).

⁴⁸ The manuscript has *al-awḍār*, which is perhaps a misspelling.

⁴⁹ *GQQ*, 115. In spite of that, it is commonly believed that during the Ayyubid period, most of the Red Sea boats were built at the shipyards in Cairo and then transported to Qūṣ; see note 96 below.

some tools mentioned in the texts, such as mattocks (*al-ṭūrīya*, RN 998*), might be used for such enterprise as well. The documentation is, unfortunately, too thin to allow any further speculations in this regard.

As for overland travel, riding animals (*rakāʾib*, *dābba*) are specified as trade items in several delivery notes. Two of these (RN 1042a*, 1016a*), for instance, mention the shipping of camels ordered by the clients; and another (RN 1085*) deals with stable supplies from overseas. Aside from being trade items, riding animals were also offered, perhaps even more frequently, for rental (*al-kirā*). As already mentioned above, *al-sayf*, “sword,” was also among the items to be negotiated by Shaykh Abū Mufarrij on behalf of a certain *al-ḥājī*, most likely for the pilgrims’ self-defense on the long, and at times dangerous, journey to Mecca.

There are also traces of slave trade evidenced by the documents. One manuscript (RN 977*) contains, in the margin, a few presumably registration marks, with semi-official titles of *al-mālik al-riqq al-ʿarīf*, that may be tentatively rendered as “the slave owner, the head of merchants.” More to the point is a letter (RN 1027g*), where the sale and transport of a particular slave girl (*al-jāriya*) is discussed in some detail,

[Let it be known that] ‘Abd al-Raḥmān has been entrusted, on our behalf, with her (i.e., the slave girl in question) sale. O God, O God! If the slave girl, whose sale has been certified (*wuʿida bayānuhā*), has arrived at your place, dispatch her to us immediately! You know the legal procedures of [her] guardianship (*shurṭ al-ḥawṭa*) already.

However, in light of the slim documentation, slave trade does not seem to be among the major activities around the “Sheikh’s house.”

Finally, it is rather curious that spices, a major commodity in Indian Ocean trade,⁵⁰ are rarely mentioned in the Quseir documents as a whole. Pepper (*fulful*, *filfil*) occurs in a few fragments. In RN 991b, a business diary, *al-filfil* is one of the recurrent items. Again, it is listed in RN 1027d and RN 1040c as a commodity, but leaves no impression of large-scale trade. In a fragment uncovered outside the “Sheikh’s house” (RN 958a), plants and woods such as prunus mahaleb (*maḥlab*) and Indian prickly ash (*fāghira*, Latin *Zanthoxylum*)

⁵⁰ *GQQ*, 108–9 (with bibliography).

are listed alongside some foodstuffs such as bread, chickpeas, resin (*sandarūs*), and Yemeni wild eggplant (*‘arṣim*, Latin *Solanum Incanum*).⁵¹ It remains unclear whether these plants and woods would be used as burning incense or for other purposes. While rose water, saffron, and perfume, as mentioned above, are cited in some documents, they are not by any measure significant in comparison with other major commodities, chief among them grain, in terms of quantity and frequency in documentation. It is thus perhaps safe to say that spices were not important in the commercial activities connected with Shaykh Abū Mufarrij’s warehouse, the main commodity of which was, first and foremost, grain.

Trade Patterns and Business Practices

In chapter 1 we have learned the human stories, stories about how Abū Mufarrij’s family business was connected with the local and regional communities and, by extension, with perhaps the international network. We came to know the “players,” major and minor, in the arena known as the “Sheikh’s house.” The shredded documents left in the house reveal that Abū Mufarrij, his son Ibrāhīm and his siblings, and perhaps the third generation of the family, were engaged, sometimes in the capacity of official or semi-official government agents, in grain collection and distribution on the Red Sea trade route, and that their shipping businesses predominantly catered to the logistical needs of the Egyptian pilgrims on their way to Mecca via the “southern route.” Now, the question is: How did it work? To put it more precisely: What do we know about the trade patterns? What were the procedures in trading goods? How were the payments being made? Answers to these questions would no doubt lead to the eventual question of whether there was a “market economy” in Quseir as previously thought, or suggested, by recent research,⁵² and, if yes, how it functioned.

A synthesis of the documents uncovered at the “Sheikh’s house” has enabled us to classify the sundry activities around the warehouse

⁵¹ The manuscript has *‘r-ṣ-n*, which is a variant spelling of *‘arṣim*, a Yemeni term for wild eggplant; see Dozy, s.v.

⁵² For example, Thayer, “Land Politics”; “Testimony.”

into the following categories: grain trade, revenue collection, and other services.

Among these, the main occupation, namely grain trade, involved collecting, distributing, and re-selling crops from/to local clients and the pilgrims to Mecca. Be that as it may, our discussion ought perhaps begin with one document which is, in many ways, representative of the mechanism of the collecting and distribution activities at the port of Quseir. This lengthy account (RN 1023*) constitutes what appears to be a balance sheet of debts or credits, with names and amounts. Written in two columns on each side of the paper—twenty-one lines on the recto and twenty-three on the verso—the account reveals the kind of local clientele of Abū Mufarrij's warehouse. Among the more than fifty clients are the local chief judge, the mayor, and a "superintendent (*al-ʿarīf*)," perhaps of the port. Each line in the document is crossed through with a stroke that seems to be a kind of check mark, suggesting some sort of finished business or cleared account. From the terse wording, it is hard to tell whether this balance sheet is about debts or credits, the "ins" or the "outs." But one thing is clear here: it has to do with the collection and redistribution of commodities among local people.

Keep this question of "ins" and "outs" in mind, one might find other account records to provide more insight. RN 1040b, for instance, contains a list of names and the amounts of grain Ibrāhīm ibn Abū Mufarrij received *from* these individuals. Though the manuscript is severely damaged, one is still able to read lines such as:

From Faḍl [. . .] two and a half and a quarter loads of wheat.

From ʿAsākir ibn [. . .] one and a quarter loads of wheat.

From [. . .] one load . . . [of wheat].

From Muslim ibn Mufriḥ one and a quarter loads of wheat. . .

In most of cases, however, the account records do not offer clues indicating whether these grains were brought in *from* somewhere or whether they were to be dispatched *to* somewhere. As a result, we know little about the context of these accounts: they may reflect one-way traffic by which the merchants and brokers—presumably Abū Mufarrij, his son Ibrāhīm, and the company—collected small amounts of grain from local peddlers. More likely, they may merely indicate the crops that were to be shipped out from the warehouse at Quseir. Whatever the case may be, efforts were made by the scribes of these records to record as many details as possible. RN 966b*, for instance,

not only lists the exact amount of wheat each person was to bring in (or take out), but also the “shortage,” or balance of grain (*naqsa*) owed by (or owed to) him. Although very often the amount of the balance was no more than a few *mudds*’ worth of wheat, they were recorded meticulously. A similar example is also found in RN 971*. Part of this account reads:

‘Abd al-Bāqī: four loads; balance: six *mudds*.

‘Umar: seven and a quarter loads; balance: three *waybas*.

Abū al-Faḥ: two loads; balance: half *wayba*.

Al-Ḥusayn: two and a half loads; balance: nine [*mudds*].

The eagerness for accuracy surely says something about the commercial nature of collection and distribution activities in Quseir. It may also reflect the practice—consistent with the historical chronicles—of weighing the commodities again upon their arrival and prior to storage (*fī mawḍiʿ jayyid*).⁵³ If they fell short (*naqsa*) of the expected weight, the discrepancy would be indicated in writing.

This double-check procedure is documented diligently in our texts. In RN 971*, for example, on the recto one finds what appears to be an inventory that lists the multiple shipments received from several individuals. “Shortages” (*naqsa*) of weight are meticulously recorded. The text on the verso, however, contains a rebuttal of sorts, arguing, or explaining, that the reason for the supposed “shortages” lies in inadequate scales (*kayl*), not malice.

I write to inform Shaykh Abū Mufarrij that our scale exceeds (*aṭāla*) theirs by one *wayba*. If your scale is accurate, then their scale master (*wālī akyāl*) may discount (*yunṣifu*, literally “to be just”) the [extra] *wayba*. The scale master is Badr al-Dīn.

Incidents of this kind seem to have been quite common on account of the frequency of references to the practice of weighing grains upon arrival (e.g., RN 966b*, 979*, 1023*). In RN 1066a*, a dispute caused by the recipients’ allegedly “inadequate scale” resulting in the withholding (*āqū*) of the shipment in question is recounted in some detail.

After collecting and verifying—weight, quality, and so forth—the crops were then to be re-distributed, or re-shipped, by the warehouse. RN 988*, a shipping note to Abū Mufarrij’s warehouse, dating

⁵³ Thayer, “Testimony,” 48; Ibn Jubayr, *Rihlat Ibn Jubayr* (Beirut, 1964), 41.

from 633/1235, states explicitly that the commodities, “twenty-seven *irdabbs* of wheat, seven bottles of lighting oil (*zayt hārr*), and ten hawsers,” were for one Shaykh Nābigh and a jurist (*al-faqīh*) named ‘Uthmān, and that the warehouse served merely as a transit stop. It seems to have been a common practice to name the person that was supposed to receive the shipment for safekeeping (*al-musallam*, literally “he to whom to deliver”), and in this case, the person was ‘Alī ibn ‘Addāl, an employee at the warehouse.

Concerning the “ins” and “outs” of collecting and re-shipping, it is no surprise that we do not find letters, or notes, written by Shaykh Abū Mufarrij, Ibrāhīm, and other associates regarding the outgoing shipments. Letters from them would end up on the receiving side, not at the “Sheikh’s house.” Nonetheless, the function of the warehouse as a brokerage reaching out to both ends—inbound and outbound—of the trading traffic can still be evidenced by the documents (for example, the *bayān* and *tadhkira* certificates; see chapter 4) issued on the shaykh’s and other family members’ authorities, as well as by the circumstantial context of the documents.

Some documents also suggest that the warehouse collected crops and other items chiefly as trade commodities, but also, at times, as revenues. In this respect, the collection of the revenues, in the form of *ghalla*, literally “crops,” is a well-documented practice in the Islamic Near East.⁵⁴ Since the term *ghalla* could, of course, also simply mean “crops,” the distinction between the two is not always clear-cut. RN 1090a, a badly soiled fragment, contains phrases such as, “to be delivered to (*al-wāsil*) to the port of Quseir, from the family (*‘ayyila*) of ‘Umar ibn Muḥammad . . . is my *ghalla* payment (*ghallatī*) of four *irdabbs*.” More to the point is the fact that the document makes it clear that the *ghalla* in question also includes vegetables, pickles, and indigo dye for fabric. This, in my opinion, is how we may draw a line between the *ghalla* as crops, namely grain, and the *ghalla* as revenue payments in kind, which include sundry types of things. By the same token, in a fragment found outside of the “Sheikh’s house” (RN 958b), a certain judge writes to one shaykh about sending the *ghalla* payments (*ghalla sālima*), which include cotton, among other

⁵⁴ For *al-ghalla* as “taxes paid in kind,” that is, taxes paid in agricultural products instead of cash (*‘ayn*) or commodities (*asṇāf*), see al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*, vol. 8 (Cairo, 1964), 275–78; Cooper, 253, 257.

things, to the town of Qūs, the capital of Upper Egypt. Abū Mufarrij's son Ibrāhīm was also involved in such an enterprise; in one shipping note (RN 967b*), for example, he was advised about the delivery of "the *ghalla* payment of Abū Hāshim," to be accompanied by "cavalry (? *al-jawlin*)."

Other forms of taxation are also divulged by the documents, further indicating the family's semi-official status in town. RN 987b*, for example, contains what appears to be a tax register whose complex arithmetic details remain to be further studied by specialists. That the crops could fulfill the *zakāt* revenue requirements is confirmed by a letter to Abū Mufarrij (RN 1004c*). "Put all of my half-share of the [shipment] in one place," the sender demands, "and use the crops (*al-ghilāl*) to pay for (*taḍmanu*) the *zakāt* taxes."⁵⁵ The shipment in question was made up of a variety of commodities, out of which only grain was allocated to pay the tax dues. An unnamed, but business-savvy, woman's fight with a tax-collector (*ṣāhib al-zakāt*) is vividly described in a letter (RN 1018d*) and has already been discussed in chapter 1.

In this connection, but perhaps in a different arena, the issue of tithe taxes (*al-ushra*) to be collected and paid at the port of Quseir is also discussed in the documents. This is an aspect that may shed light on the taxation and customs practices at the ports and harbors along the shore of the Red Sea. A good example in this respect is to be found in RN 1027a*. The text on the recto is a memo written on behalf of one Sunqur ibn 'Ayyāsh to one Muḥammad ibn Ja'far, confirming the delivery of a shipment to the latter; the shipment was eventually meant for a certain Abū al-Karam ibn Naṣr. The memo discusses the matter of charging (or perhaps paying) the broker, that is, Muḥammad ibn Ja'far, a tithe-tax (*al-ushra*) of forty *mudds* of grain, and a commission, or fee for the lease (*al-kirā*) of six *mudds*, on account of the shipment in question, which carried eight *irdabbs*, or roughly six hundred kilos, of wheat. It is interesting to see that the figures of the taxes and the commission are repeated once again at the end of the text, highlighting their importance. The

⁵⁵ For the regulations of the *zakāt* taxes issued by the Ayyubid chancery, see Ibn Mammātī, 308–17; for the *zakāt* taxes collected at Upper Egypt, on the Red Sea trade route, see Ibn Jubayr, 38–39. For the *zakāt* taxes collected at the Red Sea port of Aden and on Indian Ocean route, see Ibn al-Mujāwir, 143–45, 147–48.

text on the verso is Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far’s response. It contains rare information regarding grain prices at the local market as well as the procedures of daily business practice, selling and buying (and perhaps price gauging and fixing), the working of credit lines in the business partnership, and so forth.

This leads us to another kind of activity embarked upon by the “Sheikh’s house,” namely free trade, or market commerce. It is evident that in addition to collecting and re-distributing crops, as commodities for the pilgrims and revenues for the government, the shaykh and his family members were actively pursuing commercial interests through various venues. This “for-profit” enterprise is underscored by a considerable number of documents that turn out to be what we now might call business orders.

Orders were issued by various parties in and around, or even far away from Quseir, requesting the warehouse either to buy or to sell on their behalf. Some of these are quite simple and straightforward. RN 1029a*, a letter to Ibrāhīm, is concerned with a single item of business,

Upon receiving this letter, sell the pottery at your disposal (*al-fakkkhār alladhī ‘indaka*) . . . and give the payment (*al-thaman*) to Shaykh ‘Abd al-Muḥsin so he may invest the money (*li-yuthmīra bihā*) in the market (*‘alā al-sūq*).

By “invest” the author of the letter might mean to buy other commodities for the purpose of future retails. Also worth noting is the mention of “market,” which is not all clear whether it is spoken of as a real marketplace in Quseir, or as an abstract reference, as in “free market economy”; the rather odd preposition *‘alā*, “on, upon,” instead of the usual *fī*, “in, at,” certainly leans towards the latter interpretation.

Even the simplest orders of purchasing, as the one shown above, involve a certain degree of re-selling and re-possession process. The implication may well be that all the transactions we witness here at the “Sheikh’s house” were just one link in a much larger chain of events. This is underscored by the documents dealing with the much more complex processes of buying and selling, and re-buying, and re-selling. Goods changed hands at a rapid pace, in and out of the “Sheikh’s house.”

In one letter (RN 1064a*), for example, Shaykh Abū Mufarrij is informed by one Faraj al-Ḥāṭibī about a shipment of grain either

owed to the shaykh or that had been ordered by him. And then this Faraj goes on to tell the shaykh,

I bought (*sharqytu*) ten and a quarter *waybas* [of flour] as you had demanded. I also bought you *kiswa*-cloaks, and they will be brought over by myself, God willing! We are supposed to leave the town this Thursday, God willing! O God, O God! load them [as soon as possible] and do not delay (or withhold, *lā ta'ūqū*) in their shipping!

Although Faraj failed to state explicitly whether the “flour” mentioned here was included in the already delivered shipment in question or a new item to be shipped in the next cargo, the cloaks certainly were. It is also made clear that the shipment in question was supposed to be re-shipped, this time by Abū Mufarrij, to somewhere else, the next destination on this long chain of transport and money making.

In this respect, it is not at all unusual to see letters and notes about shipments being committed, or commissioned, to multi-layered transactions. This kind of “package deal,” if one may, is perhaps best described in the following letter (RN 968b*), from one ‘Alī ibn Badr,

I am writing to inform Brother Najīb . . . that I have dispatched, accompanied by Abū Sulaymān the deputy (*mawlā*) of the judge Jamāl al-Dīn, two loads of flour sifted in a sieve used for barley. O brother, make sure (*fā-yahriṣ*) to put them on sale. Sell them for me. Whatever you need, simply order it; just send me the order (*al-imra*).

The last sentence from the above quote, the formulaic conditional construction *mā tahtāju waṣīhi*, “whatever you need, order it [from me],” is typical Quseir jargon used in such contexts (for more details on the language of the documents, see chapter 4). More re-sales of mostly foodstuffs are ordered in the remainder of the letter. The role played by the warehouse as a brokerage firm and transit house is highlighted by the instructions given to Najīb, the senior partner of Shaykh Abū Mufarrij, as to how to handle the shipments the warehouse was to receive: he could store them, put them on sale (if the prices were right), and, as an exchange, order commodities and services from the clients, in this case, ‘Alī ibn Badr. Not only were a judge, Jamāl al-Dīn, and his staff involved in transactions here, people associated with other businesses were present as well; among them one Shaykh Sulṭān, who appears to have been staying in the warehouse at the time, albeit not working for the warehouse itself, but for its client ‘Alī ibn Badr instead.

We are able to compare Quseir business transactions we have examined with those of the Cairo Geniza era, as Goitein has listed services rendered by business partners to one another as the following: (1) deal with the shipment sent by the correspondent; (2) accept, verify, and sell the shipment and then collect on it; (3) purchase local goods (using the money collected); and finally (4) pack and dispatch the goods back to the correspondent.⁵⁶ By all accounts, Shaykh Abū Mufarrij and Ibrāhīm do all of this as well.

The role of the “Sheikh’s house” as a transfer stop is further confirmed by more extensive documentation, these including the mention of the brokerage fees, or commissions for middlemen (*dilāla*) in several letters,⁵⁷ and the discussion of specific cases. From RN 970a*, for example, one learns that Abū Mufarrij’s duties as an agent included re-selling the goods he received from the sender (“By God, by God! as soon as the aforesaid [shipment] arrives, don’t let it sit idle, not even a moment! Sell it as God so provides!”), picking up his clients’ money from a third party, and shipping back some new items to the sender of the letter (“Wrap everything separately and hand it all to Khiḍr [the porter].”). The urgency for re-sale obviously has to do with the principle of keeping one’s capital working all the time. Cash flow seems to be a major concern here. The “if-you-don’t-pay-on-time-you-won’t-get-the-goodies” warning is issued twice, on both the recto and the verso.

The Quest for Money

Regarding money, cash, as it appears in the documents, is not always mentioned explicitly in discussions of buying and selling. When it came to paying for goods and services, hard currency did not always prove to be the priority for many writers of letters to the “Sheikh’s house.” Medieval Near Eastern commerce, as early Islamic legal writings and contemporary documents would have us believe, was primarily a credit economy, and more precisely, a credit economy based on paper.⁵⁸ The Red Sea trade in Quseir was no exception. In this

⁵⁶ *MS*, 1: 166–67.

⁵⁷ For *dilāla* fees, see *MS*, 1: 160–61.

⁵⁸ *MS*, 1: 197–200, 240–50; Udovitch, *passim*, especially 77–86, 261; Bloom, 135–41.

regard, the exchange of goods seems to be a very common alternative to monetary payments. Advance pledges of property for debts (*al-rahn*) and debts proper (*al-duyūn*), in the form of exchanging goods, are discussed in the documents. Reading through some of these (e.g., RN 977*, 1008*, 1017b*, 1023*), a discernable trend appears to be that the commodities in question were to be traded as a form of payment for the pre-existing *rahn*-pledges. One document (RN 983*) also authorizes a waiver of debts (*rafʿ al-duyūn*) under circumstances that are not totally clear.

Besides exchanging goods as a means for credits, the *hawāla*, or “bill of exchange,” was used for payment arrangements as well.⁵⁹ We see its use in a quite self-explanatory way in a memo (RN 998*):

The master has confirmed this and has written [to authorize] the sale of perfumes. But I have not received the money-order (*hawāla*) for that yet, nor any information about it forthcoming. [So] you may sell them as God so provides and feeds.

RN 965* is an account that appears to be made up of two seemingly disjointed parts, to be separated by a heading of *hawālat al-ishlām*, “money order [to pay] for the received [goods],” together with a figure of “seventy three and a half dirhams.” Looking at the following break-down, we find:

part one 30 dirhams (lines 1–2) 10 dirhams (line 3) + 20 dirhams (line 4) <hr style="width: 100%;"/> 60 dirhams	part two 3.5 dirhams (line 6) 4.5 dirhams (line 7) 0.5 dirham (line 8) + 2.5 ¹ / ₄ dirhams (line 9) <hr style="width: 100%;"/> 11 ¹ / ₄ dirhams
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We calculate a total of some seventy-two dirhams that would nearly match the “seventy-three dirhams” indicated in the *hawāla* note. The following speculations are in order: (1) The sixty dirhams mentioned in part one must have to do with the flour, which is mentioned explicitly in line 5 (*wa-bihā diqāq*); (2) the eleven plus dirhams quoted in part two may have to do with other goods purchased, and money owed, by the same households, and persons, mentioned in the text;

⁵⁹ For the workings of the *hawāla*, see Udovitch, 80–81, 139–40, 187–89, 207–8 (with bibliography); *MS*, 1: 241–42; Bloom, 138–39.

and (3) therefore, the “seventy-three dirhams” in question amount to the total sum owed by the four clients in question, while the actual payments, or debts, are itemized in the two disjointed parts. In other words, the two parts actually form one account, that is, one *ḥawāla*, or money order of payments.

Another example of payments by means of the transfer and credit system known as *ḥawāla* is seen in a much lengthier and more systematic accounts record (RN 966a*), which has already been discussed in chapter 1. It is interesting to note that this *ḥawāla* has its origins as a document issued by one *ʿarīf al-ḥukkār*, “the head of the hoarders.”

That the *ḥawāla* functioned as certificate of transfer or of credit is further illustrated by a memo to Abū Mufarrij (RN 1018a*), which not only confirms the shaykh’s role as a broker whose duties included selling the crops on behalf of his clients, but also sheds light on the way payments were supposed to be made, in this case through transfer of credits via the *ḥawāla* system:

I have [sent] to you four and a half and a quarter *irdabbs* of barley, and four *irdabbs* of wheat. Would the Master please endorse (*taqīfu maʿa*) this letter with its carrier, sell them (i.e., the crops) . . . and hand him the proceeds (*al-mablagh*). Please send us a memo (*ruqʿa*) so I can cash (or change, *li-aṣrifa*) the money.

The text on the verso, which appears to be a response to the recto, tells us that the recipient of the memo did just that. “Hereby is the first certificate of transfer of debt (*awwal ḥawāla*),” he declares, “[Please pay it in full] by your grace and benevolence.” This case reveals, again, a pattern in the Quseir trade practices where cash was not, or need not, always be on hand when the selling and buying took place. Even if some form of cash—in this case, the *mablagh*—was handed over, the seller might still prefer to receive it in a particular currency, a matter to which we will turn soon.

In addition to the *ḥawāla*, we also witness the use of some form of payment installments. In RN 1015b*, for example, instructions were given to Najīb as how to make the payments, including the so-called *al-murattabayn*, the parallel of which is also found in the Cairo Geniza papers. In a particular case examined by Goitein, an amīr received his “regular fees” in the form of *al-murattabayn*, literally “two payments,” from a Jewish pious foundation; the first payment consists of nine *waybas* of wheat, and the second of eight,

“instead of which 75 dirhems were remitted in cash.”⁶⁰ Our Quseir letter suggests that the *murattabayn* dues were perhaps paid in advance,

Upon the arrival of Shaykh Ḥātim . . . , give him the dues (*al-murattabayn*) for oil, which are for (*maktūb ‘alayhim*) Sābiq ibn Iyās. Send me a receipt (*ruq‘a*), stating that he (i.e., Ḥātim) has received it.

While the exact figures used in this arrangement in the Quseir context may vary from those of the above-mentioned Cairo Geniza case, it nevertheless provides us with yet another rare look at a local version of fixed payment plan, or perhaps a “financing plan,” in the pre-modern Red Sea trade.

Eventually some form of monetary payment still has to be made, however, and the issue of money cannot be totally avoided. The documents suggest that monetary payments were made in various ways. A common method seems to be advance payment in cash. RN 1070a, for example, makes this point plain: “As soon as you send me five dirhams,” the author of the note promises, “I will rent [riding animals to carry] the crops (*ukrī ‘alā al-ghalla*) [to you].” Another document (RN 1003c/1004d*) makes a similar point by insisting on receiving the advance payment as a pre-condition for dispatching the goods:

If you have not received any [money], send me a notification, so I will rent [riding animals] to carry the goods (*ukrī dhā sila‘*). If you have received some [of the money], send me a notification, too. Whatever you need, order it [from me]. I need nothing but cash. . . . Please tell al-Makīn—if he has not paid anything yet—that I will send him a letter about renting riding animals (*li-kirā dābba*) and that he will get [the goods].

There was then the question of exchange rate and related matters that were obviously of major concern among the merchants. In the above-mentioned RN 1018a* the issue of *al-ṣarf*, “money changing,” has already been touched upon, but the preferable currency is not named explicitly. Some documents, on the other hand, make the point clear. In one particular case (RN 970a*), it was “Egyptian dinars” vs. “Meccan dinars.” In the letter, the correspondent ‘Alī ibn Badr issues a specific warning to Shaykh Abū Mufarrij,

Don’t accept the payments on our behalf unless [they are paid in] Egyptian golden dinars (*dhahab Miṣrī*). Cash the money (*intaqidhu*) carefully: No Meccan dinars (*dhahab Makkī*). Egyptian dinars only!

⁶⁰ TS NS J 27, sec. 2 (dated 1143); see *MS*, 1: 117, 425 (note 5).

Now, what is at issue here? What exactly are the differences between “Egyptian” money and “Meccan” money in terms of value, purchasing power, and credibility? Why was the latter vehemently rejected in Quseir? This particular incident about preferences for, and prejudices against, different dinars then circulating in the Red Sea commercial network has raised questions which can only be answered speculatively, given the current state of our knowledge on the subject. Islamic legal discourse on the problem of using multiple coins in one transaction has traditionally centered around the notion of coin types made of different metals, that is, gold vs. silver vs. copper;⁶¹ by and large, it has little, if any, to say about the regional variants. In the present context, the “Egyptian” dinar (*Miṣrī*, which, according to Goitein’s study of the Cairo Geniza papers, specifically means “minted in Fustat”)⁶² had a higher value in comparison with the “foreign” currency.⁶³ Since the Cairo Geniza was roughly contemporary to the period when Quseir as a Red Sea port was active, and given the overall monetary situation in Ayyubid Egypt, we would assume that the “Egyptian” golden dinars circulating at Quseir came from the same source, with a higher value *vis-à-vis* that of the “foreign” currencies. As for the “Meccan” dinars, or Hijazi dinars, one theory has it that they were perhaps being struck at new mints and relying on a relatively new source of gold in East Africa (Zimbabwe, Kilwa, among others) that was perhaps less “pure” and therefore of lower value than that of the Egyptian dinar.⁶⁴ This is, of course, just one interpretation.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Warren Schultz, “‘It Has No Root Among Any Community That Believes in Revealed Religion, Nor Legal Foundation for Its Implementation’: Placing al-Maqrīzī’s comments on money in a wider context,” *MSR* 7/2 (2003), 173–78 (with bibliographical references).

⁶² During the Ayyubid time, golden dinars were also minted in Alexandria; see Warren Schultz, “The monetary history of Egypt, 642–1517,” *CHE*, 330.

⁶³ *MS*, 1: 234, 237, 239–40, 359–60 (on exchange rate of “good old Miṣrī dīnār” vs. Tripoli, Lebanon, Damascus, and other “Mediterranean dīnārs” in the twelfth century). A case of the devaluation of the Maghribī dirhams in relation to the Egyptian ones is discussed as well (1: 390).

⁶⁴ *MS*, 1: 234. The idea was communicated with John Sutton on October 7, 2002. For details about the gold mining industry in Kilwa, see Sutton, “Kilwa in the early fourteenth century: Gold trade, monumental architecture and Sunnī conformity at the southern extremity of dār al-Islām,” in Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti, ed., *Islam in East Africa: New sources (archives, manuscripts and written historical sources. oral history. archaeology)* (Rome, 2001), 425–39; “The African Lords of the Intercontinental Gold Trade before the Black Death: al-Hasan bin Sulaiman of Kilwa and Mansa Musa of Mali,” *The Antiquaries Journal* 77 (1997): 221–42. I thank Mr. Sutton for sending me the articles and sharing with me his expertise on the subject.

⁶⁵ A historical survey of currency in pre-modern Mecca is found in Mortel, “Prices

Another interpretation of the preference for Egyptian dinars over the Hijazi ones lies in the notion of uniform type of investments in a joint partnership. This idea had been stipulated by Muslim legal writers, especially the Shāfi'īs, in the early Islamic centuries and was confirmed by later documents, such as the Cairo Geniza papers, in practice.⁶⁶ The insistence on, or the preference for, a similar type of coinages as capital in joint investments was very commonplace in business practices. Needless to say, the uniform coinage ought to be the most desirable, and lawful, in the marketplace. It is perhaps due to such concerns, not the least of which being the conceived vulnerability of the non-Egyptian currencies, that the writers of the Cairo Geniza letters made it clear that they wished to receive "exactly the type of money one paid to the issuing banker," to avoid the eventual devaluation of the currency.⁶⁷ In the context of Upper Egypt, there were certainly enough incentives to convince Shaykh Abū Mufarrij and his clients to use Egyptian money whenever they could.

Another intriguing aspect of the reference to *dhahab*, "gold," in the above text is the fact that in later Ayyubid times, gold had become scarce; the currency most commonly dealt with in Quseir, as everywhere else, was the silver dirham.⁶⁸ Although this question may best be left for specialists to debate, our documents do seem to indicate that discussion of money in terms of gold has not ceased altogether. It is seen, for example, in another letter (RN 969*). Here, the sender, apparently a merchant who specialized in textiles and clothing, demands the recipient (whose identity is unknown; perhaps a member of the Abū Mufarrij family?) to sell the turbans on his behalf. He then switches gears by informing the recipient,

in Mecca during the Mamlūk Period," *JESHO* 32 (1989), 299–302. Although Mortel's article deals mainly with the Mamluk period, some data may prove to be relevant to the late Ayyubid and perhaps early Mamluk times in question.

⁶⁶ Udovitch, 32–33 (based on the *Mabsūt* by the Ḥanafī Sarakhsī [d. 1090] and the *Minhāj al-ṭālibīn* by the Shāfi'ī Nawawī [d. 1277]), 177–80.

⁶⁷ *MS*, 1: 242.

⁶⁸ *MS*, 1: 234; for the monetary policy under the Ayyubid sultan al-Kāmil after 622/1225 when copper fulūs attained the status of official currency in addition to silver dirham, the so-called "Kāmilī dirham," see *Ighātha*, 68–69; Goitein, "The Exchange Rate of Gold and Silver Money in Fāṭimid and Ayyūbid Times: A preliminary study of the relevant Geniza material," *JESHO* 8 (1965), 34–35; Schultz, "Monetary history," 332–33 (with bibliographical references). It is noted here that the fulūs is not mentioned in any Quseir documents read so far.

Nu‘mān has sold long coat (*al-dhayl*) for twenty-six dirhams, and he still has eight [long coats?] left [unsold], by God Almighty! As for me, all [the items] in my [storage] are sold out (*inḡadā*), and we need [more] children’s clothes. We have pure gold (*dhahab asfar*), which we will use [to pay for them], by God’s blessing.

It is unclear whether by “pure gold” he meant gold bullion, or golden dinars; but the latter is perhaps more likely insofar as another document (RN 1003c/1004d*) sheds more light on the issue. In this lengthy letter to Najīb, one of Shaykh Abū Mufarrij’s senior associates, the urgent demand for cash to pay for the rental of riding animals to carry the merchandise is raised repeatedly:

I need nothing but cash (*al-darāhim*), because I intend to use them to rent [riding animals]. . . . Do not pay me golden dinars (*lā taṣrifu lī dhahab*); change them (*ishtarihā*, literally “buy them”) to silver dirhams (*darāhim*). The exchange rate (*al-ṣarf*) in Qīnā and Qūṣ is thirty-seven [dirhams per dinar], and [if it is] the Yūsufī (? or Tawfīqī)⁶⁹ [dirham], then it is nineteen and a quarter dirhams [per dinar]. O God, O God! send me the cash in silver dirhams [only]!

The exchange rate of golden dinars (*dhahab*) vs. silver dirhams, with its probable local variants, is in keeping with Goitein’s observation of a Cairo Geniza “writer’s assumption that the provincial town has an exchange rate by itself.”⁷⁰ This letter shows that the nearby towns Qūṣ and Qīnā did in fact have their own exchange rate, which was perhaps different from that of Cairo, where the “standard” rate was 1: 35–40, with 1: 34 hitting the “bottom” in this period.⁷¹ The rate of 1: 19 as quoted in the present case certainly strikes one as unusual;⁷² but a clearer notion of the currency in question (Yūsufī? Tawfīqī?) is perhaps better left for specialists to debate. Regarding currency

⁶⁹ The word is undotted in the manuscript; I have been unable to reach a satisfactory reading. The usual practice to name a coin was after the ruler; I have been unable to identify any Ayyubid ruler with the name, or title, of Yūsuf or Tawfīq. There is one possible candidate, the Ayyubid prince al-Nāṣir Yūsuf of Damascus; but there is no enough material to work with to advance along this line of inquiry.

⁷⁰ *MS*, 1: 378 (note 33).

⁷¹ Goitein, “Exchange Rate,” 4–5, 28–29 (nos. 60–61, the only two cases of gold vs. silver coins in the Ayyubid period; both at the rate of 1: 40); *MS*, 1: 368–92, especially 390–91. For the time period in question, the sources usually refer to the Kāmīlī dirham as the official currency circulated in Cairo.

⁷² Goitein did report cases of “abnormal” lower rates, ranging from 1: 13 to 1: 20, as opposed to the “normal” ranges of 1: 30–40; see “Exchange Rate,” 28–40.

exchange, the activities of the so-called *al-ṣayrafi*, “money changers,” are recorded in our texts as well (e.g., RN 1023*). Gold and silver, after all, were themselves commodities, to be freely traded everywhere in the Islamic Near East.⁷³

In addition, the so-called *warāq* silver dirham is also mentioned in a legal document (RN 1015c*) as the fee to be paid to the plaintiff or the court.⁷⁴ But its use must have been exceedingly rare in comparison with the regular dirham, apparently the most common currency circulated on the Red Sea trade route, to which we next turn.

The Trade Routes

The itineraries from and to the “Sheikh’s house” form one piece of the fascinating mosaic that makes up the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade routes,⁷⁵ on which the port of Quseir was one of many transit stops. Similar to the circumstances of the Cairo Geniza letters, the majority of which were written by people that Goitein termed “itinerant merchants,”⁷⁶ the letters and notes uncovered in the “Sheikh’s house”—of the “stationary merchants,” to use Goitein’s words, on the receiving end—were incoming mail whose senders did not, as a rule, include their own addresses (for the textual aspects of letter writing, see chapter 4). It is therefore no surprise, although it is disappointing, that the direct textual evidence one may use to pin down the itineraries of these merchants and their merchandise is thin.

The documents show that goods were transported either over land, by means of camel caravans, or by water (the Nile and Red Sea), by means of various sailing vessels.

That Quseir was the port of Qūṣ, the capital of Upper Egypt, has been confirmed by the textual evidence. The city of Qūṣ was, in one medieval traveler’s words, “a place of rendezvous (*multaqā*)” for “the pilgrims from Egypt and the Maghrib” as well as for “the merchants from Yemen, India, and the land of Abyssinia (*arḍ al-*

⁷³ Cf. *MS*, 1: 229–66.

⁷⁴ For the *warāq* dirham, or “black dirham,” which was struck in Ayyubid Egypt prior to the reign of Sultan al-Kāmil, see Schultz, “Monetary history,” 332–33.

⁷⁵ On the Red Sea trade route, a general survey is to be found in Abu-Lughod, 147–49.

⁷⁶ *MS*, 1: 156–61.

Habasha)” on the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade route.⁷⁷ It is mentioned as a destination of shipping on several occasions in the documents (RN 1003c/1004d*, 1026a*, 1058). Another document (RN 1064b*), on the other hand, tackles a legal dispute concerning a shipment “to the city of Qūṣ.” Information about the exchange rates in Qūṣ and the nearby city of Qīnā found in one document (RN 1003c/1004d*) provides another piece of evidence for the contact, and routine traffic, between these two metropolises and the port of Quseir. The sender of a letter (RN 999b) tells his colleagues, “The slave boys (*ghilmān*) from Qīnā . . . are coming in a boat (*al-markab*).” Letters sent to Qīnā are also found among the fragments. On RN 1013b, for example, the address of an outgoing letter is preserved, *ilā madīnat Qīnā yusallamu lil-akh . . .*, “to the city of Qīnā, to be delivered to Brother [so-and-so].”

Other domestic and international routes, such as Cairo and the Nile Delta, the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, remain circumstantial, insofar as the documents seldom, if at all, mention these places by name. In this regard, demographic origins and religio-social affiliations, as reflected in people’s *nisba*-surnames, may provide some clue; we have, for example, “Hijāzī,” from the Hijaz; “al-Iskandarī,” from Alexandria; “al-Damanhūrī,” from the Nile Delta; “al-Fayyūmī,” from Middle Egypt; “al-Iṣṭākharī,” from Persia; “al-Qurṭubī,” from Cordoba, Spain; “al-Mālīkī,” of the Mālīkī law school, usually an indication of the Hijazi, or north African origins; and so on. Further identification of these individuals and their relationships with the Abū Mufarrij clan, and with each other, will no doubt shed light on the organization and its operation in the Quseir shipping industry and, to a larger extent, in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade routes. Caution, however, should be applied here insofar as these *nisba*-surnames do not always hold truth in indicating the genuine origins of a given person other than his/her family pedigree.

There are, nevertheless, some more reliable pieces of information. The documents offer a glimpse into the probable origins of the shipments and cargoes. RN 1027b*, for instance, contains two separate notes about the delivery of wheat and oil strainers to Abū Mufarrij’s

⁷⁷ Ibn Jubayr, 40–41. For modern research on Qūṣ and its relation to Quseir, see Garcin, *passim*, especially 5–6, 10–11, 399 (Quseir as “the port of Qūṣ”); *GQQ*, 101–10, 115–120 (with bibliography). A vivid description of the long way upstream from Cairo to Qūṣ is found in *MS*, 1: 298.

warehouse; the two loads, one originally from “abroad” (? *khārīj*), a term that needs further verification, and another from “the south” (*al-qibl*), that is, Upper Egypt, were transported by a boat (? *ḥamūla*) called “Good Tidings” (*akhbārūka al-sawāri*).⁷⁸ The boat, or carrier, that bears the same name is also mentioned in RN 1004a*. Flax and linen are likely to have come from the Nile Delta, which has long been known for these products. In RN 997*, for instance, two loads of flax from a merchant perhaps based in Alexandria are discussed. It is also possible, however, that some of the flax and textiles were brought to Quseir from “the south,” that is, towns in Upper Egypt, such as Ashmūnayn, Qūs, and Aswan, which were also known for producing high-quality linen and clothing.⁷⁹ The Nile barges, called *jarm* (pl. *ajrām*), are mentioned in the texts as the vehicle for transporting goods (RN 977*, 1023*). Journeys on the Nile or overseas are again implied by a note (RN 1015b*), which mentions a certain individual’s “landing on the shore” of Quseir (*tālīc al-barr*) to conduct business.

As for long-distance seafaring, scattered information points to two directions: the Red Sea pilgrimage route and the Indian Ocean trade route via the Yemen.⁸⁰ Despite vague phrases such as “to the east” (*ilā al-jiha al-sharqīya*, RN 1086) that make sense only if they can be placed in context, some textual evidence does link the shipments directly to the pilgrimage caravans to and from the Arabian Peninsula. The Mecca link is firmly established by a petition (RN 1060b*) written on behalf of the Banū Shayba, the famous custodians of the holy sanctuary in Mecca.⁸¹ As for the pilgrims, some information is to be

⁷⁸ The reading of the name is tentative; it perhaps took its inspiration from the Qur’an 30: 46, “He looses the winds, bearing good tidings (*yursilu al-riyāḥ mubashshirāt*) . . . that the ships may run His commandment, . . . you may seek His bounty.” For the ways ships were named, see *MS*, 1: 312.

⁷⁹ Many towns in both the Delta and in Upper Egypt had weaving shops of flax, linen, and other textiles; see Serjeant, 153–56.

⁸⁰ For the Red Sea route of Egyptian pilgrims during the Ayyubid time, see Garcin, 135–39. For recent research on Quseir and the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade, see Hiebert, 140–41; *GQQ*, chap. 5, especially 105–20, 125–29. For pre-modern Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade in general, see Patricia Risso, *Merchants and Faith: Muslim commerce and culture in the Indian Ocean* (Boulder, Colorado, 1995); also Abu-Lughod, 227–36, 241–44, 251–348.

⁸¹ For the Banū Shayba and Shayba b. ‘Uthmān see *QS*, 1: 410; 4: 269; Najm al-Dīn ‘Umar Ibn Fahd, *Iḥāf al-uawā bi-akhbār Umm al-Qurā*, ed. Fahīm M. Shaltūt (Mecca, 1990), 1: 538–39. “They were the custodians of the holy sanctuary (*hajibat al-ka’ba*),” al-Qalqashandī wrote, “and to this day still hold the keys to the

found in the letters. “They told him,” the author of one note (RN 1053a*) recalls, “‘we are five pilgrims (*hujjāj*)’ and . . . so he granted them ten dirhams[’ worth of wheat].” Another note (RN 1085*), though only partially readable due to worm holes, discusses the needs of “the pilgrims” as well. In this connection, grain is often associated with the term *nafaqa*, literally “expenses,” or “provisions,” which as a technical term denotes funds granted and allotted by the sultan or the court to military expeditions or organized long distance caravans, such as the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.⁸² One note (RN 1015a*), for instance, states that the “high-quality grains are the provisions for the youth (*nafaqa lil-ṣighār*),” a clear reference to long-distance expeditions or pilgrimage caravans. The case is made quite clear in RN 1057*, a semi-official petition to a high-ranking *majlis*, “council,” requesting urgent additional funds for a pilgrimage caravan, or a military expedition, that was desperate for some logistical assistance.

The pilgrimage link is further evidenced by the above-mentioned shipping note in which payment in the “Egyptian dinar” instead of the “Meccan dinar” was specifically requested. The place name of the Hijaz is also mentioned directly in one letter (RN 1080), which deals with “what happened (*jarā*) in the Hijaz concerning the safety issue (*al-amm*).” The same letter also alludes to some kind of ritual, which “is necessary [to be performed] before the death (*qabla al-mamāt*).” If we put together the pieces: the concern for “safety” and the need to purchase swords discussed elsewhere (RN 1026b*), as well as the existence of “funeral texts” in the “Sheikh’s house” (see chapter 3) alongside the business documents, the rituals “to be performed” in relation to what happened “in the Hijaz” are very likely ceremonies on behalf of the sick, or dying, pilgrims from and to Mecca.

The risk was, by all accounts, well worth taking, not only because of the spiritual gratification in making the journey to Mecca, but also the material gains it might entail. The Red Sea pilgrimage trade

shrines.” Al-Qalqashandī also pointedly mentions that some members of the Banū Shayba “originally hailed from Upper Egypt.”

⁸² For the word *nafaqa* indicating “the need of the pilgrims to go to Mecca” in a contemporary document from Mt. Sinai, see Stern, “Petitions from the Ayyūbid Period,” 10–11. Also see Ibn Jubayr, 46–47 (which implies both “provisions” and the “cash” to purchase them along the way). The similar phrase of *nafaqat al-ṣighār* is also found in *ABPH*, no. 69.

route has, for centuries, been a lucrative business venture. Ibn Jubayr (d. 1204), who traveled to Qūṣ and ‘Aydhāb, a nearby port whose position on the Red Sea trade route was to be replaced soon after his visit by Quseir, gave firsthand observations in his vivid descriptions of the thriving activities of the “fleets” or “caravans” based in the two towns (*al-qawāfil al-‘Aydhābiya wa-al-Qūṣiyya*) and the greed of the local merchants and agents who dealt with the pilgrims.⁸³ Although Ibn Jubayr lived too early to witness the Quseiran “fleets” or “caravans” coming and going, it seems that not only did the same old business continue to flourish, but the old “greed” managed to persist as well. That some merchants at Quseir would openly call themselves “hoarders” (*al-ḥukkār*), as it is shown in RN 966a*, speaks volumes in this respect; their prices were, as discussed above, surely hefty, if not excessive.

As for the Indian Ocean trade routes, while Cairo Geniza papers evidenced the route from Indian Ocean to ‘Aydhāb, a sister port on the Red Sea near Quseir, in the twelfth century,⁸⁴ the direct proof from the Quseir documents so far is the one text that indicates the existence of routine shipping operations from Quseir to the Yemen (RN 1059*). Yemen is known to have been a major stopover for traffic headed for the Indian Ocean and is thus worth noting in this context.⁸⁵ In addition, the port of Aden appears in one fragment (RN 1056b) the remainder of which is largely erased in the manuscript. There are also some indirect clues that may help to establish the links between Quseir and the Yemen. Pepper and perfume, for instance, are believed to have come from India and the Far East.⁸⁶ Among textiles, the *fuwat*, “waist-wrappers, cummerbunds,” mentioned in several letters, are known to have been part of the ethnic

⁸³ Ibn Jubayr, 41–48.

⁸⁴ *MS*, 1: 269.

⁸⁵ For the Yemenite trade from and to Egypt, the Hijaz, and India in the sixth/twelfth century, see Ibn Jubayr, 34–49. Many records by Ibn Jubayr show the connections between Yemen and Qūṣ and ‘Aydhāb, the two major hubs near Quseir. It was “the ‘Aydhāban trade caravans,” Ibn Jubayr observed, “that carried the goods from India arriving in Yemen, and then from Yemen to ‘Aydhāb” (43). For the Yemenite trade with India in the seventh/thirteenth century, see Ibn al-Mujāwir, 99–100, 137–46, 184–85, 270, 293–94; much of the relevant material was summarized by Rex Smith in a series of articles collected in *Studies in the Medieval History of the Yemen and South Arabia* (London, 1997).

⁸⁶ For the *fulful* imported from India by the “Kārimī merchants” to Yemen, see Ibn al-Mujāwir, 147–48; also see Thayer, “Testimony,” 48–49; Mortel, “Prices,” 293.

dress of the Yemenites.⁸⁷ The winter wear *shamla*, also listed as a trade item in several documents, is usually explained in the dictionaries as “cloak, turban,” but Serjeant reported that he had brought from the Yemen, in modern times, a *sh[a]mla*, which was “a striped blanket carpet.”⁸⁸ One account of textile trading (RN 1023*) mentions “cloaks of the Jews” and “Abyssinian garments” (*kisā al-Yahūd wa-malīyat al-Habashīya*), which may also refer to Yemen.⁸⁹ It is also interesting to note here that these “exotic” gowns were sold on behalf of a person who had a non-Arab name, Yāsī (for Yāsīn?) ibn Anktū (or Anktuwā); the name implies that the man was apparently a Muslim of perhaps East African origin.

Archaeological finds also support the hypothesis of the Yemeni connection. Yemeni bowls were found at the “Sheikh’s house,” in what the archaeologists interpret as “Ibrāhīm’s sitting room,” alongside Egyptian products, Nubian jars, and a couple of Chinese celadons. Ibrāhīm was, as one archaeologist calls, “a man of the world,” indeed.⁹⁰

The money trail revealed by the documents may also lead to Nubia and the Yemen: the gold was being traded through the southern Swahili system controlled by Kilwa, Tumbatu, and Aden. These links were strengthened in the late thirteenth century by what appear to have been close connections between the Mahdali at Tumbatu and Kilwa with the Rasulid dynasty in Yemen.⁹¹

In this connection, it is perhaps not out of place to note that Yemen’s surge in prominence in the Red Sea trade, particularly after the rebirth of Aden’s prosperity in 1229 under the Rasulids, coincided

⁸⁷ For *fūta* as “waist wrapper,” the cummerbund-like article popular in Yemen, see Ibn al-Mujāwir, 89; Serjeant, 130–33; Smith, “Maritime Trade,” 132. A brief, yet comprehensive, survey of the political and social ties between the Yemen and the Hijaz during the Ayyubid time is found in Mortel, “Prices,” 280–81.

⁸⁸ Serjeant, 122.

⁸⁹ For the Jewish merchants’ activities in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade, as well as the Abyssinian connection through the trade route, see *GQQ*, 98–100 (citing Goitein), 119. The historical background and commercial activities of the Jews and Abyssinians in Yemen were witnessed by Ibn Jubayr (45–46) and are mentioned frequently by Ibn al-Mujāwir (32–33, 85, 89, 99–100, 134, 137, 140, 168, 235, 270, 294–95).

⁹⁰ Personal electronic communication with Whitcomb on March 20, 2003.

⁹¹ See John Sutton, *A Thousand Years of East Africa* (Nairobi, 1984). For the “Qūṣ, ‘Aydhāb, and Aswan nexus” that linked Egypt to Nubia and Africa during the Ayyubid period, see Garcin, 125–55.

with the high point of activity at the port of Quseir.⁹² The possible involvement of the Kārimīs, a powerful and mysterious merchant group operating from the major ports on the Red Sea and Indian Ocean,⁹³ perhaps played a role in this phenomenon. The existence of the Kārimī merchants in the activities of Quseir is alluded to by one letter (RN 998*), which describes the moves of a certain *rayyis al-tujjār*, literally “the head merchant,” named Yūsuf. The term *rayyis al-tujjār* was, according to Gaston Wiet, perhaps associated with the Kārimī merchants and their agents and representatives.⁹⁴ Modern researchers have also noted other technical terms that are associated with the Kārimīs. Among these is the term *markab* (pl. *marāḳib*), which is seen in several documents from Quseir; according to John Meloy, the term *markab* is used in Meccan sources to designate a special vessel type used by Kārimī merchants or Indian merchants.⁹⁵

Further north, our data is even scantier. Syria is mentioned on occasion. One letter (RN 999a), for example, talks about a merchant of Syrian origin (*al-shāmī*). In another (RN 979c), something “coming [from] Damascus” is mentioned. The city of Damascus appears again in a third document (RN 980b). The Persian link can also be spotted on occasion, such as one client’s Persian name al-Iṣṭākhri (RN 1001a*), and the mention of luxury goods imported “from Persia” (RN 1085*). However, these pieces are too sketchy to provide any context.

⁹² For a summary of the Ayyubid policy in Yemen and the Red Sea, see Garcin, 126–35.

⁹³ Walter Fischel, “The Spice Trade in Mamlūk Egypt,” *JESHO* 1 (1958): 157–74; Subhi Labib, *Handelsgeschichte Ägyptens im spätmittelalter (1171–1517)* (Wiesbaden, 1965); “Les marchands karimis en Orient et sur l’Océan Indien,” in *Sociétés et compagnies de commerce en Orient et dans l’Océan Indien* (Paris, 1970), 209–14; “Kārimī,” *EF*²; Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Ashqar, *Tujjār al-tawābil fī Miṣr fī al-‘aṣr al-Mamlūkī* (Cairo, 1999); John Meloy, “Mamluk Authority, Meccan Autonomy, and Red Sea Trade, 797–859/1395–1455” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1998), 68–73; Risso, 39–40; Abu-Lughod, 227–30. Although the Kārimī merchants, as a group, are known to have peaked during the Mamluk time, the earliest mention can be traced back to Fatimid sources; for their activities in the Ayyubid period, see Chamberlain, 229–31.

⁹⁴ See Gaston Wiet, “Les marchands d’épices sous les sultans mamlouks,” in *Cahiers d’Histoire Egyptienne* 7/2 (1955), 130–31; *GQQ*, 101. For further discussion of related terms, such as *kaḅīr al-tujjār*, *malik al-tujjār*, *shāh bandar*, all meaning “the head of the Kārimī merchants,” see Wiet, “Les marchands,” 126–27, 130–31, 146 (note 317). For the involvement of the Kārimī merchants in the Quseir shipping business, also see Thayer, “Land Politics,” 215.

⁹⁵ Meloy, 61.

Concerning the Syrian connection, noteworthy is one letter (RN 1027a*) that mentions the “troops” (*al-‘askar*) to be dispatched to fight the “Franks (*al-franj*),” that is, the Crusaders. This information may place Quseir within a larger geographical context, with regard to its strategic position in linking the Red Sea littoral and the Mediterranean world to the north, in addition to its proven link with the Indian Ocean world to the east. Ships are known to have been used to transport soldiers from Egypt to the Hijaz and Yemen across the Red Sea. In the Ayyubid period, Qūṣ’s role as a major base for the Ayyubid military operation against the Crusades under the three sultans (al-‘Ādil, al-Kāmil, and al-Šāliḥ Ayyūb), whose reigns coincided with the time period of our documents, has long been confirmed by modern scholarship. The Ayyubids maintained ships on the Red Sea, many of which were constructed in the Fustat shipyards and transported overland to Qūṣ.⁹⁶ Of the only two outlets for Qūṣ (the other one being ‘Aydḥāb), Quseir would no doubt be an ideal choice in no small part because of its proximity to Qūṣ. Al-Maqrīzī mentions that “the governor (*ḥākīm*) of Qūṣ launched a battle overseas” by sending “ships that carried fighters (*al-marākib al-mashḥūna bi-al-muqātīlīn*) from the harbor of ‘Aydḥāb.” Al-‘Aynī, however, maintains that the expedition sailed from Quseir instead, because Quseir was “nearer to Qūṣ than ‘Aydḥāb.”⁹⁷ The historical and geo-political implications of the information contained in the above-mentioned letter may merit further research. The “troops” in question, on the other hand, were most likely going, perhaps via the Gulf of ‘Aqaba, or through the Hijaz, overland all the way to the territory occupied by the “Franks”: mostly ports on the Syrian littoral, such as Antioch, Tripoli, Beirut, Tyre, Acre, and, at some point, Jerusalem.⁹⁸ This letter is also the

⁹⁶ Garcin, 84–96; Chamberlain, 220–27.

⁹⁷ Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk li-ma’rifat duwal al-mulūk* (Cairo, 1934–1975), 1: 516; al-‘Aynī, *‘Iqd al-jumān fi ta’rīkh ahl al-zamān*, MS Cairo, 8: 530 (quoted in *al-Sulūk*, 1: 516); also see Abu-Lughod, 227–28, 239–41.

⁹⁸ For a general narrative of the Frankish activities in the Ayyubid period, the time when Quseir was active as a harbor, see Stephen Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols: The Ayyubids of Damascus, 1193–1260* (Albany, 1977); Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic perspectives* (Edinburgh, 1999), 195–225 (Ayyubid campaigns), 291–93 (the Frankish threat to the pilgrimage and to the holy cities of Arabia). The complexity of the Ayyubid-Frankish diplomacy and the Ayyubids’, in Hillenbrand’s words, “lacklustre performance in *jihad*” against the Franks, is underlined by “the usual contemporary framework of shifting alliances, truces and petty territorial warfare.” Among the various factors that contributed to the temporary alliances between

sole textual evidence found so far that links the “Sheikh’s house,” and for that matter the port of Quseir, albeit indirectly, to the Mediterranean. As far as the westbound route from Quseir to North Africa and the Mediterranean is concerned, the field of inquiry remains wide open.

the Ayyubids and the Franks were trade and security. The Ayyubids, according to Hillenbrand, “were enthusiastic about the benefits of trade with the Franks and the wider world, using the Frankish ports. A common interest in the local defense of Syria and Palestine no doubt motivated both Ayyubids and Franks to unite on occasion against external aggressors, be they the Khwarazmians, Franks from Europe or even Ayyubid rivals from Egypt” (224–25).

TABLE 1
Commodities Mentioned in the Documents

Commodity	Arabic	Measure/weight/form of packing
Food and drink		
Wheat	<i>qamḥ</i>	<i>ḥiml, irdabb/wayba/mudd</i>
Barley	<i>shaʿīr</i>	<i>ḥiml, irdabb/wayba/mudd</i>
Flour	<i>daqīq, ṭaḥīna</i>	<i>ḥiml, qūʿa</i>
Rice	<i>aruzz</i>	<i>qūʿa, farda, bark</i>
Oil	<i>zayt</i>	<i>bamīya</i>
Pepper	<i>fulful (filfil)</i>	<i>wayba</i>
Syrup/sugar	<i>qūṭāra (quṭāra)</i>	<i>buṭṭa (baṭṭa)</i>
Chickpeas	<i>ḥummuṣ</i>	
Cake, baked food	<i>kaʿk</i>	
Bread	<i>khubz</i>	
Wheat-and-meat dish	<i>harīsa</i>	
Butter	<i>zubb</i>	
Clarified butter	<i>samm</i>	
Wine(?), medicinal syrup(?)	<i>shirāb mufrīḥ</i>	
Liquor	<i>al-ʿaraqī</i>	
Apple	<i>tuffāḥ</i>	<i>quffa</i>
Lemons	<i>laymūn</i>	
Watermelon	<i>biṭṭīkh</i>	<i>wazn</i>
Dried dates	<i>tamr</i>	<i>ḥiml</i>
Jew's mallow	<i>mulūkhīya</i>	
Carrots	<i>jazar</i>	
Onions	<i>baṣal</i>	
Beans	<i>fūl</i>	
Lentils	<i>ʿads</i>	
Wild eggplant	<i>ʿarṣim</i>	
Nuts	<i>lawz</i>	<i>raṭl</i>
Resin	<i>sandarūs</i>	
Meat	<i>laḥm</i>	<i>raṭl</i>
Egg	<i>bīḍ, bayād</i>	
Pickles	<i>mukhallal</i>	
Water	<i>māʾ</i>	<i>qirba</i>
Domestic items		
Lighting oil	<i>zayt hārr</i>	<i>bamīya</i>
Oil strainer	<i>gharbalat zayt</i>	
Juice presser	<i>kammād</i>	
Rose water	<i>māʾ ward</i>	
Perfume	<i>ʿiṭrīya, ʿaṭāra</i>	<i>khazaf</i>
Perfume	<i>ṭīb</i>	
Henna	<i>ḥinnāʾ</i>	
Saffron	<i>zaʿfarān</i>	
Mirrors	<i>mirʾāt</i>	
Coral	<i>marjāna</i>	
Necklace	<i>ṭawq</i>	
Beads	<i>aḥbāb</i>	

Table 1 (*cont.*)

Commodity	Arabic	Measure/weight/form of packing
Semi-precious stones	<i>ahjār</i>	
Pen	<i>qalam</i>	
Stoneware cup	<i>ahjār kūz</i>	
Long-legged bottle	<i>qumqum</i>	
Leather container	<i>baṭṭa (buṭṭa)</i>	
Soap	<i>ṣābūn</i>	<i>jarra</i>
Copper objects	<i>al-nahās</i>	
Pottery	<i>al-fakhhkār</i>	
Porcelain	<i>khazaf</i>	
Medicine	<i>wujūr</i>	
Textiles		
Flax	<i>kattān</i>	<i>himl, qūʿa, tillīs, rizma</i>
Flax comb	<i>mashshāṭ</i>	
Cotton	<i>quṭn</i>	
Thawb cloth	pl. <i>thiyāb</i>	<i>dhirāʿ</i>
Galabiya clothes	<i>jalālīb</i>	
Woman's wraps decorated with gold and gems	<i>milāyat ḥaram</i> <i>muraṣṣaʿa</i>	
Embroidered fabric	<i>ṭarīz</i>	
Fabric	<i>qumāsh</i>	
Waist wrapper	<i>fūṭa</i> (pl. <i>fuwaṭ</i>)	
Shroud	<i>kaṣan</i>	
Fine silk	<i>ḥarīr zākhīr</i>	
Cloak, turban	<i>shamla</i>	
Robe	<i>kiswa (kuswa)</i>	
Turban	<i>ʿimāma</i>	
Woolen wrap	<i>ʿabāʿ</i>	
Shawls	<i>ashyāl</i>	
Long coat (?)	<i>dhayl</i>	
Cloak of the Jews	<i>kisā al-Yahūd</i>	
Abyssinian garment	<i>malīyat al-Ḥabashīya</i>	
Others		
Rope, hawser	<i>salab</i> (pl. <i>salabāt</i>)	
Sword	<i>sayf</i>	
Livestock	<i>rakāʿib</i>	
Prunus mahaleb	<i>maḥlab</i>	
Indian prickly ash	<i>fāghira</i>	
Slave girl	<i>jāriya</i>	
Stable supplies	[. . .] <i>al-iṣṭabl</i>	

TABLE 2
Grain Prices

Crops	Price
Wheat	1.72 dinars per <i>irdabb</i> , or 11.43 dirhams per <i>wayba</i> 2 dinars minus 2 <i>qirāṭs</i> (one <i>qirāṭ</i> is $\frac{1}{24}$ of a <i>mithqāl</i> measure, or $\frac{1}{16}$ dirham) per <i>irdabb</i> (the text has “actually sold at 2 dinars per <i>irdabb</i> ”)
Flour	$1\frac{1}{4}$ dinars per <i>irdabb</i> (the text has “two dinars minus ten dirhams per <i>irdabb</i> .”)

Sources: RN 966a*, RN 1027a*.

TABLE 3
Exchange Rates in Qūṣ and Qīnā

Currency	Rates
Golden dinar	37 silver dirhams (regular)
Golden dinar	19 $\frac{1}{4}$ silver dirhams (of the Yūsufī [? Tawfiqī] type)

Source: RN 1003c/1004d*.

CHAPTER THREE

LIFE, DEATH, AND GOD: ASPECTS OF POPULAR BELIEF AND CULTURE

One of His wings carries cures [shifāʾ] and other ailments [dāʾ].—a saying attributed to Prophet Muḥammad¹

Now that they are gone too, I am weeping over their departure, crying all day long, well into night./ O, would they come back soon? Would the caravan return safely?²—a prayer found in the house²

Miscellanies not directly related to business matters occupy a very small portion of the entire body of texts found in the “Sheikh’s house.” Among these are sermons and prayers for the dead or departed loved ones, block-printed amulets, magical texts, and astrological dials. Missing are “pure” religious treatises and literary pieces drawn from the scholastic stock of medieval Muslim learning. When it comes to non-materialistic and non-commercial aspects of daily life, these texts are an informative tool guiding us into various facets of popular beliefs, communal rituals, and perhaps public sentiments and psyche in this pre-modern Red Sea port.

“Funeral Texts”: Sermons and Prayers

Of the few fragments that contain what appears to be of a religious nature, nearly all deal with the theme of death and redemption, all bear a sermon-like didactic tone, and all use similar rhetorical devices in rhyming prose.

Among these, the most complete is perhaps RN 1062b, which may shed light on the overall nature of this group of codices. Since the manuscript suffers from considerable worm-eaten holes and lacunas,

¹ A. J. Wensinck et al., eds., *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane* (Leiden and New York, 1992), 3: 156.

² RN 964a*.

only a summary is allowed here. The text begins with the stock praise of Prophet Muḥammad and his Companions, with thematic highlights such as maintaining the Islamic ideal of ritual purity (*al-ṭahra*), leading a pious and ascetic life (*zahadū fi al-dunyā*), and being God-fearing, all exemplified by the deeds of the first generation of Muslims (*āl salaf al-muslimīn*), who are to be immortalized in the hereafter (*khālīdīn wa-bādarū li-sulḥ al-ākhirā*) (lines 1–5). Then the theme of death and redemption is introduced by invocations of God’s mercy on the passing souls and God’s rewards for good deeds (*ṣālihāt*) on Judgement Day (lines 6–10). For the one whose “balance sheet” (*mīzān*, literally “scale”) has yet to be cleared with God, then “his sadness and despair are to be doubled on the Day of Resurrection” (*al-maḥshir*, literally “the congregation of the dead”). The Judgement Day motif is then reiterated, with the reference to the Islamic ritual of the Holy Month of pilgrimage, in a recitative couplet: “’Tis the time to come near God (*hādha awān al-mutaqarrīb ilā allāh*). . . . ’Tis the season for all to migrate [to the Holy House in Mecca] (*hādha zamān al-maḥjar lil-kull*). The Holy Month and Days [are coming]!” (lines 11–13).

This sermon-like tone continues on the verso: “. . . [U]nder his care is the permission of God (*ijāzat allāh*). Thou shalt acknowledge the signs of His offerings and rewards (*iyākum shawāhid ‘atīyātihī wa-ājārihī*). . . . Thou shalt be aware of (*iyākum*) whatever that may despair of (*ayyasa*) the true belief in Him. . . . Thou shalt be aware of the path where the most righteous guidance is given and the best of the Prophetic traditions are related (*aḥsan al-ḥadīth maqrū‘*) . . .” (lines 1–4). This is followed by Qur’an 5: 96–97: “[F]ear God, unto whom you shall be mustered (*tuḥsharūna*). God has appointed the Kaaba, the Holy House, as an establishment for men, and the holy month, the offering, and the necklaces—that, that you may know that God knows all that is in the heavens and in the earth, and that God has knowledge of everything”³ (line 5). It is to be noted here that the reference of “unto whom you shall be mustered (*tuḥsharūna*)” is cognate with the “Day of Resurrection” (*al-maḥshir*) mentioned above on the recto. The audience is then encouraged to strive for, and enjoy, with gratitude to God, all that is good and lawful (*bi-ijhād li-arzāq al-ma’rūf*),

³ All the translations of the Qur’an are from A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (New York, 1955).

and is warned against excess and hypocrisy (*al-nifāq*). An array of rhetorical embellishments, wrought in flowery prose rhyming with the letter *q* (*al-nifāq*, *al-mīthāq*, *al-ʿnāq*, *al-āfāq*, *al-ashrāq*, and so forth), is added (lines 6–10); and this leads to the climax, or perhaps conclusion, in invocations of the Muslim creed (*shahāda*) and a prayer for God’s miracles (*muʿjizāt*) in warding off all evils, infidels, and wrongs (lines 11–14).

Despite its fragmented state, the text does allow the observation of a coherent thematic development that is typical of a religious sermon. We do not know whether it represents excerpts copied from a generic text, the original of which still needs to be identified, or is otherwise a genuinely original piece tailor-made for a specific occasion. At any rate, two things are noteworthy about this revealing text. One is the Mecca connection. The other is the implication behind the recurrent theme of death and redemption. That the “Sheikh’s house” at Quseir was mainly catering to the Egyptian pilgrims to Mecca was becoming evident in our above reading of the business files and commercial documents (chapter 2). Here, the reference to the “Holy House” in Mecca and the “Holy Month” of pilgrimage provides further confirmation of the function, and clientele, of the warehouse. As regards the purpose of the text, both the central theme of death and redemption, and the didactic rhetoric strongly suggest that the codex in question is a sermon to be recited in front of an audience, on occasions other than regular Friday congregations. To be precise, this is likely a sermon and prayer for the dead, to be given at funeral services.

This point may be further illustrated by yet another codex. Preserved in a cluster of fragments found together (RN 1037, 1038, 1040, 1041, 1042b, 1043, 1047, 1048, 1050, and 1051), the theme of death and redemption as well as the sermon-like tone are unmistakable. Since the more than ten small pieces are too fragmentary to allow any meaningful reconstruction, a summation of the decipherable portions would hopefully suffice.

One fragment (RN 1037b) reads:

[T]o consider the matter of reviving the good living (*al-ʿtibār fī intifād al-niʿam*) . . . of those who had lived before you (*alladhīna kānū min qablikum*) . . . On earth did they inhabit (*mustawṭinīn*), and by divine covenants (*bi-ʿuhūd*) [did they die]. . . . Among those who have made their abode on the mountain summit (*tabawwʿa ʿurʿura*) . . . , [the Last] Abode will be on loan to you all (*al-dār ʿalaykum maqrūda*). . . . Death has its ups

and downs with regard to its dense clouds (*al-mawt sijāl ghammā'ihā*) and . . . [off to] graves (*qubūr mulhada*) did they go. . . . Leave behind you (*utrukū*) . . . the loved ones; and the river in Paradise (*al-kawthar*) [will overflow?].

Once a person dies, he is expecting a revival, in Heaven, of the bountiful living (*al-ni'am*) he once had led on earth. The rare word *ur'ura*, "summit," or "the head, or top," could also mean "who have made their abode on the top of a camel," or the like; the metaphor thus could well allude to a man's wanderlust-filled life on earth, or perhaps his carefree life in the hereafter.

Such notions are unmistakably Qur'anic and Prophetic. The essence and spirit of the letters of the Scripture are clear here: in the use of the verb *tabawwa'a* in the context of "earthly habitation" and this-worldly life;⁴ the term *al-dār*, which in the Qur'an is often associated with *al-ākhirā*, that is, "the Last Abode";⁵ the concept of *uhūd*, "the divine covenant," that man pledged to God during his lifetime and fulfilled upon his death,⁶ and so forth. Certain idioms, too, are parallel to that of the classical sources: the expression *al-mawt sijāl ghammā'ihā*, for example, is itself a paraphrase of the famous Prophetic tradition: *wa-al-ḥarb sijāl*, "The battle had its ups and downs."⁷

The same motif also figures predominantly in other fragments that make up the same codex. One (RN 1040c) reads: "[C]ontinuous destruction (*halāk mutawālin*) [has hit his home]. . . . Great expectations have failed him (*al-āmāl qad adānat 'alayhi*). . . . Warning of death (*ḥadhar al-mawt*) . . . [has come] before him, embracing [his soul]. . . ." Another fragment (RN 1040d) reads: "[Fate] is to be expected (*yurtaqabu*) . . . soon; and there is no need for destiny (*maṣīr*) to [interfere?] . . . ; Verily death is a shelter (*al-mawt khaymāt*) [for the destined]. . . ." "[H]e defended us (*wa-dafā'a 'annā*) . . . [on] earth . . . , lavish and splendor. . . . The memory of everything that had prospered [is now gone]. . . ."

⁴ Qur'an 59: 9: *wa-alladhīna tabawwa'ū al-dār wa-al-īmān min qablihim*, "those who made their dwelling in the abode, and in belief, before them. . . ." The *sūra* itself is titled *al-ḥaṣr*, "Mustering," which is already seen several times in the case of RN 1062b described above.

⁵ Qur'an 2: 94; 6: 32; 7: 169; 12: 109; 16: 30; 28: 77, 83; 29: 64; 33: 29.

⁶ Wensinck, 4: 408.

⁷ Wensinck, 2: 431.

The related theme of “doing good in this life and receiving rewards in the hereafter” also runs throughout the fragments in question. One fragment (RN 1042b) cites from Qur’an 57: 13, “It shall be said, ‘Return you back behind, and seek for a light!’ And a wall shall be set up between them, having a door in the inward whereof is mercy, and against the outward thereof is chastisement.” The Qur’anic teaching is followed by sermon-like moralistic exhortations, appealing directly to the audience. Herein one hears not only general warnings such as “Thou shalt be aware of the virtuous sanctuary! (*iyākum ma‘āqil ‘ismīya*)”⁸ and “Thou shalt be aware of the spirit [of the deceased]! (*wa-iyākum bi-rūh*),” but also specific instructions on how to do things right: “It is necessary that His creatures and clans (*wājib ‘alā khalīqihī wa-ālihī*) bear testimony, . . . a testimony that is to be repeated orally (*shahāda kurrirat ‘alā al-lisān*).” The specific emphasis on “repeating” the *shahāda* “with the tongue” is not only in keeping with the general Islamic principle of performing religious duties “with the hand, then the tongue (*‘alā al-lisān*), then in the heart,”⁹ but goes a step further, like a “how-to” manual for common people. Paradise (*al-jinnān*) is alluded to in the text as well.

A similar motif, and tone, is found in another fragment of the same group (RN 1051), the recto of which contains the typical *shahāda*, whereas on the verso there are passages in a more personal tone. “[Pray!] while you are vigilant (*wa-antum ṣāhūna*),” one sentence reads; “[Pray!] while you are seeing (*wa-antum tabṣurūna*) . . .,” echoes another. Words such as “death (*al-mawt*),” “the dead (*al-mawtā*),” “do good! (*aṭībū*),” “the culmination of good deeds (*iddikhār al-ḥasanāt*)” also appear frequently in other fragments that are too damaged to be deciphered more completely (e.g., RN 1047a, 1050b).

The “do-good” teaching is often embellished in commercial technical terms, in the sense of “depositing” good deeds, “dispensing” bad ones, and getting “paid back” later, a terminology that is very much in line with that of Scripture.¹⁰ One fragment (RN 1037c) urges its audience to “recall” (*arjī‘ū*) “the mortgaged [good deeds] (*rahā’in*), the locked-up bad deeds (*aḥdāth mu’aṣṣada*), and the deposits

⁸ For the term *ma‘āqil*, see Wensinck, 4: 303.

⁹ Cf. Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge, 2002).

¹⁰ Cf. Charles Torrey, *The Commercial-theological Terms in the Koran* (dissertation, Yale University, 1892); Abu-Lughod, 216.

[of virtues] (*wadāʿī*).” This surely would have sounded reassuring to the ears of Abū Mufarrij, Ibrāhīm, and their trading partners.

Aside from general teachings and commonplace prayers, some specific references revealed through the words, or read between the lines, also call for our attention. One badly damaged fragment (RN 1048) contains random phrases like “[fighting] his enemy (*aduwwuhu*),” “the sacrifice (*al-fidāʿ*) is a lamentable loss that is not [coming back],” “the dead (*mayyita*) is an absence that is not to be expected [to return] (*ghāʿiban lā yuntaẓaru*),” “a weaned orphan (*yaṭīma fiṭāmā*),” and “[until] His day [comes] He will tear the protective amulet apart (*ahtaka ḥijāb*).” Here, the mention of “enemy” and “sacrifice” is vague: it can be taken as an indication of military expeditions, a fact that has already been confirmed by some texts (e.g., RN 1027a*, discussed in chapter 2), but it also can certainly just be part of the general religious discourse. The reference to a female “dead” (*mayyita*) and “weaned orphan” (*yaṭīma*), on the other hand, is also very intriguing if only because it likely points to a more specific context in which the death of a particular person, a woman in this case, was mourned. Equally intriguing is the mention of “amulet” (*ḥijāb*), which adds a new dimension to the rituals of mourning the dead and praying for the dying, moving away from the field of religious discourse to the arena of magic and superstition, which is featured extensively in the documents.

“Healing Texts”: Block Printed Amulets and Handwritten Charms

Among the textual findings, mostly hand-written on paper, are several wooden block prints.¹¹ Since specimens of this type from the pre-modern Islamic Near East are extremely rare (see Appendix 1), such a discovery from the “Sheikh’s house” is itself a remarkable event of considerable significance. It is generally held that medieval Arabic block prints, the earliest examples of which date back to Fatimid Egypt (909–1171),¹² are usually amulets or charms called

¹¹ They were first reported in Janet Johnson and Donald Whitcomb, “Quseir al-Qadim,” 26. A follow-up inventory was conducted by Miroslav Krek in his survey of the Arabic block printing in Egypt; see “Arabic Block Printing as the Precursor of Printing in Europe: Preliminary report,” *ARCEN* 123 (1985), 13–15.

¹² For the block prints uncovered in Fustat, see D. S. Richard, “Written Documents,”

ḥijāb (pl. *ḥujūb*), or “Hegap,”¹³ intended to bestow protection upon the person that bore them. The block-printed amulets are usually “single sheets of paper, . . . pasted together in the manner of scrolls,”¹⁴ and “would have been placed in cylindrical or rectangular metal cases, or in pouches of leather or cloth, and hung around the neck on thongs or necklaces.”¹⁵ Block prints found at the “Sheikh’s house” (larger pieces are those of the RN 1009, 1038, and 1039 groups; smaller fragments are found in the RN 985 and 988 groups; for catalogue, see Appendix 2) are, as the following description and analysis will show, no exceptions.

In one fragment (RN 1009a), three lines are preserved of the *sūrat al-fātiḥa* of the Qur’an: *al-ḥamdu li-llāh rabb [al-‘ālamīn]* (line 1), *mālik yawm al-dīn iyyāka nābudu wa-[iyyāka nasta‘īn]* (line 2), *iḥdīnā al-ṣirāṭ [al-mustaqīm]* (line 3). In the right margin, to be read vertically, is the word *al-ṣamad*, “[Allāh,] the Eternal,” from Qur’an 112: 2, the famous *sūrat al-ikhhlāṣ*, which is among the most frequently cited *sūras* for amulets. This Qur’anic citation is most likely a continuation of what begins from the bottom of another fragment (RN 1009b), written upwards in the margin.

In that second fragment (RN 1009b), one finds the *basmala*, in a much larger bold-faced *naskh* script, and two lines of the amulet proper, in the regular size *naskh*. The text of the amulet proper begins with *allāhumma innī as’al[lu] . . .*, “O God, I request that . . .”; and after this, in the next line, only one word, *ilā*, has survived.¹⁶

in W. Kubiak and G. Scanlon, eds., *Fustat C. Vol. 2 of Fustat Expedition Final Report* (Winona Lake, Indiana, 1989), 64–80, especially 69–70, 76–80.

¹³ The function and language of the *ḥijāb* is outlined by the Mamluk historian al-Suyūṭī in his *al-Raḥma fī al-ṭibb wa-al-ḥikma*, ed. Zuhayr ‘Alwān ([Casablanca], n.d.), 252–58. The use of another term, *ṭarsh*, to refer to block-printed Arabic amulets was first proposed by Richard Bulliet in his “Medieval Arabic *Ṭarsh*: A forgotten chapter in the history of printing,” *JAOIS* 107 (1987): 427–38. Although this hypothesis is based on an analysis of the works of two medieval Arabic poets, the conclusion should not be seen as definitive and exclusive; the term *ṭarsh* could just be one of the accepted proper terms. For more discussion of the term *ṭarsh*, see Karl Schaefer, “Arabic Printing before Gutenberg: Block-printed Arabic amulets,” in Eva Hanebutt-Benz, Dagmar Glass, and Geoffrey Roper, eds., *Sprachen des Nahen Ostens und die Druckrevolution: eine interkulturelle Begegnung* (Westhofen, 2002), 123–24.

¹⁴ Krek, 12.

¹⁵ Karl Schaefer, “Eleven Medieval Arabic Block Prints in the Cambridge University Library,” *Arabica* 48 (2001), 223.

¹⁶ The use of multiple *basmalas* to introduce various elements of an amulet is also seen elsewhere; see Schaefer, “Arabic Block Prints,” 220 (T-S Ar.20.1).

In the right margin is the Qur'anic citation, again, from *sūrat al-ikhhlās*, written vertically in bold letters in red ink, of which only three words, [a]ḥad qul huwa, have survived. Insofar as aḥad is the last word (“[and equal to Him is not] any one”) of the *sūra* (112: 4) while qul huwa (“Say: He [is God]. . . .”) is the first, it is apparent that the entire *sūra* is being repeated again and again to create a sort of cyclical ornamental frame.

If in the RN 1009 group the amulet proper is for the most part lost, the next group, RN 1039, retains more, although it is far from being complete. One fragment (RN 1039a) contains eight lines of text plus one line of marginalia from Qur'an 112: 1, “Say He is God, One.” The main text is as follows:

3. [B]y blessings of God Almighty [.]
4. I beseech (*as'alu*) Muḥammad at night [. . . that]
5. he who carries the Book of God (*ḥāmīl kitāb allāh*), by the command of God,
6. he who wrote (*al-kātib*) [this amulet?], and he who carries it (*al-ḥammāl*) will stay safe and sound [. . .]
7. a thousand (times). There is no power and no strength save in God,
8. [.] the Sublime, the Most High [.].

In addition to the formulaic *ḥawqala* (line 7), one of the most frequent stock phrases in charms and amulets for general protection,¹⁷ the verb “I beseech (*as'alu*) . . .” is also a typical element of amulets, used to introduce the specific request.¹⁸ In the present case, the reference to “he who carries the Book of God” is intriguing. At face value, the *kitāb allāh* is an obvious reference to the Qur'an, thus one is tempted to see *ḥāmīl kitāb allāh* as referring to the Prophet Muḥammad. But such wording and imagination would be very odd in mainstream Islamic terminology. Thus the phrase may simply imply anyone who carries a copy of the Qur'an. There is also the possibility that the *kitāb* here does not, after all, denote the Qur'an but refers instead to a “writing” that is blessed “by God,” that is, the text of the amulet proper.¹⁹ So the phrase would mean “he who carries this amulet.”

¹⁷ Cf. al-Suyūṭī, 125, 142, 146, 151, 265.

¹⁸ See Schaefer, “Arabic Block Prints,” 224.

¹⁹ This particular technical meaning for the *kitāb* is discussed by Schaefer, who has reported the cases in which the phrase *man 'allaqa 'alayhi ḥādḥā al-kitāb*, “whoever hangs upon himself this writing (i.e., the amulet) . . .,” and a variant thereof, is commonly found (“Arabic Block Prints,” 225).

In any case, the text makes it clear that this is a generic amulet for the protection of anyone who either wrote it or carries it on his or her person.

This fragment also shows striking similarities to the above-mentioned RN 1009 group: the same curved angular *naskh* script, and the same marginal decorative Qur'anic citations from the *sūrat al-ikhhlās*; even the quality and texture of the paper are similar. It may well be that RN 1039a originally belonged to the RN 1009 group, or that at least the two sets of fragments were the work of the same printer. The three remaining smaller pieces in the RN 1039 group do show some different ornamental styles, with drawings of curved lines and circles in red ink that seem to have been added by hand. This is understandable in that the “floriations,”²⁰ even the simple ones shown in the Quseir specimens, are technically difficult to maneuver in print.

This kind of combination of block printing and manual decoration is seen in yet another specimen, RN 1038, by far the largest of its kind found in the “Sheikh’s house” (see Plate 1). This multi-layered amulet reveals the artistic intricacy and innovative technique involved in medieval Arabic block printing. The text as a whole is arranged in a complex of designs. The outer layer presents the Qur'anic citation from, again, the *sūrat al-ikhhlās*, in red ink and with full vocalizations. The second layer reveals an intricately wrought pattern wherein one finds Qur'anic citation from the *sūrat al-ikhhlās*, in black ink, in diamond-shaped frames the centers of which feature a floral device. In the central inner layer one finds the formulaic invocation *lā ilāha illā llāh [Muḥammad rasū]lu llāh*, “There is no god but Allāh; [Muḥammad] is His messenger.” This is written, by hand, in red ink and in bolder face that is nearly ten times larger than that of the two outer layers, which are block printed. Due to the damage to the paper, other textual material has not survived; either the supposed “amulet proper” is lost due to the damage, or it is possible that the sheet of paper is itself a complete generic amulet that requires no specific requests for protection.²¹

²⁰ The “floriations” ornament in the Fatimid block prints is discussed in Richards, 70.

²¹ The block-printed amulets that are comprised exclusively of Qur'anic citations are also found elsewhere; see Schaefer, “Arabic Block Prints,” 217–18 (Michaelides E.32); “Arabic Printing,” 124. Modern-day examples of this type also abound; see

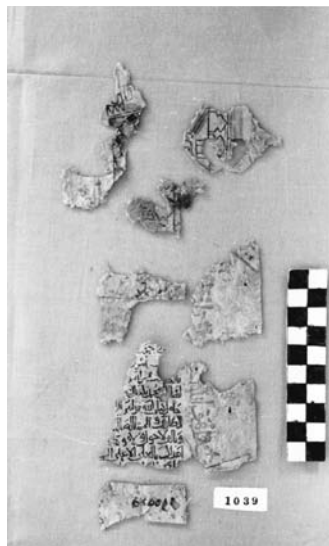


Plate 1: *Block printed amulets and astrological dials*

A close examination of the specimens in question reveals that the block prints from Quseir share many of the basic elements and characteristic features found in other medieval Arabic block prints, these including the *basmala*, the *shahāda*, excerpts from the Qur'an, especially *sūrat al-fātiḥa* and *sūrat al-ikhlāṣ*,²² formulaic supplications, one or more requests for divine protection from specific dangers or the grant of a specific favor, and rudimentary decorative devices in colored inks.²³ On the other hand, some Quseir specimens have shown slight variants and little twists of the "standard" features. For example, RN 985a is a tiny fragment on which the only two extant utterances, each in a square divided by double-lines, read *yā qadar*, "O the divine decree!," and *yā 'alā*, "O the divine highness!" This ought to be seen as derivatives of the lists of the "Beautiful Names" of God, wrought in evenly divided squares, yet another popular element in general Islamic charms and amulets,²⁴ in that the *qadar* is related to *al-qādir*, "the Powerful," and the *'alā* to either *al-'alī*, or *al-'ālī*, "the High," among the ninety-nine divine names, and attributes, of God.

Aside from block-printed amulets, there are also a few hand-written magical texts that are obviously not of the *ḥijāb* type. Unlike the *ḥijāb* amulets, which are used primarily for general protection, these hand-written charms and magical words appear to be aimed at more specific remedies. One such text (RN 1031a*) is for woman who wishes to get pregnant.²⁵ Another text (RN 1016b*) provides prevention of, and cures for, certain physical ailments.²⁶ The third text (RN 996b)

Alexander Fodor, "Amulets from the Islamic World: Catalogue of the exhibition held in Budapest, in 1988," *The Arabist* (1990).

²² Cf. Krek, 12. That these two *sūras* constitute a mandatory element of the amulets and charms is also explained in al-Suyūṭī, 61, 150–51, 292 (states, for example, that the *sūrat al-ikhḫlāṣ* should be repeated "a thousand times" for the safeguarding of food consumption [*lil-baraka fi al-ṭa'ām*]). This seems to have continued over time insofar as the *sūra* 112 may still be seen in pre-modern and modern-day *ḥijāb*-amulets (Fodor, 103, no. 192). And on the other hand, the so-called *āyat al-kursī*, or Throne Verse (Qur'an 2: 255, *allāh lā ilāha illā huwa al-ḥayyu al-qayyūm . . .*) has also been one of the most popular mandatory elements in amulets; see Fodor, 2, and examples (*passim*). At least one Quseir fragment (RN 1070b) contains the Throne Verse; it is also featured in the block printed amulet at Columbia University; see Bulliet, 432–37 (pls. II, III, IV).

²³ See Krek, 12; Schaefer, "Arabic Block Prints," 215–25.

²⁴ Cf. Schaefer, "Arabic Block Prints," 222, 224–25; "Arabic Printing," 127; Krek, 14; Fodor, 101 (no. 188).

²⁵ Also cf. al-Suyūṭī, 249.

²⁶ Cf. al-Suyūṭī, 26–32.

claims to have the power of a talisman (*al-ṭalāsīm*) that would not only untangle one's tongue from mumbo jumbo and purify one's mind of lustful thoughts (*al-zinā*), but also prevent one from diseases like leprosy and elephantiasis (*al-baras wa-al-judhām*).²⁷ Still a fourth text (RN 1026e) tackles the crisis of certain "plague (*tā'ūn*)" the details of which are missing from the manuscript.²⁸

Other kinds of protection are also invoked in various amulets and charms found in Quseir. One text (RN 1052*) contains the names of the "Men of the Cave," or so-called "Seven Sleepers," a common motif in medieval Arabo-Islamic magic,²⁹ and is meant to be used to "put out house fires."

In some of these amulets and charms, the age-old Arabo-Islamic "magic numbers" and "magic letters" are used (for more details, see chapter 4 below). One hand-written fragment (RN 1039f) contains barely six ◀ (five) signs in a row.³⁰ Another piece, a paper scroll originally folded and wrapped with a cord (RN 978), has twenty-nine lines that contain nothing but one single word, *huwa*, "He (i.e., God)," being repeated nearly a hundred times. This could be a Qur'anic citation (namely Qur'an 112: 1, *huwa allāh aḥad*, "He is God, One."), written in individual words or letters, making up a complete amulet,³¹ or perhaps simply a jotting. More magic numbers or magic letters are found in other fragments (e.g., RN 1031b) as well. Another remarkable example is found on the verso of RN 1001a*; the text is divided to two parts: the right half contains five signs of ۳ (three) in a row, to be sandwiched by several unrecognizable "magic signs"; the left half displays six monograms that might represent individual letter numerals. On the top left of the paper are more enigmatic

²⁷ Cf. al-Suyūṭī, 196–98.

²⁸ For a more comprehensive survey of magical beliefs and practices for healing purposes, see Michael Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East* (Princeton, 1977), 121–42; Manfred Ullmann, *Islamic Medicine* (Edinburgh, 1978 [1997 reprint]), 107–14.

²⁹ Cf. al-Suyūṭī, 229; Annemarie Schimmel, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Leiden, 1970), Pl. XLIII (the names of the Seven Sleepers around the name of their dog, written in Istanbul, 1900). More bibliography is to be found in the commentary of RN 1052*.

³⁰ Examples of "magic" numerals and letters in combination for the purpose of remedy and protection are presented in al-Suyūṭī, 44, 70, 125–27, 142, 147, 150–62, 174, 194, 227, 231, 248–49, 261, 265, 269, 290, 296. In addition to the better known device of "magic square," many of these cited by al-Suyūṭī comprise of combinations of numerals and individual letters.

³¹ Similar modern-day example is found in Fodor, 79 (no. 145), where the Qur'anic verses are written in separate letters.

monograms. All told, the exact significance of these bilingual “magic” numbers and letters in incantation is a subject that still awaits further research.

In addition to paper amulets and charms found in the “Sheikh’s house,” a small leather amulet was uncovered at a site not far from the house during recent excavations at Quseir.³² There is also the possibility that the artifact is in fact a leather container for paper amulets, a popular everyday accessory item in the medieval and pre-modern Islamic world.³³

Astrological Dials

Dials and diagrams pertaining to astrology, a different but related area of superstitious belief and supernatural pursuit, are also featured in some fragments discovered at the “Sheikh’s house.” Of the RN 1039 group, four fragments contain what appear to be astrological dials or signs of the zodiac (see Plate 1). One fragment (RN 1039b) has a nearly complete round circle, outlined by several layers of circles colored in red and black ink. In the center is the heading *dāʾirat al-manāzil*, “orbit of lunar phases.” Another fragment (RN 1039e) contains a grid of rectangular and square cells, containing what are supposedly names of the planets, or celestial phases. Other diagrams are added outside of the grid. The third fragment (RN 1039c) comprises a very large round circle that is divided into many radiant and diagonal grids with names of the planets and their positions in relation to each other in them. In the outer sphere, the words *shams*, “sun,” and *ʿaṭārid*, “Mercury,” are recognizable. In the inner circle, terms such as *abʿad*, “the most far,” and *aqṣar*, “the nearest,” are repeated, as if to indicate the distances between the planets and celestial phases in question. The fourth small fragment (RN 1039d) contains a grid of several squares, all radiating from a supposed center (sun? moon?) which is missing from the manuscript. The word *[al-]qāriʿa*, “the hour of the Last Judgement,” is written

³² Jill Phillips, “Leather,” in David Peacock, Lucy Blue, and Stephanie Moser, eds., *Myos Hormos: Quseir al-Qadim: A Roman & Islamic port on the Red Sea coast of Egypt* (Interim Report, 2002), 73.

³³ Cf. Fodor, *passim*.

in one square, and the word *mafāri*[*q?*], “spherical junctions (?),” in another.

Similar charts, or dials, are also featured in yet another group of manuscripts, namely RN 1029.³⁴ In one fragment (RN 1029b), along one side of the edge is part of the *basmala*, in calligraphic hand, red ink and bold face; along the other side of the edge is the phrase *lam yūlad*, “[God] has not been begotten,” from the *sūrat al-ikhhlāṣ* of the Qur’an, also in red ink. In the center is preserved what appears to be a grid of several rectangular cells and a round circle, with lines in red and black ink. The written contents inside the cells and the circle are entirely missing; but judging from its appearance, this fragment should likely have contained astrological dials similar to those of the 1039 group discussed above. The nature of such dials is again reaffirmed by another fragment in the same group (RN 1029c): on the recto is preserved a lunar dial, in the form of a grid of several square and rectangular cells, each with a phrase in it; one has *dā’irat al-manāzil*, and another *dā’irat al*-[. . .]. The verso contains what looks like another diagram, in the form of a large circle, divided into several rectangular cells, with, supposedly, names of the planets, or celestial phases, in them.

Random drawings showing curved lines connected with dots and variously shaped grids figure on several sheets of paper (RN 970c, 1035); but they are too fragmentary to allow further reading. These could be astrological dials and signs of the zodiac, or diagrams of other magical functions the details of which remain to be fully recovered.

Now, what do we learn from these non-commercial texts abandoned at the “Sheikh’s house”? With regard to the “funeral texts,” who died? Family members? Pilgrims? Who performed the services? As for the “healing texts,” block-printed amulets and hand-written charms, who produced them, and where? Regarding the astrological dials, who used them, and for what purposes?

While the answers to these questions may be uncertain and the picture may for the most part remain murky, one thing is certain:

³⁴ Some illustrated fragments of the RN 1029 and 1039 groups initially appeared to be maritime maps and were published as such (see Li Guo, “Arabic Documents,” part 1, 166), but this is obviously inaccurate.

these texts are all strung on a common thread, that is, the unknown world of death, illness, natural disasters, and dangers; in other words, the variants of the time-honored Arab notion of *surūf al-dahr*, “vicissitudes of fate,” or changes of one’s fortune. In this sense, they are all very useful for practical purposes. Their obvious functionality may explain the existence of such materials in a warehouse-residence like the “Sheikh’s house.” It fuels the speculation that the private activities around the compound, primarily buying and selling, perhaps expanded beyond the walls of the house to the public sphere, to social services such as funeral arrangements for the deceased on the pilgrimage route, medical care for the sick, spiritual guidance and material assistance for the poor and needy, and other related services.³⁵

In the case of “funeral texts,” one may certainly argue that the themes of doing good in this life and God’s rewards in the hereafter as seen in the “funeral texts” discussed above may be thought of as generic topics in general religious discourse.³⁶ However, the fact that no other kinds of purely literary or religious texts were found in the “Sheikh’s house” strongly suggests that such texts existed for practical reasons. In this regard, one ought to bear in mind that aside from his day job as a grain broker and trade head (*rayyis*), Ibrāhīm was himself also a *khaṭīb*, a sermon giver. The sermons and prayers found in the house were thus very much likely his working texts.

As for amulets, charms, and magic words, the finds from the “Sheikh’s house” are perhaps best placed within the Upper Egyptian tradition of magical practices.³⁷ The sufi connection, on the other hand, has also been suggested by Richard Bulliet in view of the general use of such material in the medieval Islamic Near East. The theory is that these printed amulets were done in imitation of handwritten amulets commissioned from sufis who, it is contended, com-

³⁵ The merchants’ role as social-service officers and “trustees of the court” was also amply documented in the Cairo Geniza papers; see *MS*, 1: 158–61; 2: chapter v, section B.

³⁶ For a recent survey of Islamic hermeneutic discourse on death, see Thomas Bauer, “Islamische Totenbücher. Entwicklung einer Textgattung in Schatten Ġazālīs,” in S. Leder et al., eds, *Studies in Arabic and Islam: Proceedings of the 19th Congress, Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants, Halle 1998* (Leuven, 2002), 421–36. I thank Bauer for providing me with a copy of his article.

³⁷ A general discussion of the popular “Ṣa’idī magicians” is in Jonathan Berkey, “Culture and society during the late Middle Ages,” *CHE*, 382–83.

manded more generous fees for such work than the shady characters who peddled the printed variety.³⁸ This is, of course, just one interpretation. In the present context of Quseir, however, no evidence is found to support this line of argument. It cannot be totally ruled out either, however. The commercial aspects of these documents cannot be denied in any case; the amulets were indeed commodities, no matter whether they were for the benefit of the sufis, or for the profits of peddlers in the marketplace. In light of the overall function of the “Sheikh’s house,” the amulets found herein may have something to do with the needs of the pilgrims in searching for protection along the long, and at times dangerous, journey across the Nile, deserts, and the Red Sea. It is a well-documented fact that the death rate was extraordinarily high among pilgrims in pre-modern times, caused by natural disasters, thirst, physical exhaustion, plague, and attacks by Bedouin.³⁹ This also explains why the few texts that are closer to what may be identified as “pure” *belles lettres* are all prayers, in the form of verse, on behalf of the departing loved ones (RN 964a*, 968c*, and 984b). They ought perhaps to be seen as reflections of this aspect of the reality of life around the “Sheikh’s house,” where comings and goings were part of the daily routine, but were nevertheless seen as activities requiring God’s protection. Even in a “no-nonsense” business world, yearning, longing, and praying were natural outpourings of the sentiments of the community. Many of the immediate family members of the Abū Mufarrij clan were embarking upon long-distance journeys on the sea and over land, as were their neighbors in Quseir and the passing pilgrimage caravans.

In this connection, the role of women in magic practices and prayer-giving is also worth further exploration. Again, parallel behavior patterns can be traced to the contemporary Cairo-based Mediterranean merchant community for whom prayers and calls for protection against natural disasters and human errors amount, too, to a pre-occupation for long-distance business travelers. Goitein noted that, “in the main, a traveler relied for his protection on the prayer of his relatives and friends—in particular, on that of this mother, another

³⁸ Bulliet, 436–38; also Schaefer, “Arabic Printing,” 124.

³⁹ See Abdullah ‘Ankawi, “The Pilgrimage to Mecca in Mamlūk Times,” *Arabian Studies* 1 (1974): 146–70, especially 160–61.

elderly woman, or a saintly person known to him.”⁴⁰ This may provide a footnote to the similar letters or prayers, all in women’s names, found in the “Sheikh’s house” (e.g., 964a*, 991a*, 1018d*).

While the sentimental importance of such texts should not be denied, the underlying commercial interests cannot be overlooked either. These texts could have been used by and for family members, but they could also very likely have been sold for profit. The block prints were meant for mass production and consumption to begin with, and other items may justifiably have had market value as well.

This leads to another question: Where were these “for-profit” block prints being produced? Krek, in his study of medieval Arabic block prints, has suggested that, in the case of both Vienna block prints and Quseir block prints, not only the technique but even the prints themselves may have been imported from China via India, intended for the Near Eastern market. This is on account of the script, which resembles what has been found on some Chinese-made vases, as well as the vases’ archaeological association with other objects that were identified as imports from India and China.⁴¹ In other words, the prints were custom-made in China, the country where this type of printing was invented. This interpretation, while bold, still needs further proof. Schaefer, on the other hand, seems to hold that the Arabic block prints he studied (all from the Cairo Geniza) were locally made, the products of the Islamic Near East.⁴² Thus this question is perhaps better left for specialists to debate, insofar as our present goal is to provide more specimens for future comprehensive survey and synthesis.

This brings us back to the Quseir context. The block prints and other magical and/or astrological materials could, in all probability, have been produced outside of Quseir and then brought into the possession of either Abū Mufarrij or Ibrāhīm. The specimens do not necessarily have to have been locally produced in order to have served the family and the community.

⁴⁰ *MS*, 1: 346–47 (the quote is from 346).

⁴¹ Krek, 15.

⁴² Technical aspects of block printing are discussed in his “Arabic Block Prints,” 226–28.

Appendix 1: Medieval Arabic Block Prints

To date, some sixty Arabic block prints, scattered throughout a dozen European, American, and Arab institutions, have been reported and examined. The largest collection is housed at the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna and has been examined and cited extensively; see Josef Karabacek, *Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer. Führer durch die Ausstellung* (Vienna, 1894); Adolph Grohmann, *Allgemeine Einführung in die arabischen Papyri* (Wien, 1924); T. F. Carter, *The Invention of Printing in China and its Spread Westward* (New York, 1925). One block-print on parchment in the University of Pennsylvania Museum was studied by G. Levi Della Vida, in "An Arabic Block Print," *The Scientific Monthly*, LIX (1944): 473–74. For block prints in Cambridge, see Paul Lunde, "A Missing Link," *Aramco World*, 32 (1981): 26–27; Karl Schaefer, "Eleven Medieval Arabic Block Prints in the Cambridge University Library," *Arabica* 48 (2001): 210–39. While the majority of the specimens are believed to have come from Egypt, Richard Bulliet reported two Arabic block prints that were apparently made in Muslim Spain now housed in the Medina Collection, New York Public Library (Nos. Ca. 31, 32), and one block print now in the Columbia University Library; see "Printing in the Medieval Islamic Underworld," *Columbia Library Columns* 36 (1987): 13–20; and "Medieval Arabic *Ṭarsh*: A forgotten chapter in the history of printing," *JAOS* 107 (1987): 427–38. In Cairo, Arabic block prints, including the finds from excavations in Fustat and Quseir, are housed in Museum of Islamic Art and have been inventoried by Krek; see "Arabic Block Printing," *ARCEN* (1985): 12–16. The two block prints from Fustat (Nos. 18, 43) were examined and published by D. S. Richards; see "Written Documents," in *Fustat C. Vol. 2 of Fustat Expedition Final Report*, 64–80.

More information about medieval Arabic block-printed amulets has recently emerged: at least one block print from the Cairo Geniza (TS Ar 30 184/TS8J18.5), an amulet dating from the eleventh century and housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, was recently on exhibition at the Spertus Museum, Chicago, in 2002 (the registration number is 1978 78.546.32; but no literature seems to be available). Five medieval Arabic block-prints were put on display in 2002 at the Gutenberg Museum, Mainz, Germany. Among the five, four were well known (exhibition nos. 58–61; three from Vienna, one from the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin), and one (no. 62),

currently at the J. W. Th. van Meeuwen private collection, was purchased at an auction of Adolf Grohmann's papers in the late 1980s. In addition, Rachel Milstein has recently discovered a number of examples in Istanbul but has yet to publish his research; see Karl Schaefer, "Arabic printing before Gutenberg: block-printed Arabic amulets," in Eva Hanebutt-Benz et al., eds., *Sprachen des Nahen Ostens und die Druckrevolution: eine interkulturelle Begegnung* (Westhofen: WVA-Verlag Skulima, 2002), 123–28, 475–78 (catalogue).

Later samples of Arabic block printing are to be found in Marie-Geneviève Guesdon and Annie Vernay-Nouri, eds., *L'art du livre arabe* (Paris, 2002), 163–75 (the earliest sample is dated from 1514).⁴³ Pre-modern and modern-day printed *ḥijāb/ṭarsh* amulets, amulets cases (metal, leather, textile), Qur'an-holder, pendants, rings, necklace, jewelry, magic bowls, and other related items are catalogued in Fodor, 43–192 (Muslim amulets).

Appendix 2: A Catalogue of the Block Prints Uncovered in Quseir

(All the fragments found in the "Sheikh's house" are lumped together as a few larger items and are now housed in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo.)

RN 985a, 5.7 × 1.8 cm, recto a few words, *yā qadr*, "O the divine decree!," *yā 'alā'*, "O the divine highness!," written in separate grids, black ink, verso blank.

RN 988c, 4 × 3 cm, recto traces of a round dial and a grid with a few words written in some of the cells, red and black ink, verso blank.

RN 1009a, 8.8 × 2.8 cm, recto three lines of Qur'an 1: 1–6 in black ink plus one line of Qur'an 112: 2 in the right margin in red ink, verso blank.

RN 1009b, 7.1 × 6.2 cm, recto three lines of amulet text in black ink plus one line of Qur'an 112: 1–4 in the right margin in red ink, verso blank.

⁴³ Karl Schaefer states that "block printing in the Arab world ceased about the middle of the fifteenth century" insofar as "no extant examples later than the mid-1400s are presently known" ("Arabic Printing," 127). This, as we have seen, can no longer be maintained.

- RN 1029b, 9.4×4.8 cm, recto signs of the zodiac and Qur'an 112: 3 in red and black ink, verso blank.
- RN 1029c, 6.8×6.3 cm, recto traces of a lunar dial in red and black ink, verso traces of an astrological dial in black ink.
- RN 1038, 26.5×15.2 cm, recto several lines, and clusters, of amulet text and illustrations in red and black ink, verso blank.
- RN 1039a, 8.5×6.6 cm, recto eight lines of amulet text in black ink, plus one line of Qur'an 112: 1 in the right margin in red ink, verso blank.
- RN 1039b, 5.6×4.9 cm, recto traces of astrological dials in red and black ink, verso blank.
- RN 1039c, 3.5×7.7 cm, recto traces of astrological dials and spherical charts in black ink, verso blank.
- RN 1039d, 4×5.8 cm, recto traces of a spherical dial in red and black ink, verso blank.
- RN 1039e, 4.8×6.5 cm, traces of an astrological dial in black ink, verso blank.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

THE RED SEA TRADE ON THE EVE OF THE “WORLD SYSTEM”

The hundreds of paper fragments uncovered at the “Sheikh’s house,” Quseir, in the 1982 season—as well as the hundreds more from the seasons 1978, 1980, and the newly uncovered documents in the seasons 2001–2003, all from other archaeological loci in the ancient town—form a mine of information for the study of the Red Sea commerce and economic history of Islamic Egypt. Our task to stitch together a coherent story, however, as the fragmentary accounts reconstructed in the preceding chapters can attest, is not an easy one. In fact, there can be no storytelling in the traditional sense; what we witness here is a pastiche of scrambled shreds in search of a narrative. From a textual and cultural perspective, the stories told here are largely “from below,” from the lower end of the spectrum of medieval Arabic writing, marred with bad grammar, awkward syntax, and less-than-elegant handwriting (to be discussed in chapter 4 below). Given all the deficiencies in documentation, compounded by a general lack of corresponding literary sources, the picture outlined in this book is far from being complete. There are, therefore, issues to be sorted out and questions to be answered before the greater context can be adequately addressed.

When it comes to “big picture” issues, one must first confront the “so what” questions: What is the significance of these fragmented texts for our better understanding of the economic history of Islamic Egypt? Yes, we have gotten into somebody’s discarded personal documents and have learned much about his and his family’s history, their social ties, and their attitudes towards life, illness, death, and God—the kind of questions that are still confounding modern-day minds and souls. More importantly, we now understand something of the once modestly prosperous but eventually folding shipping business they embarked upon. What kind of information can we expect to glean from this for general historical inquiry? What kind of conclusions might we possibly draw? In this respect, there are, in my opinion, two intertwined points to be made. One is that these documents are significant for the study of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean

trade overall. The other is that these documents contain great potential for aiding our understanding of the details of this trade, thus providing new material for the general study of Islamic economic, social, and cultural history.

As I have already mentioned in the Preface, the Quseir collection distinguishes itself from other well known archival and non-archival documentary collections from Islamic Egypt—the Cairo Geniza,¹ the Mount Sinai Monastery archive,² the Cairo *waqf* deeds,³ and the “Vienna papers”⁴—in many ways: its locale (on the Red Sea, as opposed to elsewhere), the community it served (a Muslim community, as opposed to the Jewish and Christian communities represented by the Cairo Geniza papers and Mount Sinai Monastery archive), the kind of the material it contains (mainly non-chancery texts on commerce and communal rituals). Taken together, these are firsthand accounts of the life and history on both shores of the Red Sea, namely Upper Egypt, the Hijaz, and Yemen, of which previously known documentary and literary sources reveal very little.

In the current ongoing debate over the validity of the old “world system” paradigm, Janet Abu-Lughod challenges the traditionally held view that the first world system began to emerge in the fifteenth century Europe, preceding the emergence of industrial capitalism, and argues for the existence of a “Eurasian world system”—a large though not truly global economy—between the mid-thirteenth and mid-fourteenth centuries, linking Asia by land and sea with Europe

¹ See *MS*; select texts from the Cambridge collection were published in *ALAD*; for the catalogue see: Colin Baker and Meira Polliack, *Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections* (Cambridge, 2001).

² It is the only extant archive of chancery documents from medieval Egypt; most of the documents are decrees issued by sultans as edicts of protection and privilege to the Greek Orthodox Monastery of St. Catherine’s on Mount Sinai; source: A. S. Atiya, *The Arabic Manuscripts of Mt. Sinai* (Baltimore, 1955); major texts were published in *FD*, *DIC*, *MSU*. In addition, certain European archives contain a number of Arabic documents, such as treaties and diplomatic correspondence; sources: M. A. Alarcón y Santón and R. G. de Linares, *Los documentos arabes diplomaticos del archivo de la Corona de Aragon* (Madrid, 1940); Michele Amari, *I diplomati arabi del R. Archivio Fiorentino* (Florence, 1863).

³ Some nine hundred *waqf*, “religious endowments deeds,” drawn up on behalf of the sultans and other high officials; these are the only Egyptian state documents from before the Ottoman conquest; source: M. Amin: *Catalogue des documents d’archives du Caire, de 239/853 à 922/1516* (Cairo, 1981).

⁴ Thousands of loose scraps of paper stored in boxes at the Österreichische Staatsbibliothek; the fragments, dating from the Fatimid, Ayyubid, and Mamluk periods, are mainly from Fayyūm and Ashmūnayn and have recently been published; see *DAA1*, *DAA2*, *DAA3*.

via the Near East.⁵ However, one of the key areas on the map, the Red Sea region, remains murky. The fact that after all these years, except for some general synthetic accounts, we still await a monograph devoted to Red Sea trade speaks volumes about the current state of knowledge in the field. The major obstacle lies obviously in sources. Everyone working on the subject matter, from S. D. Goitein on, bemoans the lack of information. Goitein's discussion of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean commerce, for example, stopped short for lack of sources coming from *outside* of Cairo, the end and starting point of the Red Sea trade routes. Unlike Cairo, which for several centuries played a major role in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade, and Qūš, the capital of Upper Egypt, Quseir was a lesser point of administration and exchange, a place through which rural revenues and the overseas trade, as well as pilgrimage caravans, passed on their way to and from Cairo, the Hijaz, Yemen, and Asia. Because Quseir's "frontier" location gave it such a distinctive economic, social, and political profile, a careful examination of these documents, together with an analysis of the various roles played by Quseir within the structure of the Ayyubid and Mamluk states, will be rewarding.

This brings us to my second point, that is, the potential of the Quseir documents in shedding light on details, rather than generalities, of the Red Sea trade, so they may serve as point of reference for large-scale comparison and comprehensive investigation. Having in the preceding chapters outlined and described the business practices and trade patterns unveiled by the documents, it is now appropriate to inquire what these details tell us about economic life and popular culture in this remote Red Sea port, and what is their relevance to our general historical inquiry. There are, in my opinion, three areas in which these documents have proved to hold great potential for further exploration. The three areas correspond, roughly, to the three chapters in Part One. The following discussion lays out each of these areas with its cluster of questions, some of which have

⁵ Following Abu-Lughod, there has been a growing body of literature which insists that before the Europeans arrived in Asia in the sixteenth century, Asians had enjoyed a long period of relatively peaceful, lucrative, and unrestricted trade; see, for example, Risso, 50–54, 104–6. The most recent, and somehow more cautious, take on the issue is Stephen Humphreys, "Egypt in the world system of the later Middle Ages," *CHE*, 445–61, especially 445, 447–48, 454–56.

been addressed in the preceding chapters, whereas others remain open for future research.

The first area is *family associations and business partnership*. Was Abū Mufarrij's *shūna*-warehouse an exclusive family enterprise? Kinship networks have long been thought to have played a central role in the organization of trade and commerce throughout pre-modern societies. Given the universality of such a trend in human history, what, then, is special about the Quseir experience? In the case of Shaykh Abū Mufarrij's warehouse, was it a close-knit family affair, or a loosely structured partnership of convenience? With the documents found at the "Sheikh's house," a family-oriented collection of business letters, we have a good case study in this line of pursuit. Based on our reading of the documents, it becomes clear that this indeed was a family-run business, much the same as those we have seen in medieval Cairo and elsewhere.⁶ In light of what the documents allow, we may even have enough reason to consider Abū Mufarrij's household the "Great House" that dominated the trade scene in Quseir on the Red Sea shore in the thirteenth century.

"Great House" or otherwise, "Islamic entrepreneurial activity," as Udovitch notes, "had already, by the late eighth century, moved beyond purely family associations. As important as family associations continued to be throughout the Islamic Middle Ages, the earliest legal sources already recognized that traders were likely to place commercial success ahead of family ties."⁷ In the Quseir context, the intriguing division of the family business, discussed in chapter 1, into probably two entities headed by the father Abū Mufarrij and the son Ibrāhīm respectively, may add one more footnote to this general phenomenon. Although we may never know the exact cause that brought about the split (it could be over money, or as a natural result of business growth, or due to some family feud), what we do know is that the "Great House" in Quseir was divided at some point and that the split did take place. The marginalized role of other members of the family, also discussed in chapter 1, is perhaps in keeping with this development as well. This general trend is not

⁶ *MS*, 1: 180–83. A similar case, though much earlier, is to be found in the Banū 'Abd al-Mu'min clan archive on papyri from the rural town Fayyūm in the ninth century; see Rāgīb, *Marchands d'étoffes du Fayyūm*.

⁷ Udovitch, 260.

only attested to in other contemporary Arabic documents, such as the Cairo Geniza papers, but also has shown a pattern of progression over the course of time. The complete and long-range pooling of resources among the family members, which was amply seen in the eleventh century Geniza letters, “seems to have been the exception rather than the rule” in the twelfth century, which saw a general switch from the exclusively family owned and operated mode towards more open types of partnership.⁸

In this regard, the Quseir documents show that other kinds of associations and partnerships outside of the family were actively sought after and actually being forged by Abū Mufarrij and Ibrāhīm, perhaps to cope with the tasks that required resources and labors that went beyond the capability of a single family. Be that as it may, of the two major institutions of medieval Islamic commercial cooperation, namely the proprietary partnership (*sharikat al-milk*), that is, equal joint ownership, and the *commenda* partnership, that is, joint investment through an agent-manager,⁹ which one can be used to describe Abū Mufarrij’s and Ibrāhīm’s enterprises? Insofar as the documents, as records of real trade practice, do not always bear the same technical terms as stipulated and described in legal writings, we can only approach the issue through speculative reading of the available textual testimony.

First and foremost, the documents make it clear that as far as Abū Mufarrij’s *shūna* is concerned, there was no such a thing as equal joint partnership. Shaykh Abū Mufarrij was *ṣāhib al-shūna*, the sole owner of the warehouse. As for his son Ibrāhīm, his capacity as a *rayyis*, “head trader,” among other things, points to the leadership role he would play in a wider range of business transactions. Secondly, the apparent hierarchy in the relationships between the senior partners—Abū Mufarrij, Ibrāhīm—and their employees, or perhaps partners of inferior statures, such as Shaykh Najīb, Khalaf, to name a few (see chapter 1), is also a clear indication of the nature of the partnership in which no traces of equal joint ownership—as defined by the legal writings, especially emphasized by the Shāfi‘ī school—can be identified.¹⁰ Thirdly, this is also evidenced by the

⁸ MS, 1: 183.

⁹ Udovitch, 17–169 (proprietary partnership), 170–248 (*commenda*).

¹⁰ Cf. Udovitch, 29–39.

sophisticated business practices and commercial partnerships as revealed in the texts (see chapters 1 and 2): the use of credit, the multi-tasking services, the open-ended chain of clients (“suppliers” and “buyers”), the notion of “work and capital” as joint investment, and so forth.¹¹ To sum up, in such enterprise, “people had to be hired for care and transportation of merchandise,” as Udovitch describes, “goods [might] be consigned to another person’s care, either to be sold or to be retrieved at a later date. Credit might have to be extended and a pledge taken to guarantee payment or, conversely, a pledge given to cover credit purchases for the partnership. Advantage might be gained by concluding partnerships of short duration with third parties or by investment or acceptance of capital in the form of a *commenda*.”¹² As the “to-do” list goes, Abū Mufarrij & Co. had indeed completed it.

Although it is perhaps somewhat risky to label the business practices around the “Sheikh’s house” with a definitive legal term, all the practical aspects, and facts, revealed in the documents do indeed point to the features of the *commenda* partnership, which was, as modern scholars commonly hold, “one of the most wide spread tools of commercial activity” in pre-modern Islamic Near East.¹³ It was, all told, a particularly suitable instrument for long-distance (and maritime) trade, thanks largely to its flexibility in giving the agent (in our case, Abū Mufarrij and Ibrāhīm) complete freedom in handling the capital and goods.¹⁴ In light of this understanding, some vague technical terms used in the documents now can be viewed in a more specific context: the claim of *‘idlī*, literally “my half share,” in one letter (RN 1004c*), for example, indicates the joint partner’s “half share” of the shipment;¹⁵ the honorific title of *al-amīn*, bestowed on an addressee (RN 1003b*), designates “trustworthy and faithful party” in a *commenda* partnership;¹⁶ the agent (*wakīl*), with whom Ibrāhīm worked (RN 1008*), ought to be thought of as part of the *commenda* configuration; the frequent mention of the *rahn*, literally “loan,” thus can now be interpreted as “pledging *commenda* property as security

¹¹ Cf. *MS*, 1: 164–208; Udovitch, 190–96.

¹² Udovitch, 97; also cf. 119–248.

¹³ Udovitch, 174.

¹⁴ Udovitch, 171–74.

¹⁵ Cf. *MS*, 1: 173–79.

¹⁶ Cf. Udovitch, 203–4, 240.

for a debt";¹⁷ as for the ubiquitous *al-kirā*, literally "lease contract," it may well indicate the use of *commenda* funds to rent and purchase pack animals.¹⁸

In this connection, and on a larger scale, one persistent question in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean scholarship is whether Arab traders were mostly peddlers. Muslim maritime merchants, it is commonly held, were by and large involved in the "carrying trade," that is, they were "not usually involved in the larger economic linkage of production with export-import,"¹⁹ but were rather carriers of goods, moving things around on limited family or partnership bases. However, the details as described in the documents examined in this study suggest that "Abū Mufarrij & Co." in Quseir was in fact doing much more than peddling. But it remains an open question as to whether it evolved into, or became part of, a full-fledged corporation, on the scale of the famous "Kārimī" merchants. To probe this question would have a certain impact on the "world system" debate, in that a tentative conclusion that most Muslim maritime merchants fit the definition of "peddlers" would have implications for any comparisons made between Arab-Muslim and Western European trade, which was generally organized into corporate bodies. "To co. or not co." is a question that is perhaps better left unanswered before more research on the Kārimīs, the Abū Mufarrij and Ibrāhīms, and their possible roles in business competition and commerce monopoly can be conducted in a comprehensive manner using the newly discovered documentary, as well as other, materials.

The second area is *security and communication on the trade (and pilgrimage) routes*. This has to do with the domestic policies and business customs in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt and, to a lesser extent, the Hijaz, and Yemen. Official and semi-official correspondences found in the house arguably form a direct link between the warehouse and the government. Additional circumstantial evidence also indicates that there was some kind of regular transport of correspondence, supplies, merchandise, and even cash by means of a maritime shuttle service between Quseir and other Red Sea ports to the south (*al-Yamānī, qiblī*). Weapons for the pilgrims' self-protection were

¹⁷ Cf. Udovitch, 9, 208.

¹⁸ Cf. Udovitch, 206–7.

¹⁹ Risso, 68 (note 33, with bibliography).

being purchased through local merchants such as Shaykh Abū Mufarrij, as were the provisions for the troops fighting the Crusaders. The probable Quseir-ʿAqaba (or the Hijaz)-Syria route, in light of the documents discussed above (chapter 2), can be added to the traditionally known Qūṣ-ʿAydhab-Hijaz-Yemen route under the Ayyubid regimes. The above-mentioned Kārimī connection (which itself was closely linked to the government) may be established as well.

How do we define the role played by the “Sheikh’s house” in security and communication? Since the central figure in a *commenda* partnership is the agent and manager (*wakīl*), the question would naturally be whether the Shaykh’s *shūna* was also a *dār al-wakāla*, or caravanserai. Given the multiple-capacities in which Abū Mufarrij and Ibrāhīm worked, ranging from merchant, agent, and manager (of the *commenda* joint venture), to tax-farmer, trade head (*arīf*, *rayyis*), and market inspector (*muḥtasib*), in addition to the social services the warehouse provided (e.g., postal address, funeral arrangements, medical care and magic practices; see chapters 2 and 3), the answer should perhaps be positive. Indirect evidence discerned from the documents (e.g., the frequent mentions of the agents and merchants “arriving” and “staying” in the house as well as the mysterious wooden key mentioned in the beginning of this study) also suggests that the warehouse might have provided lodgings for traveling merchants and their employees—another major function of the typical *dār al-wakāla* along the major trade routes all over the Islamic Near East.²⁰ In this respect, it is to be noted here that the fastidious distinction between “merchants,” “representatives,” and “partners” attested to in the Cairo Geniza papers is blurred, and merged, here in the Quseir setting. This is fitting for a remote, provincial small town where prominent citizens, such as Shaykh Abū Mufarrij and Ibrāhīm, were bound to wear many hats.

Lastly is the area of *cultural interactions between the merchants and the communities*. Trade routes are the avenues of cross-cultural and inter-communal contact throughout history. Although the cultural aspects of the merchants’ life as reflected in the texts are by far largely confined to the periphery, such as popular belief, communal rituals, and magic practices, the textual material is valuable in its own right

²⁰ For the function of the *dār al-wakāla*, see *MS*, 1: 186–92; Udovitch, 119–248. Sites identified as caravanserais were recently excavated in Quseir; see Lucy Blue and James Phillips, “Trench 9A,” in Peacock, 31–34.

for future study of the intersection of general Islamic values and indigenous cultural elements, and the tensions within the wide religio-cultural spectrum, from “high” (orthodox or prescriptive norms) to “low” (folk practices). In this respect, the seemingly thriving practices of magic at Quseir did not come from a vacuum, given the long tradition of magic practices in Upper Egypt, far from urban centers (see chapter 3). On the other hand, various aspects of popular culture were closely related to commercial activities: prayers were made in response to merchants’ call for protection; sermons were recited on behalf of the dead and the dying, perhaps mainly merchants or pilgrims; healing texts, amulets, and magic words were usually carried by travelers on their persons and could themselves be sold as commodities. In this connection, among the most fascinating finds from the “Sheikh’s house,” the block printed amulets and charms, also have invaluable significance for the study of the history of printing in the medieval Islamic world. The fact that they were found in places as far as the Red Sea shore is itself an indication of the far-reaching, if not global, cultural interactions through commerce.

The present study, based largely on the textual material from the “Sheikh’s house” in Quseir in the thirteenth century, is aimed at a microscopic exploration of the Red Sea trade and other related issues. Whether the reconstructed narrative in the preceding pages about the “Great House” of Shaykh Abū Mufarrij and his family presents an isolated case or an example of a common pattern is open for further discussion. The rise and fall of the family as witnessed by the documents certainly paralleled the fate of the ancient town of Quseir, which never developed into what it had aspired to be: a major harbor on the Red Sea. It was replaced, shortly after the folding of the family business, by other ports, such as ‘Aydhāb, with better natural and logistical conditions.²¹ Nevertheless, the story of the “Sheikh’s house,” by offering a firsthand account of what really happened and how, in this part of the Red Sea world, is one that is worth telling.

²¹ Cf. Whitcomb, “Introduction,” *QQ2*, 1–20; Hiebert, 127–28, 140–41; for later development of the port, see Daniel Crecelius, “The Importance of Qusayr in the Late Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 24 (1987): 53–60.

PART TWO

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE DOCUMENTS

If a letter is drafted by a scribe (al-kātib), then all the formulaic salutations (al-iṣṭilāḥ) mentioned above . . . should be used here; these include the invocation of God (al-du‘ā’), to be followed by “the slave kisses the ground and reports . . .,” and so forth.—Ibn Shīth al-Qurashī (fl. 12th century)¹

Between the sender’s name (tarjama) and the basmala, a wide space (fushḥa) should be left if the letter is from a superior to a lower ranking person; but if vice versa, then the tarjama should be written close to the basmala.—Ibn Shīth al-Qurashī²

Classification of the Texts

As discussed in Part One, the bulk of the documents recovered from the “Sheikh’s house” are what we would today classify as “economic texts”: business letters, shipping notes, delivery receipts, accounts, and documents dealing with legal issues involved in business transactions; in sum, records of a family-run brokerage and shipping business headed by an otherwise unknown Shaykh Abū Mufarrij and his son Ibrāhīm Abū Ishāq. Classifying the texts into “letters,” “notes,” and “accounts,” as they are grouped in the following edition of the texts, cannot avoid the risk of being somewhat arbitrary. This is because a great number of them are nothing more than fragmentary paper shreds that contain a few lines or words and do not, therefore, tell the whole story. Even in cases having full, or reasonably complete, codices, the functions of different types of texts can often overlap, since a “commercial letter” would deal with issues pertaining to a particular shipment and thus play the same role as a shipping note, whereas a “shipping note” may address some non-business

¹ *MK*, 38.

² *MK*, 46.

concerns and thus can be read as a business memo and a private letter. In many ways, definitions of the various types of medieval Arabic documents have never been clear-cut. But because the writings from the “Sheikh’s house” have proven to be relatively formulaic and consistent in format and language, they allow us a certain degree of certainty in our effort to classify them not only in view of their content but also because of their philological features. For this reason, therefore, our definitions of various documents in the category of “economic texts” rely mainly on what Donald Little would call “distinctive forms” of the original texts that guided his catalogue of the Islamic documents from the Ḥaram al-Sharif.³

A typical “commercial letter,” then, is defined as one that contains the standard structural segments of a *kitāb*, or formal letter, which consists of four basic elements: the salutatory, *narratio* (the main content), *corroboratio* (concluding greetings), and address. These letters are, for the most part, relatively long and multi-layered, discussing a wide range of both business and personal issues.

A typical “shipping note,” on the other hand, is much simpler, shorter, and more straightforward. Many of these “notes,” often called *al-ruqʿa*, literally “a piece of paper,”⁴ comprise merely one or two lines that say, “So-and-so is to receive such-and-such item, for such-and-such amount, from so-and-so.” All the details are reduced to the minimum: the mandatory *basmala* is often replaced by a logogram (to be discussed below); the fussy prolonged greetings, often seen in lengthy letters, are largely omitted; and, more importantly, the address is usually not given. Despite this tendency of overall brevity, many of these shipping notes still manage to be attentive to details deemed significant. The equivalent of today’s paperwork, with the functions of check, bill of exchange, and money order, all rolled into one,⁵ these notes must have served some legal purpose as written records

³ CHSH, 261.

⁴ The term has multiple meanings when used in different contexts; while in the Quseir documents, a *ruqʿa* is simply a “memo,” or “note,” in the Cairo Geniza papers it also signifies “order of payment,” which is distinct from the *suftaja*, “bill of exchange,” a term very common in medieval Arabic economic texts, but not seen in the Quseir papers. For the use of the *ruqʿa* and *suftaja* in the Geniza papers, see MS, 1: 242–45.

⁵ For the significance of paperwork in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, especially the role the *hawāla* and *suftaja* played in the so-called “paper economy,” see MS, 1: 245–46, 340–43; GQQ, 130; Bloom, *passim*, especially 135–41.

of business transactions and are, in a sense, more matter-of-fact and documentary in nature than the *kitāb*-letters. (Although *kitāb*-letters may also have some sort of legal tender as contracts,⁶ the proper specimens of this kind are curiously lacking among the fragments from the “Sheikh’s house.”)

Besides the *ruḡa* notes, other types of notes are found; some bear distinct headings and are therefore easy to classify. The common use of the *ḥawāla*, “bill of exchange,” or “transfer of credit,” has been discussed in chapter 2. Among the less frequently occurring types of paper notes is the so-called *tadhkira*, with the heading of *tadhkira mubāraka*, or “a blessed memorandum.”⁷ The only example of this type is found in RN 1027e*, a memo about the shipping of pepper. The second type is called *bayān*, a certificate- or description-like short note that opens with the heading of *bayān mubārak*, or “a blessed certificate.” The sole extant example of this type is found in RN 1021a*,⁸ which contains a statement of the prices (*qīma*) of flour being traded. In addition to these self-evident types, there are other distinctive forms, or types, of shipping note, which do not have headings but are nevertheless clear due to their contents and textual format. They are:

- The *taslīm/tasallum* type, that is, notes that begin with the phrase of *yatasallamu fulān* (so-and-so is to receive . . .) or *yusallamu ilā fulān* (to be delivered to so-and-so are: . . .).⁹
- The *tasyīr* type, notes that are introduced by the phrase *al-musayyar ilā fulān* (to be dispatched to so-and-so are: . . .).
- The *wāṣil/ṣādir* type, notes that open with the phrases of *al-wāṣil* or *al-ṣādir* (having arrived to so-and-so are: . . .).
- The *uṭlāq* type, notes that are headed by the phrase *yutlaqu li* (to be released, or to be granted, to so-and-so are: . . .). This is perhaps the shortest of all, in that no extant example exceeds three lines.

⁶ For the function of letter as contract, see Udovitch, 196–203.

⁷ Several samples of the *tadhkira* memo are found in *APEL*, 6: 191, 192, 195. The word *tadhkira*, though, is not written with the adjective *mubāraka* in these examples.

⁸ The sending of *bayān* notes is also mentioned in RN 1015a*, 1027c, 1032, 1088.

⁹ Similar examples are also found in the Cairo Geniza papers; see, for example, *ALAD*, nos. 137, 139. For the term *tasallama*, “received,” also see *MS*, 2: 444, 456, 487. One is also tempted to relate it to the *salam* contract described in medieval Muslim legal writings; see Jeanette Wakin, *The Function of Documents in Islamic Law: The chapters on sales from Ṭahāwī’s Kitāb al-shurūṭ al-kabīr* (Albany, NY, 1972), 41–42; Udovitch, 72, 79.

Less formulaic is another kind of economic texts: the account record. The texts that belong to this category are not addressed to any particular person, but, rather, contain itemized entries that include names of the customers (or sellers), the amount of the commodities, and the prices (or payment). Some of these accounts comprise what appears to be a balance sheet, with names and amounts, but from the terse wording it is hard to tell whether these balance sheets are about debts or credits. Some accounts register daily activities. Two badly damaged fragments from RN 1090b*, for instance, contain an itemization of the grains received each day, from Sunday through Friday. A similar example is found in scattered fragments from the RN 991 group, which contains day-to-day records of buying and selling;¹⁰ each day's entry is separated from the others by a line.

As for the non-economic texts, private letters, official correspondence, and miscellanies, which have been discussed in chapter 3, their classification is quite straightforward and need not be singled out here.

One particular obstacle facing one attempting a catalogue of all the textual finds from Quseir is the fragmentary nature of the extant codices. As far as the documents from the "Sheikh's house" are concerned, the current number of one hundred and fifty (RN 964–1093) is arrived at according to the groups of fragments that were found in the same archeological locus, respectively, and therefore seem to belong together; the actual number of scattered small scraps runs into the thousands. In this regard, one should keep in mind that despite the fact that many small fragments may belong to larger texts, they may have been listed under different registration numbers (RN) assigned at the excavation site in the 1982 season. It appears that some of these larger texts had been shredded into tiny pieces, not by forces of nature but by human hands. The documents were evidently abandoned over the course of time, and insofar as they were recovered from what appears to be virtually trash heaps, some have been kneaded into a paper ball of sorts and then tossed away, while others have been shredded to pieces, and were scattered all over the "Sheikh's house." A case in point is a lengthy, fully

¹⁰ A similar journal-like format is found in documents dating from the twelfth century; see *DAAl*, no. 68. Earlier specimens can be traced back to the papyri era; see, for example, David Margoliouth, *Catalogue of the Arabic Papyri in the John Raylands Library at Manchester* (Manchester, 1933), 131–32, pl. 27; also *MS*, 1: 207–8 (the so-called *muwāyama*, "daily account" or "journal.")

vocalized text on the theme of death and redemption; the original text was torn into dozens of pieces that are lumped together in different numbers, RN 1037, 1040, 1041, 1042, 1043, 1047, 1048, 1050, and 1051 (see chapter 3).

Poor preservation conditions aside, the texts themselves also pose challenges to modern-day students. Provincial, private, non-scholastic, and largely non-chancellery, the documents in question are for the most part informal and thus more idiosyncratic and less predictable than other document collections from Islamic Egypt, such as the *wagf* material, the Mount Sinai, and, to a lesser extent, the Cairo Geniza, which were often executed by learned men serving in the chancery or by professional scribes.

In this regard, if a combined knowledge of both paleography and phraseology is the key to success in reading medieval Arabic documents in general, it is particularly true when it comes to handling the Quseir texts. The informality and individuality of these texts indicate clearly that one must depend heavily on recognizing shapes and logograms, as well as other paleographic peculiarities, in addition to familiarity with the textual format and linguistic intricacies, to which we next turn.

Paleography

Overall Remarks

The following descriptive analysis is aimed at documenting the overall paleographic characteristics and orthographic peculiarities seen in the documents. It begins with individual letters, orthography, and script, and concludes with observations and comments on the overall writing practice in Quseir and the surrounding environment.

The overwhelming cursiveness of the script appears to be the norm for these documents. In this respect, even the “high end” sort of codices, such as official petitions and formal letters, feature flowering cursive hands, while the remaining majority is nothing more than a sundry variety of scribbles and scrawl. The texts, written in various hands, are, for the most part, not dotted, except for a few religious and literary texts, which are fully dotted and generously vocalized. Many of the texts are written in rounded cursive, a practice that, as described by Geoffrey Khan in his study of the Cairo Geniza papers, replaces angles with continuous curved strokes, for example,

in *j/h/kh* and in medial and final *ʿ/gh*. These cursive features also include the closing of the loops of the letters *f, q, w*, and medial and final *ʿ, gh*, and *m*,¹¹ as well as the deliberate missing of the cross bar on top of the letter *k*. The final *k* is sometimes written in the same way as the initial, without the squiggle that nestles in the dish of the final shape of the letter, but *with* the cross bar.

Another paleographic feature seen here in the Quseir documents is the excessive use of unconventional ligatures between letters, wherein “one pen-stroke” seems to be the rule: not only is a word usually written with one pen-stroke, at times a single stroke can run through two or more words. As a natural extension of this rule, certain words, even phrases, of high frequency use are written in abbreviations and logograms, which will be discussed below.

The overall orthography may best be described as a blend of the Classical Arabic (CA) and the co-called “Middle Arabic” (MA).¹² Among the non-CA features, the most commonly seen are:

- The consistent omission of the *hamza*, which is sometimes absorbed into words containing *w* or *y*, and is often elided after vocative *yā*.¹³
- The replacement of the *alif maqṣūra* and the “dagger *alif*” by regular *alif*:¹⁴ اتا for اتي, سوا for سوى, كهذ ه for كهذ ه.
- The disappearance of the distinction between long and short vowels at the end of a word and the shortening of the medial *ā*:¹⁵ صل ثلاث for ثلاث, صلى for ثلاث.
- The consonant shifts: *dh* < *th* (*tabʿadhu* = *tabʿathu*), *t* < *d* (*taṭmanu* = *taḍmanu*, *yatafaṭṭalu* = *yatafaḍḍalu*, *tafaṭṭul* = *tafaḍḍul*, *qaṭayta* = *qaḍayta*), *ṣ* < *ẓ* (*muntaṣir* = *muntaẓir*).¹⁶
- The fusion of the *tāʾ marbūṭa* and the regular *t*:¹⁷ ساعة for ساعت, غلت for غلته, صحبة for صحبت.
- The excessive use of the *alif al-fāʾila*:¹⁸ نرجو for نرجوا, ابوا for ابوا.
- The nearly whole-sale dropping of the *tanwīn alif*.

¹¹ *ALAD*, 2.

¹² For general discussions of the orthography of MA, see Werner Diem, “Some Glimpses at the Rise and Early Development of the Arabic Orthography,” *Orientalia* 45 (1976): 251–61; Simon Hopkins, *Studies in the Grammar of Early Arabic: Based upon papyri datable to before 300 A.H./912 A.D.* (Oxford, 1984), 1–61; I. Schen, “Usama Ibn Munqidh’s Memoirs: Some further light on Muslim Middle Arabic (Part I),” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 17 (1972), 233–36.

¹³ Diem, “Glimpses,” 256–59; Hopkins, 19–33 (§§19–28); Schen, pt. 1, 235–36.

¹⁴ Hopkins, 14–16 (§§11–12); Schen, pt. 1, 234–35.

¹⁵ Diem, “Glimpses,” 259–60; Hopkins, 10–14 (§§9–10); Schen, pt. 1, 234.

¹⁶ Hopkins, 33–41 (§§30–41); Schen, pt. 1, 235.

¹⁷ Hopkins, 44–48 (§47).

¹⁸ Hopkins, 51–52 (§50).

Also noteworthy are some apparent vernacular spellings: *bī* for *bī* (*bī-ka*, RN 1029a*), *minū* for *min* (*minū-ka*, RN 1053a*), as well as some unusual violations of the norm, such as writing two words as one, in *min ibn* (منابن; RN 1063b*) and *yu'allimu huwa* (يعلمهو; RN 1015b*). In these cases, sloppiness and poor penmanship, rather than deliberate-ness, seem to be the cause. After all, bad handwriting is not just for modern-day physicians. (Most of these orthographic peculiarities are preserved in the editions, with explanations in the commentary.)

Peculiarities are also found in some codices that manage to maintain a high level of accordance with the norms of Classical Arabic. In the lengthy sermon-like religious treatise (RN 1037–1051, discussed in chapter 3), conventional devices aside,¹⁹ one finds the *hamza* written below the *yā'* *kursī*, the *sukūn* sign being deliberately misplaced (RN 1037; see Plate 2), and the *tanwīn kasra* pointing toward the wrong direction (\\ instead of //; RN 1040). Taken together, the idiosyncrasies observed here may have more to do with some whimsical aesthetic concerns on the part of the overzealous scribe rather than any general trends.

As regards the styles of script, there are virtually as many as the number of the scribes (*kātib*; some of them left their names in the texts), ranging from elegant, experienced, and artistic *naskh*, *riqā'*, or *rayhānī* to naïve, coarse, and careless scrawl that defy any stylistic classification. As a whole, given our sketchy knowledge of the subject matter, it is perhaps more productive at this stage of research to focus on how to decipher the content and document the paleographic features than to try to determine the name of the script used.²⁰ In this respect, a preliminary general observation can be made that the

¹⁹ These include mainstream devices to assure accurate reading, such as the sign of ʾ, to indicate the absence of dots so an *s* will not be mistaken as a *sh*, the small *h* or *th* written underneath the regular *h* or *th*, respectively, so they will not be misread as *j* or *b*, and so forth.

²⁰ Script classification in Arabic calligraphy and paleography is an area that is not covered by substantial literature. For a general bibliography, see Adam Gacek, *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition: A glossary of technical terms and bibliography* (Leiden, 2001). Stern, who did pioneering work on the subject matter, with special reference to the Fatimid and Ayyubid periods, warned repeatedly that “it is not advisable—at least not yet advisable—to attempt to identify the name of the script used in the decrees”; see “Two Ayyūbid Decrees from Sinai,” in S. M. Stern, ed., *Documents from Islamic Chanceries* (Oxford, 1965), 15. A similar position is taken by Little, who has done pioneering work in the field of Mamluk documents and paleography; see “The Ḥaram Documents as Sources for the Arts and Architecture of the Mamluk Period,” *Muqarnas* 2 (1984), 62–63. Other scholars of medieval Arabic papyrology and paleography simply skip the issue of script altogether.



Plate 2: Peculiar orthography and various handwriting styles

overwhelming majority of the specimens: commercial letters, shipping notes, and accounts, are written in rudimentary and, in most cases, serviceable *naskh* script. Elegant calligraphic *naskh* is found in a few scholastically inclined pieces, equipped with generous vocalizations, precise case endings, and other devices used by trained scribes to safeguard their professionalism and craftsmanship. There are also a few specimens that, instead of the rounded curved strokes, feature angles and edges, with thick shading along the horizontal line, displaying the movement of the sharpened reed pen (e.g., RN 1015c*, a court report; see Plate 2). As for the official, or semi-official correspondence, a style perhaps best described as bordering on the chancery *tawqīʿ* and the epistolary *riqāʿ* seems to be the mode.²¹ Many of the samples show the features of the *riqāʿ*, the official epistolary script in the Ayyubid period. It is a cursive, but fine and disciplined, hand, with occasional exaggerated, elongated strokes between letters. There are also a few cases that feature a combination of the straightforward *riqāʿ* with some calligraphic articulation, with highly stylized curvilinear elongation, the extended elongated cross bar on the letter *k*, and well-planned diagonal margins (RN 1029a*; see Plate 2). In addition, the official, or semi-official, correspondence and petitions are, for the most part, written with slightly upwardly slanting lines, and the final words of each line are “stacked” above the line, a feature that is consistent with the typical Ayyubid chancery scribal practice as we know it.²²

²¹ For general descriptions of the *tawqīʿ* and *riqāʿ*, see Adam Gacek, “Arabic scripts and their characteristics as seen through the eyes of Mamluk authors,” *Manuscript of the Middle East* 4 (1989): 144–49, especially 146; Y. H. Safadi, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 76–77; J. Sourdel-Thomine, “Khaṭṭ” (especially pl. xxxv), in *ET*²; Schimmel, 7–9; samples of the *riqāʿ* script are also found in Little, “Haram Documents,” 62 (pl. 1), 65 (pl. 6). While all the above-mentioned studies rely predominantly on the specimens from the Mamluk era, earlier chancery writings, of the Fatimid and Ayyubid periods that laid the foundations for later development, were discussed by Stern. Especially significant are the published samples of the presumable *riqāʿ*, such as Sultan al-Afḍal’s decree, in Stern, “Two Ayyūbid Decrees,” 207–16, especially 213–16, and the petition by Simeon, Bishop of Mt. Sinai to Sultan al-Kāmil, in “Petitions from the Ayyūbid Period,” pls. IV, V, VI. Although Stern declined to identify the style of these Ayyubid writing samples (cf. his own statement cited in note 20 above), the *riqāʿ* was indeed proposed in his earlier writings as “perhaps” the style; see “Three Petitions of the Fāṭimid Period,” *Oriens* 15 (1962), 192.

²² Geoffrey Khan, “A Document of Appointment of A Jewish Leader,” in Yūsuf Rāḡib, ed., *Documents de l’islam médiéval: nouvelles perspectives de recherche* (Le Caire, 1991), 108.

On the other end of the spectrum are writings by, and for, Every-man: merchants, villagers, and perhaps even school children. They pose more difficulties for decipherment: rules are broken, code-like scrawl is the norm, and bad grammar runs amok. (Valuable in their own right, these specimens open a window on the cultural landscape in the port of Quseir and the surrounding towns and villages in Upper Egypt.)

While the majority of the documents are evidently from Egypt, certain non-Egyptian traits are observable as well, chief among them being the two dots below the letter *y*, a trademark sign of “Syrian” orthography.

The majority of the manuscripts contain plain texts written in black ink. There are, however, a few illustrated pieces, or charts, in red, brown, and black inks. Rudimentary decorative devices in red ink, in the form of floral patterns and vowel signs as ornaments, are used in the block-printed amulets. In this connection, aesthetic concerns seem, on occasion, to have outweighed orthographic rules; in one example (RN 1039; see Plate 1) the letter *h* is written (or carved, to be precise) in the medial form of the letter, instead of the regular initial form. This is perhaps due to the fact that the former, with its floral shape, has more decorative value than the latter. The block prints also exhibit the curved, angular, undotted but spottily vowelled *naskh* that is quite distinguishable from the more rounded *naskh* and *riqāʿ* as witnessed in the hand-written pieces.

A letter or note is written on both sides of the paper. If the main text on the recto is too long, then it carries onto the verso. Usually, the first line of the verso begins right after the paper is turned over; in other words, the verso is written upside down in relation to the recto. Occasionally, catchwords are used on the top of the verso to facilitate reading (e.g., the word *wa-ʿalā*, RN 1016a*; the word *ummuka*, RN 1018d*). A full address, including the destination, name(s) of the recipient(s), and a short greeting, is often written on the opposite side of the verso. It appears that many of the documents were originally folded, and a few of them were tied with cord (RN 978, 984b; see Plate 4).

Quite often, the text on the verso is not necessarily a continuation of that on the recto. It is written in an apparently different hand, with contents totally unrelated to that on the recto, suggesting that the paper, which was by no means cheap in those days,

was reused.²³ In addition, one often finds that the text on the verso is in fact a response to that on the recto. However, effective use of paper does not seem to have been a major concern for government agencies or functionaries; official petitions usually leave wide spaces between the lines, a sign of courtly grandeur (RN 1064b*²⁴).

Marginalia are frequently added. In the better-executed documents, the overall writing seems to have been carefully planned, in that the lines below the opening line are indented so as to leave space for the vertical lines of marginalia (RN 1059*). But more frequently one may find margins filled with scribbles that take up whatever space the scribe could possibly squeeze a few lines into. The marginalia may sometimes be arranged diagonally, insofar as if the bottom of the page was reached before the writing was finished, the text would continue, written nearly upside down in relation to the page. The text would be read along the right margin, beginning either at the bottom left, where the final line of the initial text finished, or at the top left. This kind of “spiral text” arrangement, however, which was commonly utilized in medieval Arabic manuscripts, is seldom seen among the documents found in the “Sheikh’s house.”

Abbreviations and Logograms

Some abbreviation signs and logograms common in medieval Arabic paleography also found their way to the “Sheikh’s house” writings. Most of these are a natural extension of the general tendency of “one pen-stroke,” in signs such as انشالله for *in shā’ allāh* (RN 1064a*), تعل for *ta‘ālā* (RN 1003a*, 1015b*, 1064a*),²⁵ عل and ع for *‘alā* (RN 1003b*) and *‘alayka(kum)* (RN 969*), respectively. The *basmala*, as a rule, is always written in a monogram, even in long hand. Some “magic” logograms are also featured in the texts (e.g., RN 1031a*).

While the examples cited above are relatively common devices, there is a peculiar sign that has remained an enigma. The mysterious

²³ For the expense of paper, and the resulting common practice of recycling paper, in the Islamic Near East, see Bloom, 74–85.

²⁴ As Bloom puts it, “The ability to waste so much expensive paper was a prerogative of power” (78); also cf. *MK*, 40–41.

²⁵ For the various logograms of *ta‘ālā*, also see *ABPH*, Tafelband, Tafel 67.

sign \surd looks like a combination of the letter *l* and the *alif maqṣūra*, and always occurs in the same place: at the top center of the paper (see Plate 3). At first, one is tempted to consider the logogram as an equivalent of today's P.S. note, or as some kind of special code used by this group of Quseiris. But its widespread use may suggest that this is perhaps a logogram for the *basmala*, itself an abbreviation of the formulaic utterance *bism allāh al-rahmān al-rahīm*, "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate." This speculation is based on observations that in all cases, the place where the sign is marked, at the top center of the paper, is exactly where a *basmala* is supposed to be written. To prove the validity of the argument, any manuscript marked with this sign accordingly omits the mandatory *basmala*.²⁶ An alternate hypothesis would be that the sign is actually the second part of the word *ta'ālā*, that is, [*bism allāh ta'ā*]lā, an alternate for the conventional *bism allāh al-rahmān al-rahīm*,²⁷ or simply an *alif*, for *allāh*.²⁸ Again, even if this proved to be the case, the sign would still have to do with the mandatory *basmala*.

It ought to be noted here that this phenomenon is not unique in the Quseir codices, although they present by far the most extensive documentation: a total fifteen examples in number. (Documents that contain this "mysterious sign" are: RN 964b, 966d, 967c, 997*, 1001a*, 1027a*, 1027e*, 1029a*, 1033b, d, 1034, 1036a, 1058c, 1063a*, and 1068a.) The practice may be traced back to as early as the papyri era. Raif Georges Khoury has presented one similar case that dates from around the fourth/tenth century. The sign was thought of as some kind of "paraphe," the exact meaning of which is unknown.²⁹ Similar examples have also been found in later medieval Arabic paper manuscripts, among them the two recently published Vienna manuscripts, one dating to around 698–708/1299–1309, another to 708–709/1309. Werner Diem, the editor, transcribed the sign as the mark \surd and speculated that it was perhaps a "Revisions-

²⁶ The only exception is RN 1029a*, which contains both the logogram and the *basmala* in long hand.

²⁷ The formula of *bism allāh ta'ālā* was in fact used in medieval Persian paleography; see William Hanaway and Brian Spooner, *Reading Nasta'liq* (Costa Mesa, 1995), 219 (Example 61).

²⁸ This kind of use, in pre-modern times, is reported in Richard Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to al-Madinah & Meccah* (London, 1893 [reprint 1964]), 1: 55.

²⁹ *Chrestomathie de Papyrologie Arabe* (Leiden, 1993), 140 (no. 79; photo in Table XXX).



Plate 3: The “mysterious sign”

zeichen.”³⁰ Still other examples are seen in a recently published fourteenth century manuscript from Qasr Ibrim, Upper Egypt,³¹ as well as two unpublished fragments in the Anawati collection of Arabic documents.³² Interestingly, similar cases are reported in recent studies of the Persian paleography as well.³³

Numeral Notations

Nearly all the number figures are, as a rule, written out in the sometimes slightly stylized form of full words; and this is particularly true for the units and the tens. Fractions are always written in complete words as well. But caution is warranted in some cases, such as *thulth*, “one third,” whose grapheme is virtually the same as that of *thalāth* (with shortened *ā*), “three.” Hundreds and thousands, on the other hand, display more variety: both complete words and monograms, of *miʿa* and *alf*, are observed in the documents.

With regard to the alternative numerals used by the Arabs,³⁴ the practice of the so-called *abjad* system, or “letter numerals,” is evidenced by several examples; but such cases are so rare that they ought to be regarded as exception rather than rule. One text, which appears to be a tax register (RN 987b*), contains a letter *t* (9), or perhaps *z* (900), at the end, below the word: *al-jumla*, or “total” tally.

The so-called “Indian numerals,” the system that became commonly acceptable to the Arabs in a much later period, after long resistance,³⁵ were evidently not familiar to the people around the “Sheikh’s house.” The rare cases that can be reasonably identified as using the “Indian numerals” may turn out to have more to do with numerology and magic than with actual calculation; such as those already discussed in chapter 3 (see Plate 4).

³⁰ DAA3, 264–65 (no. 56), 275–76 (no. 59); photos in DAA3, Tafelband, Tafels 53, 56).

³¹ Mursi Saad el-Din, “The Nubian Museum in Aswan,” *Dahesh Voice* 4/3 (1998), 17 (with photo).

³² Nos. 7B, 366A; dates are unknown. The Anawati (Qanawati) Arabic documents collection is currently on microfilm: McGill University Archives, 1473, 1474. I thank Donald Little and Bruce Craig for providing me with access to the material.

³³ Hanaway, 99 (Example 20).

³⁴ A brief overview of the subject (with bibliography) is in Bloom, 125–35; for a more comprehensive bibliography, see Gacek, *Arabic Manuscript Tradition*, 209–10.

³⁵ A detailed survey of Arab “resistance” to “Indian numerals” is found in Georges Ifrah, *The Universal History of Numbers: From prehistory to the invention of the computer* (New York, 2000), 532–76, especially 539–43; also see Bloom, 129–35.



Plate 4: Manuscripts tied with cord, bilingual (Coptic and Arabic) accounts, and “magic figures”

Bilingual accounts (or amulets?) with Coptic and Arabic letter numerals, are preserved in a few fragments (RN 1036b, 1077c), where individual Arabic letters, *s* and *ṣ*, as well as Coptic letter numerals, are written in four lines divided into four columns (see Plate 4).³⁶ The content of these bilingual materials, rare in the Quseir context, needs further study by specialists.³⁷

Language

I write to inform the most noble master—may God make him as successful as those who have acquired Divine Knowledge, and make him among the choicest of the virtuous men (*al-sayyid al-ajall waḥḥaḥu allāh <taxfiq> al-ʿarīfīn wa-jaʿala lahu karāʾim al-ṣāliḥīn*): the Prophet Muḥammad and his entire family—and now to the main topic: I miss you terribly, not just a little bit, but a lot (*katīr laysa qalīl*)! O God, I hope we would be reunited soon (*wa-llāha lanā al-ijtimāʿ*)! O my master! I have ground a small amount of flour and [other foodstuffs] that are worth (*qalīl daqīq wa-mā yubāʿūnahu*) ten dirhams, which you have received. Please send them (i.e., the ten dirhams) to me, along with the perfume. If you have not received any [money] (*wa-in kāna mā akhadhta shay*), then you should bring up the matter (*wa-ṭalaṭahu*) to the judge. Don't blame me, though (*wa-lā tattahim ʿannī*). If you have not received any [money], send me a notification, so I will rent [riding animals] to carry the goods (*arsil iʿlimnī ukri dā silaʿ*). If you have received some [of the money], send me a notification, too (*wa-in kāna akhadhta al-baʿd arsil lī wa-iʿlimnī*). Whatever you need, order it [from me] (*fa-mā tahtāju waṣīhi*). I need nothing but cash (*mā yuʿwinunī illā al-darāhim*). (RN 1003c/1004d*)

If a modern-day person with a rudimentary knowledge of Arabic grammar read this letter, written by a merchant some seven hundred years ago, he/she would not fail to notice a dichotomy with regard

³⁶ For the use of Coptic numbers in the Cairo Geniza papers, see *MS*, 1: 209. A modern-day bilingual (Coptic and Arabic) incantation against the evil eye is found in Fodor, 27 (no. 43). I thank David Ladouceur for helping me identify the Coptic letters.

³⁷ For Coptic-Arabic bilingualism in Christian communities in Upper Egypt, see Terry Wilfong, “The non-Muslim communities: Christian communities,” *CHE*, 181–82. For Coptic numerals, see H. Ritter, “Griechisch-koptische Ziffern in arabischen Manuskripten,” *Revista degli studi orientali* 16 (1936): 212–14; G. Troupeau, “A propos des chiffres utilisés pour le foliotage des manuscrits arabes,” *Arabica* 21 (1974): 84.

to the language; while the letter shows a high degree of literary formalism, it also betrays a great deal of deviations from the norms of Classical Arabic (CA), under the influence of Middle Arabic (MA), which is defined by modern linguists as the connecting link between Arabic as spoken on the eve of the Muslim conquests and modern spoken dialects.³⁸ This particular letter, like many other documents uncovered in the “Sheikh’s house,” exhibits a fusion of basic CA components and, in varying degrees, MA elements. The former can be clearly seen, for example, in the conventional syntax structure, especially the conditional sentences, and also the formulaic salutations. The latter, on the other hand, are apparent in the dropping of case endings, the fusion of verb conjugations (e.g., *kāna akhadhta, arsil ʿilmnī ukrī*), the lack of concord between the parts of speech, and a surge of vernacular expressions (*katīr, lanā al-ijimāʿ, qatīl daqīq, dā silāʿ*).

Thus we must deal with two layers of language: (1) the writing format and phraseology, in which the predominantly CA elements mandatory in Arabic epistle writing were observed and followed in daily writing practice at the “Sheikh’s house,” and (2) the influence of MA which reflects, to some degree, the language *actually spoken* in this Red Sea community and its neighboring communities at the time.

The Writing Format and Phraseology

As already discussed above, due to various factors, our classification of the documents and our goals in their decipherment depend largely

³⁸ The literature on Middle Arabic is extensive and cannot be reviewed here. Based on the key works, by Joshua Blau, Simon Hopkins, among others, it is now commonly held that the various forms of MA—Judaico-Arabic (JA), Christian Arabic (ChA), and, to a lesser extent, Muslim Middle Arabic—share the basic features. However, whereas JA and ChA have been studied exhaustively, Muslim MA has received much less attention, insofar as only two major literary works, to my knowledge, have been analyzed for the purpose: Usāma ibn Munqidh’s *Memoirs*, which reflects the spoken language of twelfth century Northern Syria (see Schen), and Ibn al-Mujāwir’s history, which sheds light on thirteenth century Yemeni vernacular (see Rex Smith, “The Language of Ibn al-Mujāwir’s 7th/13th Century Guide to Arabia: *Tārīkh al-mustabsir*,” in J. R. Smart, ed., *Tradition and Modernity in Arabic Language and Literature* [Richmond, 1996], 327–51). These two texts will, naturally, be the focal point of references for the present study.

on the recognizable textual formulas, phraseology, and other related philological aspects. Overall, the documents in question reveal a continuity, with regard to format and phraseology, with chancery letter writing of the Ayyubid period. A typical commercial letter begins, after the formulaic *tarjama* (sender's name) and *basimala*, with the obeisance formula and stock salutations. The *narratio*, the main content, is often introduced by a phrase such as *sayyartu ilayka ṣuḥbat fulān . . .*, "I have dispatched to you, in the company of so-and-so, such-and-such amount of such-and-such items." Other information, such as description of the commodities, prices, payment arrangements, and so forth, usually follows. Personal tidbits and gossip would then be added. (This is where the MA elements increase.) The *corrobatio*, the end, is usually brought back to the formula, often marked by the stock clause *al-salām 'alā . . .*, "greetings to so-and-so and peace be upon you," with the traditional *taṣḥiya/ḥamdala/raḥmala/ḥasbala* combination, which is an ancient tradition in letter writing dating back as early as the papyri era.

With regard to the salutations, the most common and remarkable may be the use of *al-mamlūk yuqabbilu al-arḍ . . . wa-yunhī . . .*, "the slave (i.e., the sender) so-and-so kisses the ground before so-and-so (i.e., the addressee) and reports . . .," as the opening clause. Drawn from an ancient Sasanian custom of kissing the ground before a ruler, it was introduced into the Fatimid court and incorporated into the structural segment of petitions, and later became obligatory in the phraseology of Ayyubid and Mamluk petitions and, to a lesser extent, letters.³⁹ That such an age-old formula of official petition would find its way to provincial commercial and personal correspondence in a much later period is itself revealing. For a modern-day reader, it is rather intriguing that such rigid court protocol would have been so strictly followed in a remote Red Sea town and, occasionally, under such desperate circumstances as demonstrated in some letters (for example, RN 1059*, which is virtually an SOS call from a ship wreck on the high sea). It is clear that these letters demonstrate a continuity, and expansion, of a time-honored textual tradi-

³⁹ *QS*, 6: 339; 7: 90; 8: 171–85; S. M. Stern, *Coins and Documents from the Medieval Middle East* (London, 1986), pt. Vi. 179, 191; *APK*, 142; *ALAD*, 307–12 (and examples from the Fatimid and Ayyubid periods: nos. 77, 78, 80, 84, 85, 87, 89, 90, 92, 98, 100); *ABPH*, nos. 4, 15 (examples from the Ayyubid period); *MSU*, xxvii, 20, 62, 64 (examples from the Mamluk period).

tion. From a socio-historical perspective, they also reveal the literary sophistication of the authors and recipients of these letters and their evident familiarity with chancery practices in Cairo, Qūṣ, and other urban centers.

In this connection, the similarity between the documents from the “Sheikh’s house” and those of the Cairo Geniza is striking. In addition to the “slave-kisses-ground” opening formula that is also ubiquitous in the Cairo Geniza documents, another observation can be made here about the way the sender’s name, the so-called *tarjama*, is written. According to Khan’s study of the Cairo Geniza documents, the *tarjama* (*al-mamlūk fulān*) at the top left of the paper, that is, above the *basmala*, usually constitutes the grammatical subject of the verb in the ensuing obeisance “slave-kisses-ground” formula and is a typical feature of the Ayyubid petition. Sometimes the *tarjama* is written on the same line as the *basmala*. Only in the Mamluk period was the *tarjama* brought down into the text of the petition under the *basmala* to the right of the verbal phrase of the obeisance formula. Interestingly, the majority of the Quseir documents that utilize this “slave-kisses-ground” formula show a resemblance to the Ayyubid structure of the *tarjama*.⁴⁰ In RN 1057*, the *tarjama* is written on the same line as the *basmala*. In RN 1026a*, the *tarjama* is written in four lines, the first of which starts above the *basmala* and the last of which is on the same level as the *basmala*; the verbal phrase *yūqabbilu . . .* begins immediately below. RN 1059*, on the other hand, demonstrates a certain degree of deviation from the formulaic norm: it does not contain a *basmala*, and we therefore are uncertain whether the way of writing the *tarjama* here fits the Mamluk pattern, or, because the *basmala* is missing from the manuscript, whether the original style was instead Ayyubid. At any rate, caution is in order here.⁴¹

The *tarjama*, for the most part, appears in the form of *mamlūk* so-and-so, but occasionally one finds variants such as: *akhūhu*, “his brother” (RN 972a*, 1064a*, 1093*), *al-muḍayya‘ī . . . al-khādim*, “the humbly lost servant” (RN 1026a*), *al-mamlūk mawadd masrūr li-shabā batika*, “the loving servant, the one that salutes your majestic youth”

⁴⁰ For the “Ayyubid structure,” see *ALAD*, 310 (examples: nos. 88, 90, 92).

⁴¹ Geoffrey Khan’s research of the period-formulas only represents the best knowledge one can attain at this stage of research and is far from exhaustive. More importantly, the Cairo Geniza formulas cited here were of the genre of chancery petitions, not necessarily entirely applicable to private business letters.

(RN 1069*), among others.⁴² These various forms of the *tarjama* reflect the sender's social status and his attitudes towards, and relations to, the recipient (for more details, see chapter 1 above).

Other traditional salutatories occur as well: the opening clauses of *ilā ḥaḍrat al-shaykh . . .*, “to shaykh . . .,” *ilā al-shaykh . . .*, or simply *ḥaḍrat al-shaykh . . .* were used quite frequently. This brings to mind the archaic formula *min fulān ilā fulān ammā ba‘du . . .*, “from so-and-so to so-and-so, now to the topic,” which was seen frequently in the papyri letters. There is a twist, however: in the papyri letters, the clause *min fulān ilā fulān* was brought down to the first line of the *narratio* of the letter; in other words, it was written below the *basmala* and without the *tarjama*, whose function was fulfilled by the clause itself;⁴³ whereas in the Quseir letters, the *min fulān* part is treated as the *tarjama*, written above or on the same line as the *basmala*, and the *ilā fulān* section constitutes the beginning of the main contents of the letter. The phrase *ammā ba‘du* was dispensed with eventually in the Quseir letters, and was replaced by a phrase *wasiwā dhālika*, to mark the end of the salutatory and launch into the business matter immediately, starting with phrases such as *annanī say-yartu . . .*, “I have dispatched . . .,” or other business jargon of the era.

Aside from the above-mentioned chancery format and archaic formulas, also commonly seen is another stock opening clause: *alladhī u‘limu bihi . . .*, “that which I am writing to report. . . .” Quite often this formula is reduced to a simplified version such as *u‘limu . . .*, a straightforward pattern that seems to be very popular, as the documents amply demonstrate.

In regards to business jargon and conventions, the “witness clause,” a common practice for business transactions in the medieval Islamic Near East, is also found in a few documents. One such rare example is RN 1079*; the lengthy text—twenty-seven lines, which is extraordinarily long by Quseir standards—forms an *iqrār*-type legal acknowledgment, half of which is made up of witness clauses in the

⁴² Similar examples are also found in *ABPH* (from the Ayyubid period: nos. 2 [*al-tilmīdh*], 41 [*‘abduhā*], 66 [*al-miskān*]).

⁴³ For examples of this archaic formula in papyri letters, see *APK*, nos. 15, 21; *ABPH*, no. 24; Rāḡib, “Lettres arabes (I),” nos. I, IV; “Lettres arabes (II),” *AI* 16 (1980), nos. IX, X, XII, XIX; occasionally it was amended to *ilā fulān min fulān* or *li-fulān min fulān* as in “Lettres (I),” no. II; “Lettres (II),” nos. VIII, XI.

formula *shahidtu bi-dhālika fī taʾrīkhihi*, “I, so-and-so, witnessed this [business deal] when it took place.”⁴⁴

As for other common technical terms and phrases, there seems to have been a vocabulary that was communicable and comprehensible to the business community at large. When people did business, they were talking to each other in the same language. In this regard, some common tried-and-true patterns emerge, and they are also featured in other contemporary Arabic documents and legal writings. For example, the phrase *bi-mā ṭāʿama allāh wa-razaqa*, “as God so feeds and provides,” a device frequently used in the Quseir documents to seal a deal or command a sale, was also common in medieval Arabic legal contracts, the so-called *al-shurūṭ* writings.⁴⁵ Some phrases are often seen in medieval Arabic documents as well; among them are: *allāha allāha* plus the imperative, “By God! By God! do that . . .,” as the technical term to issue orders,⁴⁶ and *taḥuṭṭuhum fī mawḍiʿ jayyid*, “Store the merchandise in a safe place!,” as the idiom of instruction for handling the delivered shipment.⁴⁷ The high frequency of these technical terms attests to the common knowledge and acceptance of the formulas in business writing. They also reflect a trend in the fusion of the standard norm and the MA elements (e.g., *allāha allāha* and *taḥuṭṭuhum*) in daily writings.

Features of Middle Arabic

The influence of MA, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is already clearly seen in the orthography of the documents from the “Sheikh’s

⁴⁴ The practice of attaching witness clauses to legal or economic texts can be traced back to the papyri era, the main formula being *wa kataba bi-khaṭṭihi fī taʾrīkhihi*, “so-and-so bore witness to [this] by writing with his own hand when it took place”; see *APEL*, vol. 1, *passim*. For general survey of the topic, see Wakin, 37–70, especially 48, 65–70. For later development of the practice, see *CHSH*, 248–49, 476 (index entry of *uhūd*); *DAA3*, 341–44.

⁴⁵ Wakin, *passim*; Udovitch, 196–203; *MS*, 1: 185–86.

⁴⁶ The invocational repetition is frequently seen in private letters as a rhetorical device to emphasize the urgency of the matter; among the earliest uses is a papyrus dating from the third/ninth century (*APEL*, 5: 111); more examples from the later periods are found in *ABPH*, nos. 4, 8, 11, 39, 59. Nearly all the examples show that the use of the phrase is often associated with the imperative (“O God, O God, do that . . .!”) and sometimes the negative imperative (“O God, O God, don’t do that . . .!”).

⁴⁷ A similar phrase is commonly seen in the Cairo Geniza papers as well; see *MS*, 1: 338–39.

house.” With regard to morphology and syntax, some common features of MA also manifest themselves in varying degrees. These features have been summarized by modern scholars as (1) elimination of final short vowels, (2) fusion of verb conjugations, (3) deviations from CA norms in the treatment of the dual and of numerals, and syntactic constructions.⁴⁸ In the following, specific cases drawn from the Quseir documents will be described and commented on.

Morphology

(1) The “Five Nouns.” Whereas the invariability of *abū* seems to be the rule rather than exception, especially when it comes to proper nouns,⁴⁹ occasional correct use of *abā* (accusative) and *abī* (genitive) also occurs. It appears that even in the “correct” cases, consistency is not always guaranteed; thus one sees examples like: *u‘limu bihi al-akh . . . abī ishāq, lil-shaykh abī ishāq ibrahīm bn abū mufarrij* (RN 998*), and so forth. As for non proper nouns, the overwhelming majority tend to be indeclinable: *al-salām ‘alā . . . akhūhu* (RN 969*), *bint akhūka* (RN 991a*), and oddly, *min jihat akhāka* (RN 1077a*).

(2) The demonstrative *dhā* is sometimes spelled as *dā*, a typical Egyptian flavor;⁵⁰ the peculiar spelling of *dhālikīn* is noticed once: *wa-aṣṣābuhu al-jam‘ dhālikīn* (RN 991a*).

(3) Numerals. Surprisingly, the usual erratic behavior of the notoriously cumbersome Arabic numerals, characterized by one modern student as “Achille’s heel” even for well-educated Arabs,⁵¹ is not observed here. Except for the accusative ending for the dual and plural, which is a characteristic feature of MA (*ḥamlayn* < *ḥamlān*, *thalāthīn* < *thalāthūn*), the grammar of the numerals is on the whole consistently correct and adequate.

(4) The dual. The disappearance of the dual is a characteristic feature of MA. In the documents, the disappearance is mainly seen in pronouns, adjectives, and other non-essential parts of speech, whereas

⁴⁸ Schen, pt. 1, 219–20.

⁴⁹ Hopkins, 156–60 (§§162–164); Schen, pt. 2, 73, 83.

⁵⁰ *DEA*, s.v.

⁵¹ Schen, pt. 1, 232.

the dual itself (“two loads,” “two *waybas*,” “two pieces of clothing”) is consistently spelled out. This is perhaps due to the fact that the dual in context is often the *raison d’être* of a given text; as such, any ambiguity ought to be weeded out. The following examples are typical:

Thawbayn ṭūluhum . . ., “two *thawb*-clothes, with a total length of . . .” (RN 1021b*). Note the plural pronoun suffix *hum*.

Fardatayn fihim . . ., “two *farda*-loads, which contain . . .” (RN 1022*).

Qifʿatayn fa-tusallimuhum, “two containers, please give them [to] . . .” (RN 1064a*).

Ḥamlayn daqīq wa-hum . . ., “two loads of flour and they [are for] . . .” (RN 968a*).

Ḥamlayn daqīq muḡharbala . . ., “two loads of sifted flour . . .” (RN 968b*). Note the feminine adjective *muḡharbala*.

Barkayn kibār aruzz, “two large bales of rice” (RN 1018c*). Note the plural adjective *kibār*.

Wa-ḥāna al-walad wa-Abū al-Milāḥ wāṣil, “once the young man and Abū al-Milāḥ arrived” (RN 1066a*). Note the singular active participle *wāṣil*.

Abū ʿUthmān . . . wa-Muḡammad . . . waffaqahum allāh . . ., “Abū ʿUthmān . . . and Muḡammad . . . may God let them be successful!” (RN 1062a*). Note the plural pronoun suffix.

Ḥamlayn waybayn qamḡ naqī wa-ayḡan fardatayn ruzz wa-athbithum, “two loads, which weigh two *waybas*, of pure wheat, and also two *fardas* of rice. Please verify them” (RN 984a*). Note the retaining of the final *n* in the construct.

Kānū markabayn yaḡillū . . ., “they were in two boats, arriving at . . .” (RN 1085*). Note the plural auxiliary verb *kānū* and main verb *yaḡillū*; also note the missing of the plural ending *n* in the imperfect verb *yaḡillūna*.

(5) Plural pronouns and pronoun suffixes. The disappearance of the non-human plural pronoun *hā* (replaced by *hum*) is ubiquitous. A few examples will suffice to illustrate the point:

Sayyirhum lī darāḡim fa-hum lil-kirā, “Send me cash in dirhams! It is for renting [riding animals]” (RN 1003c/1004d*).

Wa-ḡamīʿ al-ḡawāʿij taḡuṭṭuhum wa-lā tafriṭ fihim, “Put all the goods [in a safe place]; do not over-charge on account of them” (RN 1018c*).

(6) The relative article. The invariable *alladhī* is typically MA.⁵² Whereas the resumptive pronominal suffix in the relative clause (*‘ā’id*) always complies with the gender of the antecedent, the relative article, *alladhī*, itself remains unchanged:

Alladhī fīhim . . . , “that is in them” (RN 966c*).

Al-murattabayn . . . *alladhī maktūb ‘alayhim*, “the payment which is owed to . . .” (RN 1015b*). This is an extremely interesting case where the *singular* relative article and the *plural* pronominal suffix modify the antecedent in *dual*.

There is also a tendency to “over use” the relative article in cases, according to the CA rules, where it is not required. Since all the examples of this kind deal with numerals, it is unclear whether these are simply cases of “hyper-correction” or a tendency to treat numerals as definite:

Ashar darāhim alladhī akhadhtum fa-arsilhum lī, “. . . ten dirhams which you took. Send me the money quickly” (RN 1003c/1004d*).

Ashar wa-rub‘ waybāt allatī ṭalabtahum, “ten and a quarter *waybas* (of flour) as you demanded” (RN 1064a*).

In one case, the *alladhī* appears without the ensuing relative clause:

Mā sayyarnā hādhihi illā tusā’idunā ‘alā alladhī . . . , “We will not dispatch the shipment unless you help us out with the aforesaid [transaction]” (RN 970a*).

(7) Other lexical peculiarities. One may also note a trend in which certain MA elements were so frequently used that they thereby became standard technical terms. Such is the case of *ṣuḥbat*, “in the company of. . .” In the present context, this means the person who accompanied, or escorted, the shipment in question.⁵³

Other MA expressions also made their way into the domain of standard technical terms. In the following cases, to replace the preposition *ilā* with *lī* became almost standard:⁵⁴ *taktubu lī*, “write to me” (RN 970a*), *kitābuka lī*, “your letter to me” (RN 1056a*), *sayyara laka*

⁵² Hopkins, 240–41 (§289); Schen, pt. 2, 65.

⁵³ This should be distinguished from the more formal use of the word *ṣuḥba*, in the sense of “business cooperation,” by which a merchant of lesser stature describes his relation with a merchant or firm of greater reputation; see *MS*, 1: 169. This sounds similar to the relation between Shaykh Abū Mufarrij and his senior associate Shaykh Najīb (see chapter 1), albeit no such wording is used in the documents.

⁵⁴ Hopkins, 128–29 (§128); Schen, pt. 2, 77.

kitāb, “he sent you a letter” (RN 1017a*), *tabʿathu lī kitāb* (RN 976*), and *tursilu lī kitāb*, “send me a letter!” (RN 1003b*).

Noteworthy also is the phenomenon of an adjective governing as *nomen rectum* the noun to which it refers or modifies. It is true that such use, in the form of the *idāfa* construction, is not exclusively that of MA. However, its frequent occurrence in the Quseir documents still merits attention. This is particularly true in the use of *zakīyat . . .*, “[goods] of fine quality.” The documents are replete with such examples: *zakīyat lawz wa-zakīyat kaʿk wa-zakīyat daqāq*, “nuts, baked goods, and flour of fine quality” (RN 966c*), *zakīyat daqīq*, “fine flour” (RN 972a*), *zakīyat aruzz wa-zakīyat kiswa . . . wa-zakīyat ashyāl*, “high-quality rice, a fine *kiswa*-robe . . . and fine shawls” (RN 1004c*), *zakīyat al-ghall wa-zakīyat samān wa-zakīyat ḥimmiṣ . . . [wa]-zakīyat lawz wa-zakīyat bayād*, “good quality grain, pure butter, pure chickpeas . . . good quality almonds and good quality eggs” (RN 1008*), *zakīyat mukhallal*, “good quality pickles” (RN 1090a). Compared with the richness of the vocabulary to describe the various degrees of quality as seen in the Cairo Geniza papers (there were at least twelve grades, in Goitein’s count),⁵⁵ the Quseir vocabulary in this category is monotone, colorless, and vague.

In this respect, it is curious to note that while the conventional adjectives such as *qamḥ naqī*, “pure wheat,” *mawḍiʿ jayyid*, “safe place,” among others, are also used, they are nevertheless not as common as the pattern cited above. One wonders if this *zakīya* combination, together with parallels such as *qalīl kaʿk*, “some cake” (RN 1059*), *qalīl qamḥ*, “some wheat” (RN 1057*), is to be seen as an extension of the vernacular *shi(u)wayya . . .*, “a little bit of [something].” It is clear that elements deemed too “folksy” would be looked over, in that the *shi(u)wayya* itself is not seen in the documents, nor is the common colloquial adjective *kuwayyis*, “good.”

(8) The fusion of weak verbs and hollow verbs. The problem has partly to do with orthography, insofar as the writing, and omission, of *alif* and *hamza* has caused confusion (also see the section on “Paleography” in this chapter). Two examples will suffice to illustrate this point:

⁵⁵ *MS*, 1: 210.

Aʿāfanī allāh, “May God protect me!” (RN 1003b*). The *alif maqṣūra*, in *aʿfā* (verb form IV, ʿ*f-w*), is replaced by a medial *alif*, perhaps mistakenly thought of by the scribe as a hollow verb (it is rather common in MA to use form IV for form I hollow verbs).⁵⁶ Another possible explanation would be that the *alif maqṣūra*, in *ʿāfā* (verb form III), is replaced by a prosthetic *alif*. In either scenario, this is a typical case of false substitution of the *alif*.

W-r-y-t lahu al-kitāb, “she concealed (?) the letter from him” (RN 1018d*; this case is discussed earlier in chapter 1). The ambiguity is caused by two possible, but very different, readings of the verb: if the base verb is *warā* (verb form II, *warrā*), “to hide,” then the *y* should be dropped in third person singular: *warrat* < *warayat*. But the base verb may well be *raʿā* (verb form IV, *arā*, and more commonly in MA, *awrā*),⁵⁷ “to show,” in which case the *alif* is elided, and *y* (*alif maqṣūra*) is not shortened in conjugation: *awrat* < *warayt*. The sentence thus could also be understood as “she showed him the letter.” It depends on what we make of the key verb. This is a case where misspelling, or fusion of the *alif*, may lead to misinformation.

Syntax

(9) Verb conjugation: imperfect. One of the characteristic features of MA is the disappearance of the moods of the imperfect.⁵⁸ In this category, the use of the second person imperfect verb for the imperative, a feature very common in MA,⁵⁹ is perhaps the most remarkable and most extensive:

Wa-taktubu lahum ruqʿa, “please write, on account of them, a receipt . . .” (RN 967a*).

Tabīʿuhum lī . . . wa-tabʿathu lī, “sell them on my behalf . . . and send me the order form” (RN 968b*).

Wa-tuʿarrifuhu tajtahidu lī, “tell him to work hard for me!” (RN 968b*). Also note the use of the second person in *tajtahidu*, that is, “[you ought to] work hard!”

⁵⁶ Usāma ibn Munqidh used *aṣāda* for *ṣāda*, *abāʿa* for *bāʿa*; see Schen, pt. 2, 68–69.

⁵⁷ For various MA formations of *raʿā* IV, especially *awrā*, see Schen, pt. 2, 70 (cites Landberg, Barthélemy, and Blau).

⁵⁸ Hopkins, 134–38 (§138); Schen, pt. 2, 79–80; Smith, “Ibn al-Mujāwir,” 336–37 (3A.7 and 3A.8).

⁵⁹ Hopkins, 136 (§138.b. i.).

Tahriṣu annaka tabīʿu lī al-ʿimāma, “make sure that you sell the turbans on my behalf” (RN 969*).

Taʿkhudhu min . . ., “take [the payment] from . . .!” (RN 969*).

Tabīʿuhā . . . wa-tarbuṭu kull shayʿ ʿuzla wa-tusallimuhu, “sell it . . . and wrap every thing separately and hand all of it to . . .!” (RN 970a*).

Tusayyiru lanā, “send us [the payment]!” (RN 970a*).

Tusallimu lī ʿalā . . . wa-taqūlu lahu . . . wa-tabʿathu lī, “Please send my regards to . . . and tell him . . ., then send me [a letter]” (RN 976*).

Fa-tusallimuhu lahu . . . wa-taʿkhudhu lahu . . ., “hand [the load] over to him . . . and receive [the mattocks] intended for him . . .” (RN 998*).

Fa-taḥuṭṭuhum . . ., “store them [in a safe place] . . .” (RN 1003a*).

Yā mawlāya tursilu lī kitāb, “O my master, please send me a letter” (RN 1003b*).

Sallim lī ʿalā . . . wa-tuʿlimu . . ., “say hello to [so-and-so] . . ., tell [him] that . . .” (RN 1003c/1004d*). Note the combination of the regular imperative and the imperfect as imperative.

[*Ta*]tasallamu minhu . . . wa-tasukkūhā . . ., “receive from him . . ., then lock them [in a safe place]” (RN 1004c*).

Fa-taʿʿalu ʿidlī . . . wa-tukhallī al-ghalāl . . . taḥuṭṭuhum . . ., “Put all of my share of the half [in one place], and use the crops [to pay for the taxes] . . ., store them [in a safe place]” (RN 1004c*).

Tusallimu lahu . . . wa-tusayyiru lī . . . wa-tusallimu lī ʿalā . . ., “give him [the payment] . . . send me [a receipt] . . .; and say hello to [so-and-so] for me!” (RN 1015b*).

Tusallimu lī ʿalayhim, “please say hello to them for me” (RN 1016a*).

Fa-yatafaddal al-mawlā taqifu . . . wa-tabīʿuhā . . . wa-tusallimu lahu . . . wa-tusayyiru lanā . . ., “Would the master please endorse [this letter] . . . sell [the aforesaid grains] . . . and give him [the money]. Please send us [a note]” (RN 1018a*). Note the shift from the third person jussive (*fa-yatafaddal*) to the second person imperfect.

Tahfiḏu qumāshī . . . taḥuṭṭuhum . . . wa-tusayyiru lī . . . wa-takshifu lī, “keep all of my fabrics . . ., and put them [in a safe place]. Send me [a follow-up note] . . . and investigate [the matter] for me” (RN 1018c*).

Tabīʿu al-hāja . . . [u]khruj, “sell the stuff . . . and go out to have some fun!” (RN 1018d*). Note the combination of the imperfect as imperative (*tabīʿu*) and the regular imperative (*ukhruj*).

Yā mawlāya tadhulu al-ʿaṭṭārī wa-staqṣī lī . . ., “O my master, would

you please visit the druggist and inquire for me . . .” (RN 1018d*). Again, note the juxtaposition of the second person imperfect *tadkhulu* and the regular imperative *istaqṣī*; also note the retaining of the *y* in the weak verb in the imperative.

Wa-tuʿarrifuhu annī . . ., “tell him that I . . .” (RN 1027a*).

Sayyir tuʿlimuhu, “send [him the goods] and tell him that . . .” (RN 1027g*). Note the combination of the imperative proper (*sayyir*) and the second person imperfect as imperative (*tuʿlimū*).

Sāʿata wuqūfika ʿalā hādhihi al-aḥruf tabīʿu al-fakhkhār . . . wa-tusallimu al-thaman ilā . . ., “Upon receiving this letter, sell the earthenware . . . and deliver the payment to . . .” (RN 1029a*). Also note *sāʿata wuqūf . . .*, a temporal clause (see below).

Fa-taqbiḍu . . ., “so take [the money] . . .!” (RN 1062a*).

Fa-tusallimuhum . . ., “so give them [to so-and-so]!” (RN 1064a*).

Fa-astahī min inʿāmika tajbī lī ʿan al-tamr wa-tusayyiruhu lī . . ., “I am hereby ashamedly begging for a favor from you to pay for the dried dates and then dispatch them, on my behalf, to . . .” (RN 1066a*).

Other examples of the absence of moods in the imperfect are:

The disintegration of the jussive ending of the weak verb, or the jussive medial of the hollow verb:

Lā tukhallihā . . . lā tukhallī illā . . ., “Don’t let it [sit idle] . . .; all you need to do is . . .” (RN 970a*).⁶⁰

Bī[hā], “sell it!” (RN 998*, 1016a*, 1027a*); for *bīʿ*.

Qūl li-Khalaf, “tell Khalaf that . . .” (RN 1004c*); for *qul*.

The dropping of the *n* in the indicative plural:

Tarāhum yaʿūdū . . ., “Will you see them come home?” (RN 964a*).

Wa-hum yashtakū . . ., “and [they] have complained about . . .” (RN 1057*).

Wa-llāha wa-llāha wa-thumma lahum tashḥanū wa-lā taʿūqhum . . ., “O God! O God! Please load the goods and do not delay [in shipping] them . . .” (RN 1064a*). The device of *wa-llāha wa-llāha*, “O God! O God! [Do that] . . .!” is a clear indication of the imperative (discussed earlier in this section), hence the subjunctive, in *tashḥanū* and *taʿūqu* (for the more appropriate plural *taʿūqū*).

Kānū markabayn yaḥillū . . ., “they were in two boats, arriving at . . .” (RN 1085*).

⁶⁰ Hopkins, 85–86 (§82d, e); Schen, pt. 2, 71.

(10) The auxiliary verb *kāna* in the imperfect for the imperative. This particular phenomenon has not been documented in other studies on the subject matter that I consulted and thus merits special attention:

Wa-llāha wa-llāha takūnu taḥuṭṭuhum . . ., “O God! O God! Put them [in a safe place] . . .” (RN 968a*).

Wa-yakūnu al-mawlā yaʿlamu . . ., “Let the master know that . . .” (RN 988*).

Takūnu taḥuṭṭuhā . . ., “put them [in a safe place] . . .” (RN 1015a*).

Yā mawlāya takūnu taʿlamu . . ., “O my master, please know that . . .” (RN 1018d*).

Lā yakūnu fīhi dhahab Makkī lā yakūnu illā Miṣrī, “no Meccan gold dinar [is to be accepted]; Egyptian gold dinar only” (RN 970a*). This is the only example of the negative. One could also argue for a possible reading of *lā yakun*, in the jussive, with the hollow verb *yakūnu* intact, but the absence of the moods in the imperfect overrules such consideration.

(11) Verb conjugation: perfect. One peculiar case is the use of the auxiliary verb *kāna* with the perfect where the simple past, not the pluperfect, is meant:⁶¹

Kāna qāla lī . . ., “he told me . . .” (RN 969*).

(12) Negation. The fusion of *lā* and *mā* in negation is very rare in CA, but quite common in MA.⁶² Following are examples found in the documents:

Fa-mā daḥāa lī shay wa-lā qultu anā shay, “he did not pay me a dime, neither did I say a thing . . .” (RN 969*). Note the *lā* replacing *mā* to negate the perfect.

Mā yalqā ʿindanā illā aʿāb, “He got nothing but troubles from us” (RN 1016a*). Note the *mā* replacing *lā* to negate the imperfect.

Mā nadrī sh biʿta, “we don’t know what you sold” (RN 1027a*).

Wa-naḥnu mā nanqalibu fī al-layl . . . illā nadʿū . . ., “We have been turning over [in bed] all night long . . . only to pray . . .” (RN 991a*).

⁶¹ W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language* (Cambridge, 1977 reprint of the 3rd edition), ii, 5c; Hopkins, 214 (§238); Schen, pt. 2, 87; Rex Smith and Moshalleh al-Moraekhi, “The Arabic Papyri of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78/2 (1996), 19 (S.29).

⁶² Hopkins, 150–55 (§§153–160), especially 151–52 (§153b; §154a); Schen, pt. 2, 82–83.

Mā naqdiru (pronounce: *niʾdar*) *nusāfiru* . . . , “we are unable to travel . . .” (RN 1059*). This is also a case of asyndeton (see below).

Mā sayyarnā hādhihi illā tusāʿidunā ʿalā alladhī . . . , “We won’t dispatch the shipment unless you help us out with the aforesaid [transaction]” (RN 970a*). Note the *mā* to negate the subjunctive in the perfect.

(13) Conditional clauses. A variety of peculiarities are seen in the conditional clauses, especially in the rules governing the protasis (the conditional clause) and the apodosis (the resulting clause).⁶³

Mā tahtāju waṣīhi . . . , “whatever you need, order it . . .” (RN 968b*, 970a*, 1003c/1004d*, 1004c*). Note the use of the imperfect, instead of the perfect, for the main verb in the protasis.⁶⁴

Mahmā ihtāja al-mawlā min al-ḥāja fa-taktubu lī . . . , “Whatever the master needs, write me [a note] . . .” (RN 970a*). In addition to the characteristic MA feature of the use of the indicative for the imperative (*taktubu*) in the apodosis,⁶⁵ the most interesting is the shift of person, from the third, in the protasis, to the second, in the apodosis. A logical explanation would be that the third person *al-mawlā*, “master,” is in essence an extension of the second person, that is, “[your] majesty.” This kind of shift is very common in the documents examined.

Mā yahtāju al-mawlā waṣīhi, “Whatever the master needs, please entrust it [to me]” (RN 998*). Note the shift of person in the protasis and apodosis, the use of the imperfect in the former, and the imperative without the *fa* in the latter.

In kunta tajī taqḍī ḥawāʾijaka . . . , “if you choose to come to take care of your business . . .” (RN 998*). Note the use of the perfect *kunta* and the imperfect *tajī* within the protasis. A similar example is also seen in RN 1003c/1004d*, cited in the beginning of this section, where *mā kāna* (sic.) *akhadhta* is observed. This is also a case of asyndeton.

In ṣahḥa kayluka wālī akyāl lahum yunṣifu, “If your scale is correct, then their scale master may fix the *wayba* [amount]” (RN 971*). The apodosis is a nominal sentence, and is without the *fa*.

⁶³ Hopkins, 250–60 (§§309–327); Schen, pt. 2, 94.

⁶⁴ Hopkins, 251 (§311a).

⁶⁵ Hopkins, 252–53 (§312a).

Fa-in ka'k jarā kulluhu sayyir min al-daḡīq . . ., “If the cakes have all run out, then send along flour [instead] . . .” (RN 1004c*). The protasis is a nominal sentence. Also note the irregular word order (should be: *in jarā ka'k . . .*).

In qadarta tashtarī lī . . ., “if you could, please buy me . . .” (RN 1072*). Note the use of the imperfect for the imperative in the apodosis.

(14) Asyndeton, or sentences without appropriate conjunctions:⁶⁶

Mā naḡdiru nusāfiru . . ., “we are unable to travel . . .” (RN 1059*).⁶⁷

Naḡlubu nukrī bihā . . ., “We would like to request that you rent . . .” (RN 970a*).

As'alu allāh ukrī . . ., “I beseech God[’s help] so I may rent . . .” (RN 976*).

Urīdu ukrī bihim . . ., “I intend to use the cash to rent . . .” (RN 1003c/1004d*).

Wa-tukhallī al-ghalāl taḡmanu al-zakāt . . ., “Use the crops to pay for the *zakāt*-taxes . . .” (RN 1004c*).

Wa-naḡnu nanjū wuṣūl al-marākib taṣīlu . . ., “we hope that the boats will arrive . . .” (RN 1085*).

Wa-al-sīr kulluhu taḡarraka siwā al-qamḡ dīnārayn illā qīrāṡayn, “The prices have all changed except for wheat [which is sold for] two dinars minus two *qīrāṡs* [per *īrdabb*]” (RN 1027a*).

(15) Concord. One noticeable aspect is the shift of person between the verb and the subject, a phenomenon that is already seen above. Here are some more examples:

'Araḡta al-mawlā dhālika wa-taḡa'uhu . . ., “[Your] lordship know about this. Please store it . . .” (RN 1037a*). Note the second person verb and the third person subject; it can be argued that there is a tendency to treat the third person *al-mawlā* as the second.

(16) Temporal clauses:⁶⁸

Sā'ata wuḡḡīfika 'alā hādhihi al-aḡruḡ tabī'u al-fakkkhār . . . wa-tusallimu al-thaman ilā . . ., “Upon receiving this letter, sell the pottery . . . and

⁶⁶ Hopkins, 228–36 (§§268–278); Schen, pt. 2, 89–92.

⁶⁷ For the verb *qadara* in the asyndeton, cf. Hopkins, 232 (§269p.); Schen, pt. 2, 91.

⁶⁸ Hopkins, 246–50 (§§301–308).

deliver the payment to . . .” (RN 1029a*); an asyndetic genitive clause.⁶⁹

Sāʿat wuṣūl laka alladhī lā tukhallihā . . ., “As soon as the aforesaid [shipment] arrives at your place, don’t let it . . .” (RN 970a*). Also note the use of *alladhī*, without the relative clause, and referred to by the feminine pronoun *hā*.

(17) Vernacular expressions:

Mā nadrī sh biʿta, “we don’t know what you sold” (RN 1027a*). The use of *sh* for the interrogative is very frequent in MA.⁷⁰

Lā tashlū lahūm shay min hūna ilā hūna, “Don’t move things around from here to there . . .” (RN 1053a*). The verb *shāla* is Egyptian expression;⁷¹ also note the oral form of *hūna*, for the formal *hunā*.

Wa-jīb thamanahā . . ., “and forward its cost . . .” (RN 1059*). The verb *jāba* is an Egyptian expression;⁷² also note retaining of the weak letter *y* of the hollow verb in the imperative.

Jāba lakum, “he brought to you . . .” (RN 1056a*).

Fa-munākh mayyit bi-al-bard ghāyat mā yakūnu, “the weather has been deadly and extremely cold” (RN 1059*). Compare with Usāma Ibn Munqidh: *anā fi al-mawt min al-bard*, “I am dying of cold.”⁷³

Wa-lanā khārīj yawm al-khamīs, “We are supposed to be out of town this Thursday” (RN 1064a*).

The repetition of certain phrases, such as *kathūr kathūr*, *surʿa surʿa*, *wa-llāha wa-llāha*, and so forth, seems to reflect the oral flavor of the syntax; the examples are too abundant to be listed here.

(18) Other irregularities and peculiarities. These are too sporadic to allow systematic analysis. As such, they should perhaps be viewed more as resulting from lapses and errors than general trends:

Wa-dhakarū lahu anna nahnu (RN 1053a*); for *anna-nā*.

Surirtu hādhihi, “I was very pleased [about] that” (RN 1018d*). The preposition is missing: *surirtu [li, min, bi-]hādhihi*.

Innī rāḥilan, “I am leaving . . .” (RN 968c*). The predicate of *inna* should be nominative; this is a typical case of hyper-correction.

⁶⁹ Hopkins, 248 (§305b); Schen, pt. 2, 95.

⁷⁰ *DEA*, s.v.

⁷¹ *DEA*, s.v.

⁷² *DEA*, s.v.

⁷³ Schen, pt. 1, 221.

Having surveyed our data, a few remarks are in order. First, it should be pointed out that despite the numerous examples of deviations from CA norms, what we witness here is far from being a wholesale takeover by the MA of the written language, or a regression or “debasement” of Classical Arabic as such.⁷⁴ Rather, the language of the documents from the “Sheikh’s house” is perhaps best described as a hybrid that blends the CA and MA, but is nevertheless squarely based on CA conventions, with highly formulaic phraseology and standard vocabulary, along with some MA elements. In other words, there are plenty indications of the existence of MA elements in the texts, but nothing is outrageously in violation of the age-old rules that have safeguarded the continuity of the *‘Arabīya* as the vehicle for written communication, “high” or “low.” Secondly, the long-debated question “Why MA?” is perhaps irrelevant in the present context.⁷⁵ If the MA elements found in literary texts by the prominent literati can be viewed as legitimate examples of the fluid, and flexible, state of the literary language, how much more so those found in the non-literary documents uncovered in a dump heap on the shore of the Red Sea. After all, the written text does reflect the spoken language, even in high-minded authors such as Usāma Ibn Munqidh or Ibn al-Mujāwir. In Usāma Ibn Munqidh’s case, the possible “scribal contamination” has long been a bone of contention,⁷⁶ as regards the “Sheikh’s house,” where ordinary people went about their business and would naturally write things down in the way in which they were most comfortable, such concerns would hardly carry any weight at all. Thirdly, that being noted, there still is a line to be drawn between the written text and the spoken language. The documents in question show clearly that some “control factor” was at work. In addition to the fact that the most common and plain vernacular expressions are largely unused, the overall tendency seems to be of flexibility within a quasi-formal language by which the people in Quseir actually conducted “serious” business. In a sense, they write

⁷⁴ The term “debasement” is borrowed from Schen, pt. 1, 218.

⁷⁵ For detailed discussions of the reason medieval Muslim literati utilized MA elements in their writings, or, more accurately, why their texts contained so many MA elements (an implication that scribes may have a share in the enterprise), see Schen, pt. 1, 224–33; Smith, “Ibn al-Mujāwir,” 347–48.

⁷⁶ For the so-called “blame the copyist” hypothesis regarding the MA elements in Usāma Ibn Munqidh’s Memoirs, see Schen, pt. 1, 227–28, 233.

about “real stuff” in their blunt “street language,” while endeavoring to keep the “fancy” elements—salutatories and greetings, invocations of God, and the like—embedded in the conventional rhetorical formula. It is in such spirit, and such manner, that the letter we read at the beginning of this section, as well as many letters and notes discovered in the “Sheikh’s house,” were written, where the formulaic ornaments frame a narrative that is peppered with lively vernacular expressions.

CHAPTER FIVE

EDITION

Commercial Letters

TEXT NO. 1: A LETTER CONCERNING CROP SALES AND PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS

RN 970a

Description: Light brown paper, badly torn upper part, large holes, 8.2 × 24.6 cm, recto twenty lines, verso eight lines on both ends of the paper, in a naïve but clear hand, with generously supplied diacritics, black ink.

Introduction: This lengthy letter sheds considerable light on the workings of the warehouse. Its context and the various issues it raises, including the question of “Egyptian dinars” vs. “Meccan dinars,” are discussed in chapter 2 above.

Text

recto

١. مماليكه المظفر وابو
٢. بكر
٣. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
٤. حضرة الشيخ ابو مفرج [١] اطال
٥. الله بقاءه و<ادام> عزه ونعماه
٦. [] اننى سيرت لك
٧. [] الحميلات
٨. [] ثلثين اليه كل شى جيده
٩. فا الله الله ساعه وصول لك الذى

١٠. لا تخليها تقعد ساعه واحده
 ١١. تبيعها بما طعم الله ورزق
 ١٢. فنحن نطلب نكرى بها حموله
 ١٣. كبيره ونسيرها للمولا وما سيرنا
 ١٤. هذه الا تساعدنا على الذى فا الله
 ١٥. الله لا تخلى الا تسير لى ثمنها
 ١٦. صحبه خضر الصبى الحمال
 ١٧. ولا تاخذ لنا ثمنها الا ذهب مصرى
 ١٨. وانتقده جيد لا يكون فيه ذهب
 ١٩. مكى لا يكون الا مصرى وتربط
 ٢٠. كل شى عزله وتسلمه لخضر
-
١٦. حصر.

verso

١. فا الله الله ما تحتاج وصيه
 ٢. ومهما احتاج المولا من الحاجه
 ٣. فتكتب لى مع الحمالين رقعته
 ٤. لحوايجك <سير> ولما يصل لك
 ٥. من الغله بما امر تسير لنا مل الثمن
 ٦. والسلام عليك ورحمه الله وبركاته
-
٥. مل = ملء.

address (written from the top down)

١. خدمه توصى على []
 ٢. الشيخ ابو مفرج الى []

Translation

recto

- 1–3. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. His servants al-Muzaffar and Abū Bakr
4. [write to inform] Shaykh Abū Mufarrij—may God prolong
5. his life and make his strength and happiness everlasting!—
6. [. that] I have dispatched to you
7. [. in] small loads
8. [. a total of] thirty; [and that] everything shipped to him (i.e., you) is of good quality.
9. By God, by God! as soon as the aforesaid [shipment] arrives,
10. don't let it sit idle, not a second!
11. Sell it, as God so feeds and provides.
12. We would like to rent a large carrier [for the merchandise]
13. and dispatch it to the Master. [But] we will not dispatch it
14. unless you help us out with the aforesaid [shipment]. By God,
15. by God! all you need to do is send me the down payment,
16. to be accompanied by Khidr the young porter.
17. Don't accept the payments on our behalf unless [they are paid in] Egyptian golden [dinars].
18. Cash the money carefully: No Meccan
19. golden [dinars]. Egyptian dinars only. Wrap
20. everything separately and hand it all to Khidr.

verso

1. By God, by God! anything you want, let [me] know.
2. Whatever [you,] the Master need,
3. write me a memo [and send it] through the porters;
4. I will ship off your orders. Upon the delivery
5. of the crops as ordered hereby, you should send us the full payment.
6. Peace be upon you. God's mercy and blessings.

address

1. The service was commissioned [.]
2. Shaykh Abū Mufarrij to [.]

Commentary

recto

6. The first part of the line is damaged by worm-eaten holes. In light of the formulaic phraseology, the missing part should likely be *wa-siwā dhālīka*, a phrase to end the greeting segment and introduce the main content.

8. The first part of the line is missing and the reference to the suffix “him” (*ilayhi*) is perhaps an unidentified third party.

9. *Wuṣūl laka* is odd (*wuṣūl-ka* is better), but the second *l* is visible in the manuscript.

12–13. *Naṭlubu nukrī . . . nusayyiru*; since all the verbs are unpointed, there remains a possibility that the reading could be *naṭlubu tukrī . . . nusayyiru*, i.e., *we* request that *you*, Abū Mufarrij, rent a large *ḥamūla*, that is, either “a large boat, carrier,” or “a large space in a shipment,” and dispatch it to the “Master,” a third party.

17. *Thaman*, “payment, cost”; according to Goitein, the term, in the Cairo Geniza papers, denotes “the total proceeds of one sale,” as opposed to *sīr*, “the price of the unit sold”; see *MS*, 1: 218.

18. *Intaqid*, “cash the money!” could also mean “examine it!” as in, “detect defects in it!” which also fits the context here. The root *naqd*, indicates, in the Cairo Geniza papers, “money with a legal tender”; see *MS*, 1: 234.

verso

2–3. The *mawlā* here is obviously Abū Mufarrij. Note the shift of the subject from the third person (*iḥtāja*) to second (*taktubu*).

5. *Mil[?] al-thaman*, “paid in full”; the statement implies that the money mentioned on the recto was perhaps some sort of down payment, and that the “full” amount was due after the delivery had completed.

TEXT NO. 2: A LETTER CONCERNING THE DELIVERY, AND DEFECT, OF A SHIPMENT

RN 971

Description: Light yellow paper, torn on all sides, 9.3 × 8.9 cm, recto six lines, verso three lines in a different hand, black and brown ink.

Introduction: The contents of this letter, especially with regard to the “shortages” detected in the shipment, are discussed in chapter 2.

Text

recto

١. [] ل عبد الباقي اربعة اجمال نقصه ستة ام <داد>
 ٢. عمر سبعة اجمال وربع نقصه ثلاثة وبيات
 ٣. اب <و> الفتح حملين نقصه نصف وبيه
 ٤. [] الحسين حملين ونصف نقصه تسعة \ امداد /
 ٥. [] اجمال نقصه ثلاثة امداد
 ٦. [] اد حمل الا []

verso

١. <ا> علم الشيخ ابو مفرج اطال كيلنا
 ٢. <ل> لهم بالويبه ان صح كيلك والى اكيال
 ٣. لهم ينصف وبيه الوالي بدر الدين

Translation

recto

1. [. . .]l ‘Abd al-Bāqī: four loads; balance: six *mudds*.
2. ‘Umar: seven and a quarter loads; balance: three *waybas*.
3. Ab[ū] al-Faḥ: two loads; balance: half *wayba*.
4. [. . .] Al-Ḥusayn: two and half loads; balance: nine *mudds*.
5. [.] loads; balance: three *mudds*.
6. [.]d: one load minus [.].

verso

1. I [write to] inform Shaykh Abū Mufarrij that our scale exceeds
2. theirs by one *wayba*. If your scale is accurate, then their scale
3. may discount the [extra] *wayba*. The scale master is Badr al-Dīn.

Commentary

recto

4. The last word, *amdād*, is stacked above the line.

verso

1. *Aṭāla*, literally “to make long or longer, elongate, extend”; the present rendering is conjectural.

2–3. The syntax of the conditional sentence is corrupt, in that the resulting clause, *wālī akyāl* . . ., lacks the preposition *fā*.

3. *Yunṣifu*, literally “to be just, to do things right.” Also note that the *y*, in *al-wālī*, is written with two dots, a “non-Egyptian” feature rarely seen in the Quseir documents.

TEXT NO. 3: A LETTER CONCERNING THE SHIPPING OF FLOUR

RN 972a

Description: Brown paper, profuse worm-eaten holes, torn on the left edge, 8.3 × 10.1 cm, recto nine lines, in a naïve hand, black ink, verso blank.

Text

١. اخوه على بن حسين
٢. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم الجابري
٣. اعلم الشيخ ابا مفرج ادام الله عزه
٤. انى سيرت اليك صحبه [] الحمال
٥. زكيه دقيق فيما له []
٦. وانما []
٧. []
٨. []
٩. الى مواصله []

in the right margin

[حضر يسلمهم زبده]

حصر. زبده.

Translation

1–2. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. [From] his brother ‘Alī ibn Ḥusayn al-Jābirī.

3. I am writing to inform Shaykh Abū Mufarrij—may God prolong his strength!—

4. that I have dispatched to you, in the company of [. . .] the porter,

5. fine flour, which is for [.]

6. however [.]

7. [.]

8. [.]

9. to he who delivers it [.]

in the right margin

He came here to deliver butter to them [.]

Commentary

in the right margin

Ḥaḍāra, literally “he came”; in some medieval documents, the term bears the notion of “came before his witness”; see, for example, Richards, “The Qasāma in Mamlūk Society: The Ḥaram collection,” *AI* 25 (1991), 259–61; Rāḡib, “Les archives d’un gardien du monastère de Qalamūn,” *AI* 29 (1995), 41–42; *ALAD*, nos. 52, 57.

TEXT NO. 4: A LETTER CONCERNING THE DELIVERY OF WHEAT AND FLOUR

RN 1003a

Description: Light brown paper, in very good condition, 9.7 × 15 cm, recto nine lines, in a clear hand, verso six lines, soiled for the most part, in a different hand, black ink.

Introduction: The text on the recto was examined by Jennifer Thayer, who also published a full translation (Thayer, "Land Politics," 47), from which the following rendering differs slightly. It is likely that the paper was re-used in that the text of the verso appears to have nothing to do with that of the recto.

Text

recto

١. من عبد على
٢. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم بن حجازى
٣. اعلم حضره الشيخ ابو مفرج وفقه الله تعلى
٤. انى ارسلت لك عشر قطع دقيق وعشر
٥. ارادب قمح فيمن الله لا تسلم لاحد منهم شى
٦. حتى اصل اليك والله الله الوصيه
٧. عليهم فتحطهم عند موضع جيد
٨. ولا تسلم لاحد منهم شى غيرى
٩. والسلام عليك ورحمه الله واحسانه

٣. تعلى = تعالى. ٨. عبرى.

Translation

- 1–2. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. From the servant of ‘Alī ibn Ḥijāzī.
3. I am writing to inform your Highness, Shaykh Abū Mufarrij—may God, Almighty, make him (i.e., you) successful!—that
4. I have sent to you ten *qiṭ‘a*-units of flour and ten
5. *irdabbs* of wheat. By the Grace of God, do not deliver any [of these] to anybody
6. until I have arrived at you[r place]. O God, O God, the instruction,
7. on account of these goods, is that you store them in a safe place.
8. Do not deliver a thing to anybody without my [consent].
9. Peace be upon you. God’s mercy and blessings.

TEXT NO. 5: A BUSINESS LETTER

RN 1017a

Description: Light brown paper, torn on the left edge and the lower part, a considerable number of worm-eaten holes, 12.5 × 6.2 cm, recto six lines, in fine *naskh*, verso six lines, in a very naïve and coarse hand, black ink.

Introduction: The texts on the recto and verso, written in drastically different hands, seem to be related, in that both mention a “notice” (*al-waraqqa*), carried by a porter named ‘Alī, along with “two *qiṭ‘a*-loads” of grain. The text on the recto is a formal letter (*kitāb*) to Abū Mufarrij regarding the delivery. The text on the verso appears to be a working memo written by someone else to confirm, or “double check,” the identity of the porter and the recipient.

Text

recto

١. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
٢. يصل كتابي هذا الى الا>خ أبي< مفرج لرعد [
٣. الحاج عبد الكريم] [ى مسلمه على البطوى]

- ٤ . هذه الورقه تصد<ل> احجامها تام السلام وافاد []
 ٥ . والحاج [] سلمو عليك وقد سير لك كتاب عبد []
 ٦ . على قط<عتين> [] عبد الكريم وحمو حسن وقطعتين لل []

١ . لى.

verso

- ١ . حامل هازه
 ٢ . الورقه اسمه
 ٣ . على الحمال
 ٤ . العجوز
 ٥ . حامل قطعين
 ٦ . لعبد المحسن

Translation

recto

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
2. This letter of mine is to Brother Abū Mufarrij [.....].
3. Ḥājj ‘Abd al-Karīm [.....]. ‘Alī al-Baṭawī is to deliver it.
4. As regarding this notice, the bulk of its contents (?) has arrived safely and in good condition. It says [that.....].
5. and Ḥājj [.....] all send their regards to you. He had sent you the letter of ‘Abd [.....].
6. ‘Alī [regarding] two *qiṭ‘a*-loads [... for Ḥājj] ‘Abd al-Karīm and Ḥasan’s father-in-law, and two *qiṭ‘a*-loads for [.....].

verso

1. The carrier of this
2. notice, his name is
3. ‘Alī the porter,
4. the Old Man.
5. He has carried two *qiṭ‘a*-loads
6. for ‘Abd al-Muḥsin.

Commentary

recto

4. The term *al-waraqā* was used in Cairo Geniza papers to denote “a sheet [with accounts]” or “note”; see *Dictionary*, 224. It thus ought to be distinguished from the *kitāb*, “letter,” mentioned in line 2. The reading of *ahjāmuḥā* is tentative; the supposed *m*, with its oval-shaped loop, appears more like a *ṣ*.

5. Note the spelling of the verb *sallamū*, without the *alif* otiosom.

6. The syntax is incomplete. Judging from the way the “two *qiṭʿa*-loads” is repeated, it may be that the first “two loads” were “for” ‘Abd al-Karīm, whose name is also mentioned above in line 3, while the other “two loads” were “for” perhaps ‘Abd al-Muḥsin, whose name occurs on the verso, line 6.

verso

2. “This notice” is perhaps referring to the same *waraqā* mentioned on the recto, line 4.

3. This porter ‘Alī is probably the same ‘Alī al-Baṭawī, whose name is mentioned on the recto, line 3.

TEXT NO. 6: A LETTER CONCERNING THE DELIVERY OF GRAIN AND ITS PAYMENT

RN 1018a

Description: Yellow paper, a large hole in the middle, 10 × 8 cm, recto seven lines, verso eight lines, the last three written in a different hand, black ink.

Introduction: The text on the recto discusses the ways in which the payments were to be made, or credit to be transferred. The text on the verso consists of two short memos, written in distinctly different hands. The first memo, written in a fine hand, appears to be a response to the text on the recto, discussing the payment of the cargo in question. The second memo, the last three lines, in faded ink, is nearly impossible to read, except a few words such as “a total of four” (line 6), “five loads” (line 7), and “six *mudds*” (line 8). This is likely an irrelevant note written on the back of the re-used paper.

Text

recto

١. الذي اعلم به الشيخ <ابو م> فرج وفقه الله توفيق العارفين
 ٢. وجعله من اولياء الله لا خوف عليهم ولا
 ٣. هم يحزنون وسوى ذلك انى <سيرت> الى [] منكم
 ٤. اربعة ارادب ونصف وربيع شعير و<ا> ربعة ارادب قمح
 ٥. فيتفطل المولا تقف مع موصل هذه الاحرف
 ٦. وتبيعها بما طعم الله ورزق وتسلم له المبلغ
 ٧. وتسير لنا رقعته لاصرف والسلام عليك ورحمة الله وبركاته
-
٥. فيتفطل = فيتفضل.

verso

١. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
 ٢. مملوكه مبارك
 ٣. وهي اول حو<اله> [] بتفطلك
 ٤. واحسانك [] لله خير والحمد لله وحده
 ٥. ولا تعوقه عن حماله ولا تاخذ منه نقص ان بقى شى
-
١. لى. ٣. بتفطلك = بتفضلك. ٥. تعوقه. ناخذ.

Translation

recto

1. I write to inform Shaykh [Abū Mu]farrij—may God make him successful in the same manner as those who have acquired Divine Knowledge!
 2. May God make him among *God's Friends*, no fear shall be on them,
 3. neither shall they sorrow!—and so forth. [And now to the main topic:]
 I have [sent] to [one of the associates?] of you

4. four and a half and a quarter *irdabbs* of barley, and four *irdabbs* of wheat.
5. Would the Master please endorse this letter with its carrier,
6. sell them (i.e., the crops)—as God has fed and provided—and hand him the proceeds.
7. Please send us a memo so I can cash the money. Peace be upon you and God's mercy and blessings.

verso

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
2. His servant Mubārak.
3. Hereinabove is the first certificate of transfer of debt. [Please pay it in full] by your grace
4. and benevolence. [. . .] Blessings are from God. Praise be to God alone.
5. Do not hold it back from the carrier! Do not accept, if any, shortages [in the delivery]!

Commentary

recto

1. The formulaic *waffaqahu allāh tawfiq al-ʿarīfīn* is also found in *DAA2*, no. 31; Grohmann, *Die Arabischen Papyri aus der Giessener Universitätsbibliothek* (Giessen, 1960), no. 17.
- 2–3. *Awliyāʾ* . . . *wa-lā hum yaḥzanūna*; cf. Qur'an 10: 62.
5. The verb root *w-q-f*, of *taqifu*, with the preposition *maʿa*, signifies "to support," "to back" (Lane); and hence the present rendering. The use of the verb may also bear the connotation of "inspecting" (*w-q-f ʿalā*) the cargo upon its arrival.
6. *Bi-mā ṭaʿama allāh wa-razaqa*, a formulaic idiom for cutting a deal (see chapter 4).
7. *Ruqʿa*, literally "a piece of paper," was used in the Cairo Geniza papers as "order of payment," or "promissory notes" as well; see *MS*, 1: 242, 245–47; 2: 435, 458; 3: 450 (note 85). The verb root *ṣ-r-f* can be used to mean various aspects of handling the money, "to spend money," "to change money," or "to pay." The context here is perhaps that the recipient of the letter (abbreviated as C) would eventually owe to the sender of the letter (A), for selling the

grain on the latter's behalf. If that is the case, then the reference to *al-mablagh*, in line 6, as the "amount" of money to be given by C to the sender's associate (B), who carried the letter (and perhaps accompanied the cargo), would be something other than real cash. Therefore A needs some further confirmation from C so he can cash (*li-ʾasrifā*) the money. There is, of course, another scenario: that C sells the grains and gives the money to B, and then he ought to send an order of payment (*ruqʿa*) to A, who in turn, will "pay" (*ʾs-r-f*) him back.

verso

1. Only the last stroke of a possible *y* has survived in the manuscript. Its position suggests that this is likely the remaining part of the logogram *l-y*, for the *basmala* (on this logogram, see chapter 4).
3. The word *haw[āla]* is only partially preserved. In addition to "transfer of debt, credit, money order," it can also mean "order of payment"; see *MS*, 2: 488. If that is the case, then the sentence here may mean "this is the first order of payment; please deliver it as requested. . . ."
- 3–4. *Bi-tafaḍḍulika wa-iḥsānika*; for the use of this formulaic idiom in Ayyubid chancery writing, see *MK*, 34 (and discussion above in chapter 1).
5. The clause *lā taʿūquhu* 'an . . . is written without any dots, so it could be *lā naʿūqu*, namely "we will not withhold . . .; nor will we accept. . . ."

TEXT NO. 7: A BUSINESS LETTER

RN 1026a

Description: Yellowish-brown paper, worn on the top and the left edge, 9.5 × 11.5 cm, recto seven lines, verso two lines, in cursive *naskh*, black ink.

Introduction: This fragment constitutes the upper portion of a letter to Abū Mufarrij, who is spoken of as "the owner of the warehouse" (*ṣāḥib al-shūna*) at Quseir. The letter informs the recipient of the arrival of the sender, a certain unidentified Ibrāhīm ibn Naṣr Allāh, and his company to Qūṣ, an inland city 200 km to the west of Quseir. Qūṣ is known to have been the capital of Upper Egypt from

the Fatimid period on and the jumping-off point for the desert routes to the Red Sea harbors 'Aydhāb and Quseir; traders and their cargoes traveled from Cairo upriver to Qūṣ and then across the desert to 'Aydhāb or Quseir.

Text

recto

- المضيعی . ١
 ابراهيم . ٢
 الخادم . ٣
 ٤ . بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم ابن نصر الله
 ٥ . يقبل الارض بين يدي المولا الوالد الموفق الشيخ
 ٦ . الاجل ابو مفرج ادام الله سعوده و اباد
 ٧ . حسوده وينهى اليه اننى وصلت الى قوص مع
-
- ١ . المصبي . ٥ . الميفق .

verso

- ١ . الى القصير يسلم للشيخ ابو مفرج صاحب الشونه دا <مت>
 ٢ . سعاده

Translation

recto

- 1–4. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. The humbly lost servant Ibrāhīm ibn Naṣr Allāh
 5. kisses the ground in front of the master, the father, the successful
 6. and the most exalted Shaykh Abū Mufarrij—may God prolong his fortune and crush
 7. his envious [enemies]—and reports: I have arrived at Qūṣ with [. . .].

verso

1. To Quseir, to be delivered to Shaykh Abū Mufarrij, the owner of the warehouse. May
2. his happiness last forever.

Commentary

1–4. The challenge here is to read correctly the *tarjama*, or the sender’s name, which is written in several lines above and parallel to the *basmala*. It is clear that the first line (*al-muḍayyaʿī*) is by no means part of a proper name, but, rather, an adjective modifying *al-khādīm*, “servant,” which appears in the third line. The placement of *al-khādīm* before the other lines indicates that it is to be read as the first word of the *tarjama*. (For more on the Ayyubid *ʿunwān*-titles in letter writing, see *MK*, 34 and the discussion in chapter 1). The current reading of *al-muḍayyaʿī* is tentative; the letter *ḍ* is undotted, to be followed by an obvious *y*, with two dots underneath, while the circle on the letter *ʿ* is not visible. Other possible readings could be: *al-muṭīʿī*, “the obedient,” or *al-muḍayyaʿī*, “the enlightened (?)” At any rate, this is most likely one of the stock adjectives attached to a title.

5. *Al-wālid*, “father,” is used here as a honorific title; for the honorific title of *al-wālidī*, see *QS*, 6: 34; also *DAA1*, no. 45 (*al-mawlā al-wālid*); *DAA2*, nos. 8 (*wālidī, al-wālid*), 13 (*al-wālid al-ʿazīz*).

6. The title *al-ʿajall*, “the most exalted,” was first used as the highest honorific title at the Fatimid court. It became a commonly used honorific thereafter (*QS*, 6: 6). It is still interesting to note, however, that a provincial merchant such as Abū Mufarrij would have been addressed with such official honorific titles that strongly suggest some kind of association with the government.

6–7. *Adāma allāh suʿūdahu wa-abāda* (?) *ḥusūdahu* appears to be a stock clause of the *duʿāʾ*-obeisance greeting segment of a letter. But this type of combination is rarely seen elsewhere. The most common relevant uses are: *adāma [allāh] nuʿmāka wa-kabata . . . ḥussādaka wa-ʿdāka* (*ABPH*, no. 39), *thabata allāh suʿūdahā wa kabata ḥusūdahā* (*ABPH*, no. 48), *adāma [allāh] taʿyīdahū . . . wa kabata ḥasadatahu wa-ʿidāhu* (*ALAD*, no. 93), *adāma allāh nuʿmāhu wa-kabata ḥāsidihi wa-ʿdāhu* (*ALAD*, no. 94), *adāma [allāh] tamkīnahā . . . wa-kabata ḥasadatahā wa-ʿdāhā* (*ALAD*, no. 95), *adāma [allāh] sumuwwahā . . . wa-kabata ḥasadatahā wa-ʿdāhā*

(*ALAD*, no. 98, Document II). All the cases cited above are from petitions submitted to *amīrs*, *qādīs*, and court officials.

7. “I have arrived at Qūṣ with . . .”; the overseas traders of the Indian Ocean and Red Sea always traveled with companions, regardless of whether or not there was a formal financial partnership (*MS*, 1: 346–48; *GQQ*, 99, 105; for more details, see chapter 1).

verso

1. *Al-shūna*, a certain kind of granary; its structure is suggested by Muhammad M. Amin as nothing more than a walled open space, but occasionally there were also roofed ones (*musaqqaf*); see M. M. Amin et al., *Architectural Terms in Mamluk Documents: 648–923 H/1250–1517* (Cairo, 1990), 71–72. According to al-Qalqashandī, a *shūna* could also be used to store wood and straw and the like (*QSM*, 208).

TEXT NO. 8: LETTER CONCERNING A DELIVERY OF WHEAT AND PURCHASE OF SWORDS

RN 1026b

Description: Yellow paper, torn along the right edge, 7.3 × 6.8 cm, recto six lines, verso three lines, fine *naskh*, sparsely dotted, black ink.

Introduction: This is a very informative letter, albeit incomplete. Judging from the usual pattern as we know it, the first three lines deal with the normal business at the warehouse: the item of shipment (wheat?) and the identity of its sender (line 1), the person that accompanied it and its final recipient (line 2), and the broker (Najīb, Shaykh Abū Mufarrij’s senior associate). More interesting, perhaps, is the remainder of the letter, which contains an inquiry into the possible sale of swords on behalf of an unnamed “pilgrim” (*al-ḥājj*) by the seller, a certain Abū Yaḥyā Abū Bakr. A final note: Najīb only worked for Abū Mufarrij, who, in turn, was himself in charge of purchase of the sword. The verso contains what seems to be a balance sheet that may have nothing to do with the content on the recto. It is likely that the paper was later reused.

Text

recto

١. [] <قم> ح غاليه من راشد بن نجم الدين
 ٢. <صحبة> [] مع بن حمال العلامه راجى وهو لعلى بن ابراهيم
 ٣. [] <ا> لشيخ نجيب تبلغ سلامى للاخ ابو يحيى ابو بكر
 ٤. [] الى بيعه السيف فان الحاج داعيه
 ٥. [] وخص نفسك باتم سلامى وجميع
 ٦. [] <ابو> مفرج تعرفه نسير اليه السيف لا []

١. عاليه. ٣. تبلغ. ٥. حص.

verso

١. موسى بن الخضار دينارين ونصف
 ٢. صيف <سي> نى ثلاثه وعشرين درهم
 ٣. وسدس . . .

١. الحصار.

Translation

recto

- [To be delivered is] wheat of high quality, from Rāshid ibn Najm al-Dīn,
- [accompanied by . . .] the son of Rājī, the carrier of the trade mark. It is for 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm,
- [through the brokage by] Shaykh Najīb. Send my regards to Brother Abū Yaḥyā Abū Bakr,
- [and talk to him] about his selling of the sword. The pilgrim has demanded it.
- [Say hello to everybody;] and my warmest greetings to yourself and all.

6. [When you see Shaykh Abū] Mufarrij, tell him we will forward the sword to him without [any delay . . .].

verso

1. Mūsā ibn al-Khiḍār: two and a half dinars.
2. Ṣayf Ḥ[usay]nī: twenty-three dirhams
3. plus one sixth [. . .].

Commentary

recto

1. The reading of [*qam*]ḥ *‘āliya* (? or *ghāliya*, “expensive”) is conjectural.
2. *Wa-hwa*, “it,” namely, the shipment in question. The term *ḥammāl al-‘alāma*, “he who carries the trade mark,” may imply that certain kinds of paperwork were to be carried in person by those who escorted the shipment.
3. *Tablighu*, “you send . . .”; the imperfect verb, for the imperative, is undotted, but the reading is nonetheless quite certain, given the context.
5. *Khaṣṣ nafsaka*, literally “devote yourself to . . .”; since the imperative verb is undotted, the possible reading of *ḥaḍḍir nafsaka* as “get yourself ready for . . .” is also likely.
6. The verbs *tu‘rifuhu nusayyiru* are undotted, but the subjects are rather clear here: “you tell him that *we* will send. . . .”

TEXT NO. 9: LETTER REQUESTING SUPPLIES TO A SHIP STUCK NEAR YEMEN

RN 1059

Description: Light yellow paper, slightly worn on the lower right edge, 12 × 9.5 cm, recto eight lines plus two lines marginalia, clear fine hand, with slight upward slanting lines, the final word stacked above each line, black ink, verso soiled, with a few illegible lines.

Introduction: The letter is written in a fairly high level of classical Arabic, with a few Egyptian colloquial expressions. Noteworthy are the repeated invocation phrases *alf alf* (line 2) and *wa-allāha allāha*

(lines 3, 5, 6, 8), among others, which convey an extraordinary sense of desperation and urgency. If the addressee of the letter proves to be Abū Mufarrij and the word *wāliḏī* can be taken at face value, then the senders of the letter would likely be Abū Mufarrij's sons (one of these sons' names, Muḥammad, appears in RN 1062a*). The location where the ship in question was stuck, al-Qaṣr al-Yamānī, cannot be identified with absolute certainty, but it was most likely on the Yemeni side of the Red Sea. When the accident occurred, the ship, as indicated in the letter, was perhaps heading for the Hijaz, traveling along the Yemeni coast. Why would this petition be found in the "Sheikh's house"? A possible explanation is that Quseir is historically known as a source of supplies shipped from and to the south, that is, from India via Yemen and the reverse (Gladys Frantz-Murphy, "Red Sea Port Quseir," 268–72), and there was, as the letter suggests, some kind of regular transport of correspondence, supplies, merchandise, and even cash via a kind of maritime shuttle service between Quseir and other harbors on the Red Sea.

Text

recto

١. المماليك حسين ومحمد وعمر الحمد لله وحده
٢. يقبلون الارض وينهون الف الف لا اوحش الله منك ولا
٣. اخلا ونحن في برد ما يعلمه الا الله والله الله يا والدى
٤. ادفع لنا الشمله على كل وجه فمناخ ميت بالبرد غايه
٥. ما يكون وجيب <<ثمننا>> ثمنها عليه كم ما ارب الله الله
٦. ويا سيدى الحقنا بقربتين ما من كل بد الله الله
٧. فنحن لنا فى القصر اليمانى ثلث ايام وما دام دا
٨. الريح فنحن ما نقدر نساقر الله الله فى الما وفى الشما<ل>

١. حسن. ٥. ما ارب.

in the right margin

٩. وان قدرت لنا على قليل كعك فاشتره
١٠. لنا وسيره الله الله يا سيدى

Translation

1. The slaves Ḥusayn, Muḥammad, and ‘Umar—praise be to God alone!—
2. kiss the ground and report: [We pray] a thousand and a thousand [times] that God may not deprive [us] from your[r help] and nor would He
3. let [us] down now that we are in a cold spell whose severity none knows save God. O God! O God! O my father!
4. Pay for us the [cost of the] cloak by all means, for the weather has been deadly and extremely
5. cold. Forward its cost in the amount requested. O God! O God!
6. O my lord! Supply us with two water bags at any rate. O God! O God!
7. We have been in al-Qaṣr al-Yamānī for three days. And as long as this
8. wind continues [to blow], we are unable to travel—O God! O God!—in the water, and in this northerly wind [. . . .].
9. If you could [find] for us some baked food, please purchase it
10. for us and send it along [to us]. O God! O God! O my lord!

Commentary

1. It is to be noted that the usual *basmala* is missing. It is unclear whether this is due to the defective state of the manuscript or whether the omission was intentional. The other observation is the writing of the *ḥamdala* in this context. In contemporary private letters, for example, from the Cairo Geniza (*ALAD*, *passim*), the *ḥamdala* was often written on the same line as the *basmala*. The sender(s)’s name(s), usually introduced by *al-mamlūk* (pl. *al-mamālīk*), is written either above or below the line of the *basmala*. The combination of the *ḥamdala* and names in the same line but without the *basmala*, as seen in this letter, is rare.

2–3. The phrase *ilayhi* is missing from the standard pattern *al-mamlūk yuqabbilu al-ard wa yunhī ilayhi*. For the phrase *lā awḥasha allāh minka*, “may you not be missed for long, may we soon see you again!,” see *DEA*, 928. The use of *lā akhlā [allāh]* was also common in private letters; the variations of which (*lā yukhlī*, *lā yukhallī*, *lā yakhlū*) can be found in, for example, *ABPH*, nos. 6, 41, 45, 57, 60; *ALAD*, no. 97.

5. The imperative verb *jīb* is Egyptian colloquial (*DEA*, s.v.). The word *thamanan* is crossed out; the scribe apparently recognized his mistake and then wrote the correct *thamanahā*. The phrase ‘*alayhi kam mā ariba*’ is problematic; what the suffix *hi* refers to is not clear; another possibility is that the suffix *hi* refers to the relative particle *mā* and the subject of the verb *ariba* is the word *allāh* that follows, so the phrase would be understood as “as much as God wishes.”
7. I have been unable to locate al-Qaṣr al-Yamānī. The demonstrative *dā*, a colloquial equivalent of *hādḥā*, should be *dī* since the word *al-rīḥ* is feminine.
8. *Mā nīʿ(q)dar*, “we are unable to . . .,” is Egyptian. Most intriguing is the phrase *wa fī al-shimā*[l]. Since the manuscript is cut off here, it is difficult to determine whether this is connected to the previous clause or if it is the beginning of a new clause introduced by the conjunction *wa*. If the former, the whole sentence could be read as “we are unable to travel in water (i.e., the Red Sea), and in this northerly wind. . . .” It is also possible that the phrase starts a new clause, something like “and in this northerly wind . . .,” or “and in the north lies our destination. . . .” For the term *shamāl* (*shimāl*) as “northerly wind, from June through September extending the full length of the Red Sea,” see Meloy, 55–56, 255.

TEXT NO. 10: A BUSINESS LETTER

RN 1063b

Description: Yellow paper, slightly damaged at the left lower portion and the bottom, 8.7 × 13.4 cm, recto ten lines, in an elegant cursive hand, no dots, black ink.

Text

recto

- ١ . من عبد ابوا السعاد <ة>
- ٢ . بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم بن رضوان
- ٣ . ومن ا بن كيلا <ن>
- ٤ . اعلم الشيخ ابو مفرج ادام الله

- ٥ . عزه واهدى اعاديته وصدده وقرر
 ٦ . بالتوفيق حلمه وعقده وينهى اليه
 ٧ . ادام الله توفيقه ان سيرنا لك
 ٨ . صحبه مجلى الجمال ثلثه احد <مال>
 ٩ . ونصف وويبه []
 ١٠ . فينعم المولا []

٣ . منابن . ٥ . فرر .

verso (address)

- ١ . الى ساحل القصير سلم ابو مفرج
 ٢ . العباوى دامت سعاده والسلام

Translation

recto

- 1–3. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. From ‘Abd Abū al-Sa‘āda ibn Riḍwān and Ibn Kīlān.
 4. We are writing to inform Shaykh Abū Mufarrij—may God prolong
 5. his strength, lead his enemies astray, and assure him
 6. success with regard to his gentleness and contracts!—and report to him—
 7. may God make him successful!—that we have sent to you,
 8. to be accompanied by Majlī the porter, three and a half loads
 9. and a *wayba* [of wheat?].
 10. So [you,] the Master would profitably receive [this shipment].

verso (address)

1. To the shore of Quseir, and to be delivered [to] Abū Mufarrij
 2. al-‘Abāwī (?)—may God prolong his happiness! Peace.

Commentary

recto

3. Note the unusual one-stroke attempt to connect the two words *min* and *ibn*.

4. The formulaic opening phrase *u'limu/u'allimu . . .*, is universally applied, regardless whether the subject is singular or, in this case, plural (“we”).

5. *Ahdā a'ādīhi waṣdahū*, literally “may [God] guide his enemies to obstacles,” as in, “may God mislead his enemies,” or “may God lead his enemies astray.” The reading of the undotted *w-ṣ(d? m?)-d-h* is uncertain; the present reading is derived from verb form IV *w-ṣ-d*, “to stop, to shut [the door].” This formulaic *du'ā'* invocation is not found in the contemporary documents consulted.

5–6. The parallel expression *wa-qarrara bi-al-tawfiq ḥilmahu wa-ʿaqdahū* has yet to be found in the contemporary documents consulted. The only example that comes close is *waffaqahu fī al-qawl wa-al-ʿamal*, “may [God] make him successful in words and deeds”; see *ABPH*, no. 69.

8. The pronunciation of the undotted name Majlī could be Majallī, Mujallī, Majallā, Mujallā, among others.

verso

2. The *nisba*-surnames, and in this case the undotted *al-ʿAbāwī* (*al-Fatāwī?* *al-ʿAtāwī?*), associated with Abū Mufarrij are rarely seen in the documents. His other surname, *al-Qiftī*, appears in RN 1066a*.

TEXT NO. 11: A LETTER CONCERNING THE DELIVERY AND RE-SALE OF GRAIN AND CLOTHES

RN 1064a

Description: Light brown paper, some worm-eaten holes and wrinkles, 10 × 13.5 cm, recto eleven lines, black ink, verso blank.

Introduction: It appears that the paper on which the letter is written was kneaded into a ball and then tossed in trash bin. Reading between the lines, it is clear that Abū Mufarrij’s clients, from whom he collected grains and other goods, were not necessarily farmers who grew crops, or manufacturers who produced the products (and

in this case, clothing), but rather brokers who would buy crops and other goods and ship them to Abū Mufarrij for re-sale. The text also suggests that sometimes the goods were to be re-shipped in a timely manner.

Text

recto

١. اخوه
٢. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم فرج الحاطبي
٣. حضره الشيخ الاجل ابو مفرج ادام الله سعادتته
٤. والذى اعلمك به انى قد سيرت اليك صحبه على
٥. بن فلاح الحلبي ثلثى دقيق وهي قطعتين
٦. فتسلمهم [] الجواب صحبه موصلها
٧. وشريت عشر وربع وبيات التى طلبتهم
٨. وشريت لك الكسوه وهى واصله صحبتى
٩. ان شا الله ولنا خارج يوم الخميس ان شا الله تعلى
١٠. والله الله وثم لهم تشحنوا ولا تعوقهم
١١. من كل بد والسلام عليك ورحمه الله وبركاته

٢. فرج. ٧. سريت. ٨. سريت. ٩. تعلى = تعالى. ١٠. تشحنوا.

Translation

- 1–2. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. [From] his brother Faraj al-Ḥāṭibī.
3. To the most noble Shaykh Abū Mufarrij—may God make his happiness everlasting!—
4. This is to inform you that I have sent to you, to be accompanied by ‘Alī
5. ibn Fallāḥ al-Ḥillī, two-thirds of the flour [I owed to you?], and they are [packed in] two containers.

6. Please give them [to . . . and then issue] a receipt, to be carried [back] by the carrier who delivered them.
7. I bought ten and a quarter *waybas* [of flour] as you had demanded.
8. I also bought you *kiswa*-cloaks, and they will be brought over by myself,
9. God willing! We are supposed to leave the town this Thursday, God willing!
10. O God, O God! load them [as soon as possible] and do not delay in their [shipping]
11. by all means! Peace be upon you. God's mercy and blessings [be upon you].

Commentary

1. "His brother" is used here as an honorific required by the format of the *tarjama*; for ranks in the *tarjama*, see chapter 1.
9. The phrase *in shā' allāh*, which occurs twice in this line, and the word *ta'ālā* are written in logograms.
10. Note the inconsistency in verb conjugations: the jussive imperative *tashḥanū* is in the plural while the imperfect (as the imperative) negative *lā ta'ūqu* is singular.

TEXT NO. 12: A LETTER CONCERNING THE SHIPPING OF FLOUR

RN 968b

Description: Yellow paper, large holes on the lower part and the left edge, 9 × 11.5 cm, recto twelve lines, verso ten lines on both ends of the paper, fine *naskh*, rarely dotted, very black ink.

Introduction: The texts on the recto and verso make up one long letter, sent by one 'Alī ibn Badr to Shaykh Najīb, a senior associate of Abū Mufarrij. The text reveals a complex web of business and social networks around the "Sheikh's house," the details of which are discussed in chapters 1 and 2 above. It is curious, though, that the greeting section, which is long on this Shaykh Sulṭān, fails conspicuously to mention Abū Mufarrij and his family, despite the sender having made it clear that the letter was to be delivered to "Abū Mufarrij's warehouse."

Text

recto

١. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم وصلى الله على محمد والله سلم
٢. اعلم الاخ نجيب حفظه الله وتولاه اننى
٣. سيرت صحبه ابو سليمان مولا القاضى جمال الدين
٤. حملين دقيق مغربله بغربال الشعير
٥. فيحرص الاخ ان لقى لهم بيع تبيعهم لى ما تحتاج
٦. وصيته فى ذلك وتبعذ لى الامرہ والعرا(؟)
٧. وعلامتهم الحنا م []
٨. والله الله فى البطتين التى سيرت []
٩. ان لقيت للسمن سعر فى عشره دراهم وطالع
١٠. والزيت اربع [] ونصف و []
١١. وان لم []
١٢. الى []

٥. ان لعى. ٦. تبعذ = تبعث. ٩. لعىت.

verso

١. موضع <جيد> []
٢. لى الموالى [] <السلام>
٣. عليك ورحمه الله [] سلم لى عد<لى>
٤. الاخ سلطان وما ولده واهله ووالده>
٥. واخوته الا بخير وتعرفه تجتهد لى فى ال []
٦. التى وصيته عنها []
٧. السلام وحضر والدى يسلم عليك الجميع
٨. وصلى الله على محمد والله سلم

٥. الابحير.

address (read from the top down)

١. الى شونه ابو مفرج يسلم للاخ نجيب
٢. من على بن بدر
\حفظه الله/

Translation

recto

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. May God bless the Prophet Muḥammad and grant him salvation!
2. I am writing to inform Brother Najīb—may God protect him and take care of him!—that I have
3. dispatched, accompanied by Abū Sulaymān the deputy of the judge Jamāl al-Dīn,
4. two loads of flour sifted in a sieve used for barley.
5. O Brother, make sure to put them on sale. Sell them for me. Whatever you need,
6. simply order it; just send me the order forms and [?],
7. and their mark [ought to be?]
8. O God, O God, [send them] in two *baṭṭa*-containers which had been dispatched [earlier?]
9. If you find [the right] price for clarified butter, at ten dirhams or higher [.]
10. and for oil, at four [dirhams] and a half [. . . .]
11. even though it hasn't [.]
12. to [.]

verso

1. [Put the goods] in a [safe] place. [. Say hello]
2. for me to the mayor [and]. [Peace]
3. be upon you and God's mercy [be upon you]. Send my regards to
4. Brother Sulṭān. [I wish for] his son, his family, his father,
5. and his brothers nothing but blessings. Tell him to work hard for me on the [deal]
6. I entrusted him to do [. And upon him to be]
7. peace. My father is here and he says hello to you all.
8. May God bless the Prophet Muḥammad and grant him salvation!

address

1. To Abū Mufarrij's warehouse, to the care of Brother Najīb—may God protect him!
2. From 'Alī ibn Badr.

Commentary

recto

3. *Mawlā*, “lord,” “master,” but also “deputy,” “associate,” “freed slave,” which fits the context here.
5. *An laqiya lahum bayʿ*, literally “so that he (i.e., you) will find sales for these goods”; the reading is tentative and somewhat problematic; the *q* lacks the two dots, and the syntax is corrupt (*an* with the perfect verb for the subjunctive).
6. Note the consonant shift in the verb *tabʿadh* < *tabʿath*. *Al-ʿarā* appears in the manuscript, the meaning of which is unclear.
9. *Laqīta* (?) is unpointed and thus the present reading is conjectural; since the slightly oblique *l* can be read as *k* without the cross bar on the top, and the loop of *q* is not fully developed, alternate readings include *katabta*, “you have written down,” or *kafayta*, “you are content with. . . .” For *siʿr* as “the price of the unit sold,” cf. RN 970a* (Text No. 1, commentary recto 17).

verso

1. [*Taḥuṭṭuhum*] *fī mawḍiʿ* [*jayyid*], “put the goods in a safe place,” a technical phrase commonly used in Quseir business letters for storage; also see chapter 4.
5. Note the shift of subjects of the verbs in the asyndetic clause *tuʿar-rifuhu tajtahidu lī*, namely “you tell him that *he* should work hard for *me*. . . .”

TEXT NO. 13: A BUSINESS LETTER

RN 1003c and 1004d

Description: Yellow paper, two fragments making up one single text, 10.8 × 16.5 cm taken together, recto fourteen lines, verso six lines on both ends of the paper, in clear *naskh*, black ink.

Introduction: This is one of the most detailed business letters uncovered at the “Sheikh’s house.” The business and social associations of the recipient of the letter, Najīb, a senior clerk at the warehouse, are further confirmed. Issues such as currency exchange rates and payment arrangements are discussed. For more details, see chapter 2.

Text

recto

١. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم ع بد
 ٢. م\ من الله / ع بد
 ٣. اعلم السيد الاجل وفقه الله <توفيق> العارفين وجد جعل له كرايم الصالحين محمد وآله
 ٤. اجمعين وسوا ذلك انى مشتاق اليك كثير ليس قليل والله لنا
 ٥. الاجتماع ويا مولاي طحنت قليل دق ييق وما يباعونه عشر دراهم
 ٦. الذى اخذتم فارسلهم لى مع الطيب وان كان ما اخذت شى
 ٧. وطلعته للقاضى ولا تتهم عنى وان كان ما اخذت شى
 ٨. ارسل اعلمنى اكرى دا سلع وان كان اخذت البعض
 ٩. ارسل لى واعلمنى فما تحتاج وصيه فما يعوننى
 ١٠. الا الدراهم وسلم لى ع لى الاخ عبد الرحيم وعلى الاخ عيسى
 ١١. وسلم لى على الشيخ ابو مفر ج وتعلم المكين ان كان ما دفع لك
 ١٢. شى تعلم انا ارسل اليه كتاب ل كرى دابه ويطلع فهو
 ١٣. ارسل مالى لى ما يعوننى الا ال دراهم لانى اريد اكرى بهم
 ١٤. والسلام عليكم نصر الله فى علمه

٨. دا = ذا.

verso

١. ولا تصرف لى ذهب واشترها دراهم فان الصرف
 ٢. فى قنا وقوص سبعة و٥ لاثين واليوسفى تسعه عشر <ر>
 ٣. درهم وربيع اليوسفى وا لله الله سيرهم لى دراهم

م عليك ورحمه الله وبركاته

٤. فهم للكرا والسلا

١. واسترها.

address (read from the top down)

جيب مولا عبد الله فخرهم
عليه السلام بنص<ر الله>

١. الى ساحل القص<ي>ر يسلم للاخ ن
٢. الى شونه ابو مفرج

١. فخرهم.

Translation

recto

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
2. From 'Abd Allāh.
3. I write to inform the most noble master—may God make him as successful as those who have acquired Divine Knowledge, and make him among the choicest of the virtuous men: the Prophet Muḥammad and his entire
4. family—and now to the main topic: I miss you terribly, not just a little bit, but a lot! O God, [I hope] we can be
5. reunited [soon]. O my master! I have ground a small amount of flour and [other foodstuffs] that are worth ten dirhams.
6. Please send me what you have received (i.e., money) along with the perfume. If you have not received any [money?],
7. then you should bring up the matter to the judge. Don't blame me, though. If you have not received any [money],
8. send me a notification, so I will lease [riding animals] to carry the goods. If you have received some [of the money],
9. send me a notification, too. Whatever you need, order it [from me]. I need nothing but
10. [cash in] dirhams. My regards to Brother 'Abd al-Raḥīm and Brother ' s̄ā.
11. My regards to Shaykh Abū Mufarrij. Please tell al-Makīn—if he has not paid you
12. anything yet—that I will send him a letter about leasing riding animals and that he will get [the goods?]. He is the one who

13. ought to send me money. I need nothing but cash, because I intend to use it to lease [riding animals].

14. Peace be upon you. May God help [you] in regard to His Divine Knowledge.

verso

1. Do not pay me golden [dinars]; change them to silver dirhams. The exchange rate

2. in Qīnā and Qūṣ is thirty-seven [dirhams per dinar], and [if it is] the Yūsufī (? or Tawfīqī) [dirham], then it is nineteen

3. and a quarter dirhams [per dinar]. O God, O God! send me the cash in silver dirhams [only]!

4. It is for leasing [riding animals]. Peace be upon you. God's mercy and blessings.

address

1–2. To the shore of Quseir, to the warehouse of Abū Mufarrīj; to the care of Brother Najīb, the associate of 'Abd Allāh Fakhruhum. Peace. May God help all!

Commentary

recto

2. The *tarjama*, *min 'Abd Allāh*, is written in three lines; the proposition *min* is sandwiched between two 'abds.

3. For the similar formulaic phrases of greeting *waffaqahu allāh tawfīq al-ʿarīfīn wa-jaʿalahu min awliyāʾ al-ṣāliḥīn*, see RN 1018a*.

5. The reading of *al-ijtimāʿ*, literally “meeting,” is tentative.

6. *Arsilhum*, literally “send them,” that is, the ten dirhams mentioned above. The reading of *al-tīb*, “perfume,” is tentative: the letter *b* looks like a *r*, with stretched long tail and no dots; the phrase *maʿa al-tūr*, “fly [your letter to me],” namely, send letter by express-mail, is found in the Cairo Geniza letters; see *MS*, 1: 291.

7. *Ṭalaʿtahu*, literally “you were to bring it up . . .,” that is, the fact that you have not received the money.

9–10. *Mā yuʿwinu-nī illā*, literally “nothing will help me except. . . .” The same demand is repeated in line 13.

verso

1. For the formulaic phrase *al-ṣarf* . . . , “the exchange rate is . . . ,” see *MS*, 1: 239. The expression *ishtarihā darāhim* can also be rendered as “buy them[, using] silver dirhams,” insofar as golden dinars were indeed traded like goods themselves (*MS*, 1: 230). However, the author of the letter makes it clear here, and reiterates elsewhere in this letter, that he does *not* want golden dinars, but only silver dirhams. Hence the present translation.

2. “The rate of exchange is thirty-seven,” that is, one dinar buys thirty-seven dirhams; in other words, the ratio is 1: 37. This rate was quite common in the Cairo Geniza papers (cf. *MS*, 1: 368, 378). The reading of al-Yūsufī is tentative; the word is undotted, so the alternate could be al-Tawfiqī.

address

1. The name Shaykh Najīb appears frequently in the letters found in the “Sheikh’s house.” But the mention of the man as an “associate (*mawlā*) of ‘Abd Allāh Fakhruhum” is not seen elsewhere. It is thus unclear whether this is the same Najīb, a clerk at the warehouse; if yes, does this mean that he was working for both Abū Mufarrij, to whose warehouse the letter is addressed, *and* this unidentified ‘Abd Allāh? Or could it be that Najīb was formerly a *mawlā*, a “freed slave,” of this ‘Abd Allāh? Or, could it be that this ‘Abd Allāh is the same ‘Abd Allāh, the sender of the letter?

2. It appears that the first part of the second line of the address is related to the first part of the first line as in “to the shore of Quseir, the warehouse of Abū Mufarrij,” whereas the rest of the address deals with the recipient, in this case, Najīb.

TEXT NO. 14: LETTER CONCERNING PAYMENTS TO ABŪ MUFARRIJ

RN 1015b

Description: Yellow paper, a few holes in the lower part, 13 × 5.5 cm, recto seven lines written along the horizontal side, in a naïve hand, verso four lines in a different hand, black ink.

Introduction: The text on the recto is a letter to Shaykh Najīb, probably the most frequently mentioned name in the documents, after

Abū Mufarrij and Ibrāhīm. The letter reveals the scribe's rudimentary knowledge of Arabic orthography and grammar. But it is quite impressive that all the basics of formal letter writing have been followed diligently. The hastily written text on the verso seems to be a receipt of sorts, perhaps issued by Najīb.

Text

recto

- ١ . الشيخ الاجل الموقر السعيد المولا نجيب اطال الله بقاءه وادام عزه ونعماه ومن حسن
 - ٢ . التوفيق لا اخلاه ولا اعدمنى اياه وسوا داك يا مولاي ساعت وصول الشيخ حاتم
 - ٣ . يعلمهو الله تعالى تسلم له المرتبين للزيت الذى مكتوب عليهم
 - ٤ . سابق بن اياس البدرى وتسير لى رقعة بانه تسلمهم
 - ٥ . وتسلم لى على الشيخ ابو مفرج داك . . وقد ذكرت لنا ان الشيخ
 - ٦ . اسماعيل خادم الـ [] عليه السلام انه قد قطيت حوايجه وهو
 - ٧ . طالع البر يصل [] ان شا الله تعالى فلا اعدمك الله العدل
-
- ٢ . داك = ذلك . ساعت = ساعة . ٥ . داك = ذلك . ٦ . قطيت = قضيت . ٧ . انشا .

verso

- ١ . ان شا الله تعال
- ٢ . والحمد لله وصل الله عل سيدنا محمد نبيه <وصلى الله>عل آله الطاهرين وصحابه<ته>
- ٣ . صح
- ٤ . عشرين سبع الرطل

Translation

recto

1. [To] the most noble, revered, and auspicious shaykh, the master Najīb—may God prolong his life, make his strength and wealth everlasting. May God never fail him
2. with regard to his good fortune in success, and never deprive me

from his [company]!—and so forth. O my master, upon the arrival of Shaykh Ḥātīm—

3. may God Almighty enlighten him!—give him the *murattabayn*-dues of oil, which are for
4. Sābiq ibn Iyās al-Badrī. Send me a receipt, stating that he has received it.
5. My regards to Shaykh Abū Mufarrij. [. . .] You have mentioned to us that [as regards] Shaykh
6. Ismā‘īl, the servant of [. . .]—peace be upon him!—, you have fulfilled all his needs
7. since his landing at the shore, and that he is coming to [. . .], God willing! May God never deprive you from His justice!

verso

1. God willing!
2. Praise be to God. God bless our Lord, His messenger Muḥammad and his virtuous clan and companions.
3. Exact number:
4. Twenty-seven pounds [of grain].

Commentary

recto

3. *Yu‘allimu-huwa* appears so in the manuscript; it could be an error for *yu‘allimu-hu* (or *hum*), or perhaps *Mu‘allimuhum*, a name. For details about the term *al-murattabayn*, see chapter 2.
7. *Ṭālī‘ al-barr*, literally “ascending to the land.”

verso

1. Note the logogram of *in shā’ allāh ta‘ālā*; a similar logogram can be found in *ABPH*, *Tafelband*, *Tafel 67*, 3v, 3.
3. The manuscript has a logogram consisting of *ṣ* and a short stroke, for *r* or *h* (?); its function is unclear.
4. *Sab*^ᶜ could be *tis*^ᶜ, “nine”; the graphemes are similar.

TEXT NO. 15: A LETTER TO ABŪ MUFARRIJ'S ASSOCIATES

RN 1016a

Description: Yellow paper, torn on all sides, considerable abrasions, 9 × 10.3 cm, recto nine lines, verso five lines, in fluent cursive hand, black ink.

Introduction: This incomplete letter, apparently to someone who was close to Abū Mufarrij's family, is noteworthy nevertheless. In the greeting section not only Abū Mufarrij but also his "sons" (*awlād*) are mentioned. The probable catchword *wa-ʿalā*, on the top of the verso, also reveals some textual devices for writing long letters.

Text

recto

١. [] ل مع []
 ٢. [] ك ما تبخل عليه
 ٣. [] حق اننى اثقل عليك
 ٤. [] ما يغير هذه المرة
 ٥. فلا علامته []
 ٦. اليك ركائب قبل []
 ٧. . . . ومع خدام []
 ٨. شي منها فبيع []
 ٩. يعملك بال []

٢. تبجل. ٣. انقل.

verso

١. وعلى
 ٢. وعلى الشيخ ابو مفرج السلام
 ٣. واولاده تسلم لى عليه <م>
 ٤. عليه كتير كتير فهو فما يلقى
 ٥. عندنا الا اتعد <ا> ب

TEXT NO. 16: A BUSINESS LETTER CONCERNING THE DETAINMENT OF
A SHIPMENT

RN 1066a

Description: Yellow paper, profuse worm-eaten holes and ink stains, 8 × 12.5 cm, recto ten lines, verso seven lines on both sides of the page, black ink.

Introduction: The letter deals with the release of a detained, or seized, cargo whose eventual destination would be Abū Mufarrij's warehouse. The key term 'āqa reveals some kind of government intervention, in light of the parallels found in the Cairo Geniza papers. In the present case, the possible pretext for the detainment by the government seems to be the lack, or invalidity, of the license. A probable penalty fee was expected for the release of the detained goods.

Text

recto

- عساكر . ١
 على المملوكى . ٢
 بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم . ٣
 يعلم الاخ عرفات وفقه الله تعالى ان . ٤
 على المملوكى سير قطعتين دقيق ونصف . ٥
 حمل تمر الى عبد الحضرة وحان الولد . ٦
 وابو الملاح واصل فعاقوا الحمال بسبب <ب> . ٧
 لزمه فاستحى من انعامك تجبى لى عن . ٨
 التمر وتسيره لى ساعه بالقطعتين . ٩
 . ١٠ [شونه ابو مفرج حملها <م>]

. ٥ المملولى . ٨ . فاستحى .

verso

١. [] <ت>سيلهم اى دليلا وله
 ٢. السيرفى ولا تتكل على ميكال فهل له
 ٣. الانشغال والفضه اتت بها كل
 ٤. والسلام عليكم
 ٥. والقطعين اربعين دراهم

١. تسيلهم = تسألهم. ٢. السيرفى = الصيرفى (?). ٣. الانسعالى. الفصه.

turn page upside down and read from the top down (address)

١. <ال>ى ساحل <القصير شونة الشيخ>
 ٢. <ا>بى مفرج القفطى

Translation

recto

- 1–3. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. The servant ‘Asākīr ‘Alī
 4. is writing to inform Dear Brother ‘Arafāt—may God Almighty make him successful!—that
 5. this servant ‘Alī has dispatched two *qiṭ’a*-sacks of flour and a half
 6. load of dried dates to the slave boy of [your] noble presence. [However,] once the young man
 7. and Abū al-Milāḥ arrived, they detained the cargo on account of
 8. its license. I am hereby ashamedly begging for a favor from you to pay for the release
 9. of the dried dates, and to dispatch them, on my behalf, immediately in two *qiṭ’a*-sacks
 10. and send them to the warehouse of Abū Mufarrij [.].

verso

1. [. You] may ask them for some verification. Together with him is
 2. the cashier. Do not trust the scale, [because one is not sure] whether it

3. works [or not]. The cash has already arrived in sum.
4. Peace be upon you.
5. The two *qif'a*-sacks are [worth] forty dirhams.

address

1. To the shore [of Quseir, the warehouse of Shaykh]
2. Abū Mufarrij al-Qifī.

Commentary

recto

2. Note the identifier so-and-so *al-mamlūkī*, instead of the usual *al-mamlūk* so-and-so.
4. The addressee of the letter, ‘Arafāt, is likely Abū Mufarrij’s client, or business partner.
6. *Tamr*, “dried dates,” is undotted, thus the reading of *thamr*, “fruits,” is also possible.
- 6–7. *Al-walad*, literally “the son.” “The young man and Abū al-Milāḥ” appear to be the ones who accompanied the cargo.
7. The verb *‘āqa* was, according to Goitein, the term commonly used in the Cairo Geniza papers to refer to “the seizure of goods by a government”; see *MS*, 1: 467 (note 8); also see *ALAD*, no. 77; *DAA2*, no. 31. The manuscript has *al-ḥammāl*, literally “the cargo carrier.” Among the uses of the verb *jabā*, with the basic meaning of “collecting (taxes, payments),” is a “pledge for a certain sum for a certain purpose” (*Dictionary*, 26), hence the present rendering.
8. *Astahī min*, literally “I am ashamed (or embarrassed) in front of . . .”; similar use in this context is found in *DAA1*, no. 53.

verso

2. The reading of *al-sayrafi* < *al-ṣayrafi* is tentative. The letter *k*, in *tattakil* and *mīkāl* (for *mīkyāl?*), lacks the cross bar on the top.
3. *Al-fidda*, literally “silver.”
5. This line was written after the formulaic closing greetings and is perhaps an after-thought.

TEXT NO. 17: A DATED LETTER TO ABŪ IṢHĀQ CONCERNING THE SHIPPING OF ROPES

RN 1020a

Description: Yellow paper, 8 × 4.1 cm, recto four lines in a very cursive hand, unconventional ligatures and missing hooks, dots, and teeth of the letters, black ink, verso blank.

Introduction: The significance of this badly damaged fragment is the date it contains: 29 Jumādā (I or II), the year A.H. 62(1–9), i.e., A.D. 1224–31, and the direct link of this date to Ibrāhīm's activities.

Text

recto

١. صحبه] [<للشيخ أبو اسحاق ابراهيم>
 ٢. بن ابى مفرج بتا <ر> يخ التاسع عشرين جماد <ى> . . . <سنة> . .
 ٣. وعشرين وستماية الحمد لله حسبنا ونعم وكيلنا هو
 ٤. وقد سيرت [ل] لكم السلب صحبه

 ٣. وعسرى.

Translation

1. In the company of [.]; to Shaykh Abū Iṣḥāq Ibrāhīm]
2. ibn Abū Mufarrij; on the 29th day, the month of Jumādā [I or II, the year]
3. six hundred and twenty [. . .]. Praise be to God. Our sufficiency is in Him. What an excellent trustee He is! [. . .]
4. I have sent you ropes, accompanied by [. . . .].

TEXT NO. 18: ADDRESS OF A LETTER CONTAINING INFORMATION ABOUT
 ABŪ IṢHĀQ AND ABŪ MUFARRIJ

RN 1020b

Description: Yellow paper, 10.2 × 3.2 cm, recto blank (perhaps this part of the paper happened to cover the empty space after the end of the letter), verso two lines, black ink.

Introduction: The fragment contains the address, which is usually written on the top of the verso, to Abū Iṣhāq. From the various honorific titles, we learn that he was a sermon giver (*al-khaṭīb*) and perhaps a trade leader (*rayyis*), and that his father, Abū Mufarrij, was a *ḥājj*, who indeed had traveled to Mecca for fulfilling the duty to perform pilgrimage.

Text

verso (address)

١. <الى> ساحل القصير يسلم للمولى الاخ الخطيب المو<قر>
 ٢. الريس ابو اسحق ابراهيم بن الحاج ابى مفرج العـ []

Translation

1. To the shore of Quseir, to be delivered to the revered master, dear brother, the sermon giver,
2. and trade leader Abū Iṣhāq Ibrāhīm, the son of the *ḥājj* Abū Mufarrij [.].

Commentary

2. The reading of the word *al-rayyis* is tentative; the long stretch of the base line of the *s* seems to be connected to another cluster of, most likely, honorific titles that extend to the next line which is cut short in the manuscript.

TEXT NO. 19: A LETTER CONCERNING THE PURCHASE OF CLOTHES

RN 976

Description: Light brown paper, badly damaged by water and holes, 13.6 × 20.4 cm, recto fifteen lines plus one line marginalia, verso several nearly unrecognizable lines in an elegant cursive hand, with a tendency to ignore the cross bar on top of the letter *k*, black ink.

Text

recto

١. بسم <الله> الـ <رحمن الرحيم>
 ٢. الذى اعلم به []
 ٣. ابى اسحاق ابراهيم []
 ٤. المملوك الى المولا []
 ٥. الكريمه []
 ٦. لخدم []
 ٧. الحمل اسود []
 ٨. ونشترى لهم شملتين و . . . و . . . و []
 ٩. اوصيك \ت/ فيما يهملك فانى ان اسال الله اكرى فى مركوبهـ <م>
 ١٠. صحبه الخليل ان اسال الله <التوفيق> والسلام عليك ورحمه الله و<بركاته>
 ١١. على صغارى السـ <لام وعلى الاخ> العزيز محمد وولد حسين
 ١٢. [] صبيح وتسلم لى على حسين السلام الكـ <يد> ر و تقول له
 ١٣. عمك ابو على يسلم عليك السلام الكـ <يد> ر وتبعث لى كتاب عليهم
 ١٤. وان وقفت على [] تسيرها او ما معه او قحيحه (?) \قريب عليك/
 ١٥. السلام

٦. لخدم. ١١. الصرير. ١٤. وقعت.

in the right margin

عل من يحوط عنايتكم السلامه وال . . . سرعه

عل = على.

Translation

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
2. I am writing to inform [.....]
3. Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm [.....]
4. [Homage from] the servant to the master [.....]
5. the noble [.....]
6. for the service of [.....]
7. a load of black [fabric? and.....]
8. and we will buy them two cloaks and [..] and [..] and [..].
9. I have advised you regarding the matters that concern you. I beseech God[’s help] so I may rent their riding animals,
10. in the company of al-Khalīl. I beseech God for success. Peace be upon you. God’s mercy and blessings
11. be upon my children. Peace be upon the dear [brother] Muḥammad and Ḥusayn’s son
12. [..] Ṣubayḥ. Please send my regards to Ḥusayn, and tell him,
13. “Your uncle Abū ‘Alī sends his best wishes to you.” Write me a letter soon about their [welfare].
14. If you find [..], send it along; or whatever he carries, or his [..].
15. Peace be upon you.

in the right margin

Peace and swift [relief?] to those under your care.

Commentary

9. The *t*, in the verb *awṣaytuka*, is apparently added later and stacked above *k*.
13. This Abū ‘Alī is likely the sender of the letter.
14. This line is partially erased and the present reading is prob-

lematic: (1) The *c* shaped beak of the ع , in عalā , is actually a closed loop, making it look like *m*. (2) $q-h-y$ (?)- $h-h$ (or $tā'$ *marbūṭa*) appear so in the manuscript, for which I have failed to find satisfactory decipherment. While the *q* is supplied with two dots above, the remainder is unpointed. (3) The syntax is corrupt at the end of the line. I tried to read this line as a postscript of sorts added later to the original letter that concludes with *tab'athu lī kitāb 'alayhim* (line 13) *qarīb 'alayka* (line 14) *al-salām* (line 15), hence the present translation. Piling up words at the end of lines is not infrequent in the Quseir documents.

in the right margin

'Alā man yaḥūṭu 'ināyatakum al-salāma, literally “Peace be upon those whom you surround with your care”; a similar version, *ba'ada s-salām 'alayhi wa-عalā man yuḥīṭu bihi 'ināyatahu*, is found in *ABPH*, no. 67, also dating from the thirteenth century.

TEXT NO. 20: LETTER CONCERNING A SHIPMENT TO QUSEIR

RN 998

Description: Yellow paper scroll, extensive worm-eaten holes and profuse ink stains, 25.1 × 8.1 cm, recto seventeen lines, verso twelve lines on both ends of the page, in a cursive hand, unconventional ligatures between the undotted letters, black ink.

Introduction: One of the few complete texts from the “Sheikh’s house,” this letter is also perhaps one of the most revealing. Sent to the care of Ibrāhīm and concerning a shipment whose eventual recipient is one Abū Zayd, the letter gives us a chance to look at not only the intricacies of business dealings around the house, but also the textual features and technical aspects of a typical Quseir business letter, such as the logogram of the *basmala*, the four basic components, the terms and the idioms, and so forth. The *basmala* on the top of the verso implies that the text on this side of the paper is perhaps a response to the letter on the recto. Noteworthy also is the mention of the *ra'īs al-tujjār*, which might well have been the “head,” or “agent,” of the Kārimī merchants that played a central role in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade but of whom little is known so far. That such a *ra'īs* was in direct contact with Ibrāhīm ibn Abū Mufarrij highlights

the importance of the “Sheikh’s house,” and Quseir for that matter, in the long-range transactions on the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade routes.

Text

recto

- ١ . بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم وصلى الله على
- ٢ . سيدنا محمد
- ٣ . الذى اعلم به الاخ العزيز الموفق
- ٤ . السعيد المحترم الامين ابى اسحاق
- ٥ . ابراهيم وفقه الله تعالى وسو<ى> دلکا
- ٦ . يا مولاي انى قد سيرت الحمل وتلد<ك>
- ٧ . اليك اذا وصل يوسف ريس التجار
- ٨ . فسلم له الحمل فتسلمه له واصله
- ٩ . ما بين الفقيه او ما بين عبد الرحيم اعلم
- ١٠ . المولا ذلك وتاخذ له الطوريه
- ١١ . ما يحتاج المولا وصيه وبالمولا صريه<ح>؟
- ١٢ . ذلك وانا منتصر وصولك ان
- ١٣ . كنت تجي تقضى حوايجك اعلمك
- ١٤ . ذلك والسلام وكاتب هذه الا
- ١٥ . حرف يحيى وهو يسلم على المولا
- ١٦ . وعلى اهل بيته والسلام وصلى
- ١٧ . الله على عبده والحمد لله وحده

٥ . دلکا = ذلك . ٧ . البحار . ٩ . ما بن . ١٢ . منتصر = منتظر . ١٣ . تقصى .

verso

- ١ . بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
- ٢ . والمولا يقر ذلك بجذ وكتب

٣. لبيع العطاره فما وصلنى لها حواله < >
 ٤. ولا خير جاييه بيعها ما طعم الله
 ٥. ورزق والسلام وتسلم لى على
 ٦. عد [] ه با كثير وتقول له ان
 ٧. لى اليوم (؟) يبيعه استلام شى
 ٨. بخير شى فلا امر الا لله وانا . . .
 ٩. بذلك وتسلمه لى <على> حسين وعلى المعين
 ١٠. السلام وعلى الوالد والسلام
 —
 ٢. بحد. ٤. ولاخير حابيه. ٧. السوم.

address (written from the top down)

١. الى حضره ابى زيد وقومها الى القصير سلمه للشيخ
 ٢. ابى اسحاق ابراهيم بن ابو مفرج

Translation

recto

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. God bless
2. our Lord Muḥammad.
3. That which I [am writing to] inform the dear brother, the successful,
4. auspicious, respectable, and trustworthy Abū Ishāq
5. Ibrāhīm—may God, the Most High, make him successful!—and so forth. [Now, to the topic:]
6. O my master, I have sent a large shipment to
7. your care. If Yūsuf, the chief merchant, arrives,
8. please hand the load to him. [Also,] please hand over to him, upon his arrival,
9. whatever is between the jurist and ‘Abd al-Raḥīm [regarding the unfinished business]. I am reporting
10. to [you,] the Master, about this matter. You ought [also] to receive the mattocks on his behalf.
11. Whatever should [you,] the Master need, please entrust it [to me]. And it has been made clear to [you,] the Master,

12. regarding this. And in the meantime, I am looking forward to your arrival if
13. you choose to come to take care of your business. Hereinabove is my report to you.
14. Greetings. The writer of these
15. lines salutes and greets [you,] the Master,
16. and his (i.e., your) family members. God bless
17. His servant. Praise be to God alone.

verso

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
2. The Master has confirmed this and has written [to authorize]
3. the sale of perfumes. But I have not received the *ḥawāla* money order yet,
4. nor any information about its coming. [So] you may sell them as God so provides
5. and feeds. Greetings. Please send my best regards to
6. ‘A[. . .] and tell him if
7. he can sell it for me today, he will receive things
8. that are better. There is no command save that of God and I hereby am [content with?]
9. this [deal]. Please send my regards to Ḥusayn. Greetings to al-Mu‘īn
10. and the father. Peace.

address

1. For Abū Zayd and his clan, to Quseir, to be delivered to Shaykh
2. Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm, the son of Abū Mufarrij.

Commentary

recto

7. For the title *raʿīs al-tujjār*, literally “the head of the merchants,” and its probable association with the Kārimīs, see chapter 2.
8. A preposition or particle, such as *ʿinda*, *lammā*, or the like seems to be missing between *lahu* and *wuṣūlihi*, i.e., (to hand over) to him upon his arrival.

11. The reading of the partially erased word *ṣarīḥ* is tentative.
 14–15. Note the word *al-ahruf* is written across two lines. It is unclear whether the signature of “the writer of these lines” indicates the professional scribe hired to draft the letter or the sender himself.

verso

2. The reading of *yuqirru* is conjectural due to the hole and ink mark that blurred the word; so is *bi-jidd*, literally “in a serious manner,” which is unpointed.

3. The *ḥawāla*, in the present case, may contain the advance payment for the perfumes mentioned above.

4. The reading of the first part of this line is uncertain. The tentative reading of *jāʾih* < *gāyī-hi*, “coming to him,” in Egyptian, is not totally satisfactory. The second part follows the formulaic pattern *biʿhā* (i.e., *biʿhā*) *mā taʿama allāh wa-razaqa*.

6. The reading of *kathīr* is conjectural, for the letter *k* lacks the top bar and other letters are unpointed.

7. The first two words are partially erased in the manuscript and the reading is conjectural. The conditional sentence *in . . . yabiʿuhu istalām . . .* is grammatically flawed.

10. The word *al-wālid* is intriguing. If it is to be taken at face value, the “father” here must refer to Ibrāhīm’s father Abū Mufarrij. But the word *al-wālid* could be used, metaphorically, as an honorific title as well. Such usage is found in *ABPH*, no. 68 (a letter dated from the seventh/thirteenth century), as part of a stock clause of greeting: *salām allāh taʿālā wa-raḥmatuhu wa-barakātuhu wa-azkā taḥyātihī ʿalā al-wālid*, where *al-wālid* does not refer to any particular “father.” Similar use is also found in RN 1026a*, line 5.

address

1. Note the pronoun *hā*, in *qawmihā*, namely “his clan”; the reference is the honorific *ḥadra*, literally “the seat,” which is feminine.

TEXT NO. 21: CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN IBRĀHĪM AND A CLIENT

RN 1015a

Description: Yellow paper, torn at the right edge and the lower part, 12.4 × 15 cm, recto ten lines, in a clear, careful but stiff, hand, with

orthographic and grammatical errors, verso eight lines, in a more elegant and cultivated hand, black ink.

Introduction: The business correspondence between Ibrāhīm and one ‘Asākīr has survived for the most part. The text on the recto, ‘Asākīr’s letter, discusses the delivery of two shipments of wheat to Ibrāhīm’s warehouse. It makes it clear that the grains in question are provisions for “the youths,” a reference frequently found in the Quseir texts to indicate pilgrims, and, to a lesser extent, military expeditions. Ibrāhīm’s reply is to be found on the verso. It confirms that he is going to sell the cargoes in question on his client’s behalf. However, the letter reveals some hesitation, or perhaps some difficulty, in the process on Ibrāhīm’s part (“if it sells, then we would put it on sale; otherwise . . .”). The text also sheds light on some procedural aspects of business transactions in Quseir. The enforcement of proper documentation in business dealings is seen here through Ibrāhīm’s issue of a specific *bayān*-certificate to his representative, in this case, one Ḥusayn, so the latter could act on his behalf, with specifically defined authorities. The *bayān* is later to be re-used, this time to be shown to ‘Asākīr, along with the letter, as a proof that Ibrāhīm had done his part in carrying out the enterprise, that is, trying to sell “provisions” to the pilgrims in a probably volatile and uncertain market.

Text

recto

١. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
٢. الذى اعلم به الشيخ ابو اسحاق ابراهيم ولد <أ>بو
٣. مفرج انى سيرت اليك
٤. صحبه سلال الكلجى حمل ونصف وصحبه
٥. <خ>ليفه حمل ونصف الجملة ثلاثه احمال
٦. <ع>شره ارادب وهى غله طيبه نطقه
٧. للصغار تكون تحطها فى موضع جيد
٨. كيلها بالنصف وبه
٩. [باموالى تحطها فى موضع]

١٠. <جيد> [على والداك السلام

٤. الكلجى.

verso

١. حسبى الله ونعم الوكيل
 ٢. الذى اعلمه الاخ العزيز عساكر ادام الله بقا>
 ٣. يا مولاي حامل الكتاب حسين له بيان قد
 ٤. اوصيته ووكلته على بيع الذى تم لا <تعوق>
 ٥. عنه لا انت ولا له ومحمد عطا الله يبتاع
 ٦. بما طعم الله ورزق وان ابتاع من المذكور>
 ٧. شى تبيعه والا []
 ٨. فى الم []

Translation

recto

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. [From] His servant, the Ḥājī ‘Asākīr.
2. I am writing to inform Shaykh Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm, the son of Abū
3. Mufarrij that I have sent to you,
4. accompanied by Salāl al-Kaljī, one and a half *ḥiml*-loads, and, accompanied by
5. Khalīfa, one and a half *ḥiml*-loads; thus a total of three *ḥiml*-loads,
6. which weigh ten *irdabbs*, of fine wheat. These are the provisions
7. for the youths. Put them in a safe place.
8. [.], weigh them at half of a *wayba*,
9. [.] with my own money. Put them in a [safe] place.
10. [.]. Greetings to your parents.

verso

1. My sufficiency is in God; how wonderful a guardian He is!
2. I am writing to inform my dear brother ‘Asākīr—may God prolong his life!—

3. Dear Sir: the carrier of this letter, Ḥusayn, has brought with him a *bayān*-certificate, by which
4. I have advised him and entrusted him to sell what has been [brought over? delivered?] in full measurement. Do not [hold it back from?]
5. him. Don't do that to him. Muḥammad 'Aṭā' Allāh will buy [them],
6. as God so provides and feeds. If he could sell the above-mentioned [goods?],
7. then we will put them on sale; otherwise, [.],
8. in [.].

Commentary

recto

5. The word *al-jumla* is written without dots, thus the possible reading of *al-ḥamla*, "the cargo, the shipment," cannot be ruled out.
6. For the term *naḥaqa*, in the sense of "provisions for pilgrims," see discussion above in chapter 2.
8. I was unable to decipher the three (or four) words in this line.
10. The supposed *k*, in *wālidāka* (sic.), "your parents," is written in the final shape of the letter with a rounded top bar, looking like a *y* < *wālidāya*, "my parents," i.e., 'Asākir's parents, which is rather odd, and unlikely, given the context. It is evident that Ibrāhīm's father Abū Mufarrij and mother, whose name is not given here, were still alive when this correspondence took place. The curious wording of *walad*, instead of the usual *ibn*, is also noteworthy in that it betrays a sense of familiarity, as if 'Asākir had been doing business with the father for a long time and now he was aware that he was dealing with the Jr., the *walad*.

verso

1. The *ḥasbala* usually marks the conclusion of a document, but occasionally, as it is shown here, replaces the introductory *basmala*. Similar examples are found in the Cairo Geniza letters; see *ALAD*, nos. 61, 104. The *tarjama*, apparently Ibrāhīm, is missing.
4. The verb *tamma*, "it was completed, finished," is written without dots, and the reading is tentative.

4–5. The reading of *lā* [*taʿūqu*] *ʿan* is conjectural; similar usage is found in RN 1018a*.

6. The phrase *bi-mā ʿaama allāh wa-razaqa* is often used as a stoke phrase in association with the closing of deals (for more discussion, see chapter 4). The verb *ibtāʿa* is written without dots, so other readings, such as *inbāʿa*, “it was/is sold,” cannot be ruled out.

7. The verb *nabīʿuhu*, literally “we will sell it,” is unpointed; an alternate reading could be *tabīʿuhu*, “you may sell it.” The content of this part of the text is vague, due to damage to the lower portion of the paper.

TEXT NO. 22: A BUSINESS LETTER

RN 1029a

Description: Yellow paper scroll, slightly soiled and abraded, 9 × 25 cm, recto twelve lines plus five diagonal short lines along the right margin, to be read from the top down, verso two faded lines, in *riqāʿ* style, with some unusual paleographic peculiarities, very black ink.

Introduction: Written in a chancery calligraphic style, which is rarely seen among the finds from the house, this letter confirms that Ibrāhīm’s parents and children were living together, or at least close to each other by the time the letter was written.

Text

recto

- ١ . بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم مملوكه ابو عثمان
- ٢ . {بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم}
- ٣ . يحيى حضره الشيخ الاجل الموفق السعيد الموقر
- ٤ . ابو اسحاق ابراهيم سلمه تعال وتولاه
- ٥ . ساعت وقوفك على هذه الاحرف
- ٦ . تبيع الفخار الذى عندك بما طعم الله
- ٧ . تعال ورزق وتسلم الثمن الى يد الشيخ

٨. عبد المحسن ليثمر بها على السوء؟>

[] ٩.

١٠. تفضل بيك واحسان كما جرت

١١. [] جميع [] اصحاب

١٢. [] عل المولا مغرم حضر الكل الى

١. لى. ٥. ساعت = ساعة. ١٢. معرم.

in the right margin

الحمد لله > و> حده وعل صغارك وك> بارك السلام بركاته عل الوالده العزيزة>
> ورح> ماته عل الجلاله حمد لله مملوكه تبارك الله تعال السلام

عل = على. تعال = تعالى.

Translation

- 1-2. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. His servant Abū 'Uthmān
3. greets the most noble, successful, auspicious, and revered Shaykh
4. Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm—may [God] Almighty give him peace and secure him
5. prosperity! Upon receiving this letter,
6. sell the pottery at your disposal—as God
7. Almighty has fed and provided!—and give the payment to Shaykh
8. 'Abd al-Muḥsin so he may invest the money in the market (?).
9. [.....]
10. [by] your grace and benevolence. It so happened that
11. [....] all the [.....] owners of [..]
12. [....] a liability was [brought on] against [you,] the Master. All have come to [.....].

in the right margin

Praise be to God alone! Peace be upon your children and elders.
God's blessing on the dear mother. God's mercy on [your] majesty.
Praise be to God alone. [From] His servant. God bless. Greetings.

Commentary

- 1–2. Both logogram and longhand version of the *basmala* are written.
 4. The *alif maqṣūra* in this line (*ta‘ālā*) as well as elsewhere is consistently missing.
 5. The *alif maqṣūra* in *‘alā* is written with two dots, perhaps a case of over-correction.
 7. *Ilā yad*, literally “to the hand of. . .”
 8. Note the use of verb form IV *yuthammir*, literally “to bear fruit,” instead of the usual form X *istathmara* in such context.
 10. The colloquial *bī-ka* is given instead of the conventional *bi-ka*.

in the right margin

“The dear mother,” i.e., Ibrāhīm’s mother, Abū Mufarrij’s wife.

TEXT NO. 23: BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE

RN 1062a

Description: Yellow paper, torn on the right edge, sparse holes, 10.2 × 17.4 cm, recto ten lines (two of which are separated from the main text and are illegible) plus one line marginalia, in a coarse and rectangular hand, verso eight lines, in a different hand, with considerable irregularities, black ink.

Introduction: The text on the recto is a letter from a certain Abū al-Qāsim to Abū ‘Uthmān Mithqāl and Muḥammad, “the son of Abū Mufarrij.” It discusses the usual business of shipping and delivery. Noteworthy is its revelation that, in addition to Ibrāhīm, Abū Mufarrij had another son named Muḥammad, who was involved in the shipping business as well. Above the letter are two lines, written in a much smaller hand, whose content and function remain unclear. The text on the verso is most likely a reply to the letter on the recto. The incomplete text seems to deal with some business dispute between the two parties regarding the “shortage” in delivery.

Text

recto

١. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
 ٢. ابو القاسم يو<سف> مخلف
 ٣. الذى اعد<لم> به ابو عثمان
 ٤. مثقال والولد العزيز محمد
 ٥. ولد الشيخ ابو مفرج وفقهم
 ٦. الله فى الدنيا وفى ال<آ>خر انى
 ٧. سيرت سته عشر رزمه
 ٨. [] ثمانيه احمد<ما>ل فتقبض
-
٢. محلف.

in the right margin

وايضا صحبه حمال كمال الدين حمل آخر

verso

١. [] <ال>قاسم وصل الله على سيدنا محمد وآله
 ٢. [] حظوظهم آخره انه لما كان من هذه نقص []
 ٣. [] اجتمع ابو ع<ب>د الله بن جزيل بن على حسن
 ٤. [] الحسين العسقلانى ويستسال احد
 ٥. [] <اب>سى القسم لمزهر ادفع لى الرساله التى كانت
 ٦. [] وابو القسم يفرض ان الرساله التى كانت
 ٧. [] سلمتها لوصيك فسمع هو ذاك
 ٨. [] <ا>لك كل الحاله يبتاع البايع []
-
١. صل = صلى. ٣. حريل. ٦. يفرض.

Translation

recto

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
2. [From] Abū al-Qāsim Yū[suf] Mukhallaf.
3. I am writing to inform Abū ‘Uthmān
4. Mithqāl and Dear Son Muḥammad,
5. the son of Shaykh Abū Mufarrij—may God let them be successful,
6. in this world and in the hereafter!—that I
7. have sent [to you] sixteen bundles
8. [of flax?], in eight loads. So you will receive [the payment].

in the right margin

Also, to be brought over by Kamāl al-Dīn the porter is another load [of].

verso

1. [. . . Abū] al-Qāsim. May God bless our Lord Muḥammad and his family.
2. [. . . and may God make] their fortune last forever. When a shortage was [discovered . . .]
3. [. . .] Abū ‘Abd Allāh ibn Jazīl ibn ‘Alī Ḥasan met
4. [. . . with] al-Ḥusayn al-‘Asqalānī. One of
5. [the associates of?] Abū al-Qāsim inquired into the matter with Muzhir [saying]: “Pay me on account of the shipment, which
6. [has been delivered to you?]. Abū al-Qāsim would assume that the shipment which
7. [. . .] I delivered according to your request.” He heard about that,
8. [. . . so pay us with] your cash by all means. The seller will put on sale [. . .].

Commentary

recto

2. Note the position in which the *tarjama* is written, which is a new line under the *basmala*. In most cases, the *tarjama* occurs to the left of the *basmala*.

3–4. Abū ‘Uthmān Mithqāl appears to be a business partner of Abū Mufarrīj’s son Muḥammad.

4. *Al-walad al-‘azīz*, “Dear Son,” is perhaps used here as some sort of honorific title; see *DAA1*, no. 46.

7. The word *rizma*, “bundle,” “package,” or “ream of paper,” was usually used as a measure for fabric or paper; see *MS*, 1: 336, 337, 418 (note 35), 426 (note 23), 486 (note 24); 4: 403 (note 148); *al-Qaddūmī*, 237.

verso

1. Note the tendency of the scribe to drop the *alif maqṣūra* (in *ṣallā*) and the regular *alif* (in *al-qāsim*, lines 5, 6). This Abū al-Qāsim should be the same Abū al-Qāsim, the sender of the letter on the recto.

4. The missing word from the right edge of the paper could be a preposition, such as *ma‘a*, *bi*, or the like, relating to the verb *ijtama‘a* in line 3. The reading of the partially erased verb *yastas‘alu* is tentative.

5. For the word *risāla*, meaning “load, shipment,” see *MS*, 1: 183–84.

7. The verb *sami‘a* could also be read as *samaḥa*, “he permitted, approved”; the graphemes are very similar.

TEXT NO. 24: A LETTER CONCERNING CLOTHING SALES AND PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS

RN 969

Description: Light brown paper, worn on the lower edge, 8 × 18.3 cm, recto sixteen lines plus one line marginalia, verso thirteen lines plus one line marginalia, in a clear, fluid, and coarse hand, without any dots, black ink.

Introduction: The text on the recto and verso makes up one letter concerning the selling of clothes and payment arrangements. The marginalia appear to have been meant to complement the main text. Some natural, or man-made, disaster as well as some argument over money can be glimpsed through the lines on the verso, but the detail is unclear.

Text

recto

١. فينعم له []
٢. حسين اطال الله بقه <ناه>
٣. وادام عزه ونعماه و<من>
٤. حسن توفيقه لا اخلاه
٥. وسوى \دلك/ يا مولاي تحرص انك
٦. تبيع لى العمامه وقد اباع
٧. نعمان الذيل بسته
٨. وعشرين درهما الباقي له
٩. ثمانيه وبالله العظيم
١٠. اما انا فجميع ما معى
١١. انقضاه ونقصد
١٢. كسوه للصغار
١٣. ولنا ذهب اصفر
١٤. ننتهزها بالله تبارك
١٥. وتعالى يفرحنا تخلاها
١٦. فله الحمد على ذلك

٥. دلك = ذلك. ٧. الدليل. ١١. انفصاه. ١٤. ننهرها.

in the right margin

[] اول الى الله تعالى وقد سيرت للمولا صحبه سيدهم ثلثه ارطال

verso

١. ولما بين والله العظيم
٢. لقد بلاتا خراب والعمر
٣. فى البلد ما بدا الا قليل
٤. الا ان سيدهم قال لى ان

- ٥ . دفع لى معين الدين خليل
 ٦ . قضيت والمولا كان قال لى
 ٧ . تاخذ من زيتون احد
 ٨ . عشر درهم الا ربيع فما دفع
 ٩ . لى شى ولا قلت انا شى خص
 ١٠ . ع السلام وعلى والدك
 ١١ . افضل السلام وعلى الفقيه
 ١٢ . السلام وعلى محمد ومعدين الدين
 ١٣ . السلام وعلى []

٢ . حراب. العمى. ٦ . قضيت. ٩ . حص. ١٠ . ع = على، عليك (؟)

in the right margin

السلام وعلى الوفى واخوه السلام وعلى فخر السلام وعلى عبد [] <السلام>

Translation

recto

1. So let [God] grant His bounty to him [.....]
2. Ḥusayn—may God prolong his life,
3. make his strength and wealth everlasting, and
4. never deprive him from good fortune!—
5. and all that. Now: O my master, make sure that you
6. sell the turbans on my behalf.
7. Nu‘mān has sold long coats for
8. twenty-six dirhams; and he still has
9. eight [long coats?] left, by God Almighty!
10. As for me, all [the items] in my [storage]
11. are sold out, and we need [more]
12. children’s clothes.
13. We have pure gold,
14. which we will use [to pay for them], by God’s blessing.
15. O God, the Sublime! we will be happy to spend all of it [on this].
16. Thank God for that.

in the right margin

[.] to God, the Sublime. I have dispatched to [you,] the Master, accompanied by Sayyiduhum, three pounds of [.]

verso

1. [A]nd in between, by Mighty God!
2. We suffered from a disaster, and life
3. in town has not shown [signs of recovery] very much.
4. Nevertheless, Sayyiduhum said to me,
5. "If Mu'īn al-Dīn Khalīl paid me the money
6. I would have spent [it]." O master! he (Sayyiduhum?) told me
7. "Take from Zaytūn eleven
8. minus one quarter dirhams"; but [the truth is,] he (Zaytūn?) did not give
9. me a dime! Neither did I say a thing about it.
10. Greetings. Best regards to your father,
11. and to the judge.
12. Greetings to Muḥammad and M[u'īn al-Dīn?].
13. Greetings to [.].

in the right margin

Greetings to al-Wafī and his brother. Greetings to Fakhr. Greetings to 'Abd [.].

Commentary

recto

5. The word *dhālika* is added later, above *wa-siwā*.
7. *Al-dhayl*, literally "tail," "the train [of a cloak?]" ; the term perhaps refers either to the back part of a regular jacket or coat that falls below the waist, or to the long "tails" of a formal jacket that may extend to the back of the knees. I thank Katherine Burke for this suggestion; cf. chapter 2, note 45.
9. The invocation *wa-bi-llāh al-ʿazīm*, "by God Almighty!" is also echoed in line 14 (*bi-llāh tabāraka*), and repeated in the verso, line 1.
1. The invocations, in this context, seem to express the satisfaction

at cutting a deal. If that proves to be the case, then the price of long coats cited here must be a good one.

11. *Inqadāhu* is problematic: the intransitive verb form VII, “to be finished,” “to be used up,” needs no direct object; it is likely a mistake for *inqadaytuhu*, “I have sold them all,” or simply *inqadā*, “it was sold out.”

13. *Dhahab asfar*, literally “yellow gold.”

14. The reading of *nantahizuhā* is tentative; the reference of the feminine suffix *hā* obviously refers to the antecedent *dhahab*, “gold,” which is masculine.

15. *Takhallāhā*, literally “to get rid of it,” as in “to squander the money.” Since the word is unpointed, alternate readings include *bikhālāhā*, which means the same, or *tajallāhā*, “to expose it,” or *tahallāhā*, “to have it endowed.”

verso

2. The detail of the *kharāb*, “disaster, destruction,” is not explained here.

2–3. I read the word *al-ʿumr* in the sense of *al-ʿumrān*, “prosperity, flourishing state,” so that the ensuing verb *badā*, literally “to emerge, to show signs,” can fit the context.

3. *Al-balad*, “the town,” perhaps Quseir.

4. This Sayyiduhum ought to be the same person mentioned on the recto (in the right margin). He is supposed to have accompanied the shipment, to be delivered to the recipient of this letter. It is evident that this person had some argument with the writer of the letter, and that the latter is trying to explain it to the recipient of the letter. But the detail of this argument is not totally clear due to the lack of punctuation and the confusing pronominal references in the text.

6. Compare verb form I *qadaytu* with verb form VII *inqadā*, in the recto, line 11.

10. The letter ʿ, in its full independent form, is most likely a logogram for *ʿalayka*. One is also tempted to read it as *tamma*, “finished,” i.e., the end of the main content of the letter, because the graphemes of *tamma* and ʿ look almost identical. This reading is itself problematic, however, in that it does not explain the conjunction *wa* that follows *al-salām*.

TEXT NO. 25: LETTER TO A JUDGE

RN 980a

Description: Yellow paper, torn at the lower part and the left edge, 8.5 × 8 cm, recto five lines, verso two lines, slightly soiled, black ink.

Introduction: The identity of the recipient of this letter, a judge in both the Sharīʿa court (*al-qāḍī*) and the municipal court (*al-ḥakam*), is unknown. It is unlikely that these refer to Abū Mufarrij or Ibrāhīm, because if they had occupied such positions, these titles would have naturally been seen more frequently in the letters addressed to them. Given that it is indeed sent to Quseir and that it is found in the “Sheikh’s house,” this “judge” could be one of the family members, or at least someone with business ties to the family.

Text

recto

- ١ . بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
 ٢ . الى الشيخ الاجل القاضى الحكم ادا م [الله] بقاءه
 ٣ . [وأطال] نعماه و[به ن]سأ<ل توفيقه []
 ٤ . [] وجعلنى من كل سو هذا من عبد []
 ٥ . [] للمولا []

verso (address)

- ١ . الى ساحل القصير []
 ٢ . ابو حسن علي المعول دامت <سعادته>

Translation

recto

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
2. To the most noble shaykh, the *qāḍī*, the municipal judge—may God prolong his life!

3. May God sustain his bounty! Of God we ask for his success! [. . .]
4. [.] and spare me from all the evils!—: This [letter] is from the servant [.]
5. [.] to the master [.]

verso (address)

1. To the shore of Quseir [.]
2. Abū Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Mu‘awwal—may his happiness last forever!

TEXT NO. 26: A LETTER CONCERNING PERSONAL AND BUSINESS MATTERS

RN 1003b

Description: Thick and glossy yellow paper, torn at the top and the left side, several holes, 17.5 × 15.4 cm, recto seven lines plus ten lines marginalia, verso two lines, in a cursive hand, with some “non-Egyptian” features, such as the two dots under the *y*, black ink.

Introduction: The recipient of the letter is not Shaykh Abū Mufarrij or his son Ibrāhīm, but one Shaykh Abū ‘Alī Ḥusayn, who was, as discussed in chapter 1, probably Abū Mufarrij’s brother.

Text

recto

١. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم مملوكه عثمان الناجي
٢. حضره سيدي ومولاي ومن لا غلوت حياتاه ولا خلوت مكانه
٣. الشيخ الاجل الافضل الاكمل الامين ابو عل حسين وفقه <الله>
٤. لطاعته ولا اخلاه من حسن توفيقه والذي نعلمك
٥. وفقك الله ان من يوم خرجت من عندك ما وصلنى كتاب
٦. فوالله يا مولاي اعافنى <الله>ه بكل الحال وانا متكل عل الله
٧. [] فى شى عليه

٣. عل = على. ٦. عل = على.

in the right margin (turn the page and read from the top down)

- ١ . سمعت ان []
- ٢ . لنا ملايه حرم مرصعه []
- ٣ . عندى حملين وتسلم
- ٤ . لي عل سرحان []
- ٥ . و [] ومختار وهو []
- ٦ . ربيع مبتاع ما يعلم
- ٧ . فا [] اليه []
- ٨ . رسومها محتاج []
- ٩ . يا مولاي ترسل لى كتاب
- ١٠ . [] نعمى تجارتكم

٤ . عل = على .

verso (address)

- ١ . يصل هذا الكتاب الى <ساحل> القصير فسلم للشيخ الاجل الافضل الاكمل ابو عل حسين
- ٢ . الى . . . []

١ . عل = على .

Translation

recto

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. [From] His servant ‘Uthmān al-Nājī.
2. [To] my master and lord—whose life will not be spent in excess and whose lofty position will not be void—
3. and the most noble, virtuous, perfect, and trustworthy shaykh Abū ‘Alī Ḥusayn—may God make him successful
4. on account of his obedience! [May God] not deprive him from the wonder of his success! That which I am writing to inform you—
5. may God make you successful!—is the following: since the day I left you, I have yet received any letters [from you].

6. By God, O my master! May God protect me under every circumstance and in God I place my trust.
7. [...] as regards [.....]

in the right margin

1. I heard that [....]
2. We have women's wraps decorated with gold and gems [...]
3. at my disposal are two loads. Send regards
4. for me to Sirḥān [.....]
5. and [...] and Mukhtār; he is to [...]
6. a quarter to be sold. He did not know
7. [.....] to him [.....]
8. Its tax due is being demanded [.....].
9. O my master, send me a letter.
10. [May God] bless your business.

verso

1. This letter is to be delivered to the shore of Quseir, to be handed over to the most noble, virtuous, and perfect shaykh Abū 'Alī Ḥusayn.
2. To [.....].

Commentary

recto

1. The name of the sender of the letter, 'Uthmān al-Nājī, is written next to the *basmala* in two lines vertically, from the top down.
2. The conjugation of the two verbs, in *lā ghalawt ḥayātuhu wa-lā khalawt makānuhu*, is problematic: (1) The conjugations of verb form I *ghalā* and *khalā* ought to be *ghalat* and *khalat*, respectively; and (2) the subject of the verb *khalā*, *makān*, is masculine. Examples of the similar formulaic phrase *lā akhlā [allāh] makānahu*, or *fa-as'alu allāh an lā yukhlīya makānahu*, "May God not deprive him of His place!" are to be found in *ABPH*, nos. 6, 57; *DAA2*, no. 33.
5. Although the exact circumstance in which the writer of the letter "departed from" the recipient of the letter is unclear, it is clear that some sort of response, most likely on business matters, had been expected.

6. The verb *a'āfa-nī* is a misspelling for *a'āfā-nī* (verb form IV) or *āfā-nī* (verb form III).
7. The paper is cut off in the middle of this line; only the upper part of the content has survived.

in the right margin

2. The word *muraṣṣa'a* is partially erased; but the traces of *m*, *r*, and *ṣ* are clear enough to warrant the reading.
6. *Mubtā'* is undotted; the reading could be *matā'*, "luggage," *mub[ḡ]ā'*, and the like.
8. The term *nusūm* means various things in different contexts, "records," "notes," "fees," "tax dues," and so forth. In the Cairo Geniza papers, it also signifies "sales tax," or "salaries"; see *MS*, 1: 140, 435 (note 71, sales tax); 2: 451 (note 42, salaries).

TEXT NO. 27: LETTER CONCERNING THE DELIVERY OF GRAIN, TEXTILES,
AND FOODSTUFFS

RN 1004c

Description: Yellow paper, the upper part missing, 9 × 10.3 cm, recto seven lines plus one line marginalia, verso seven lines, some suffering from abrasions, in an experienced and educated hand, ignoring all the dots and the top bar on the *k*, black ink.

Introduction: Although the beginning of the letter is missing, judging from the content ("Peace be upon you and Najīb . . . and Khalaf!"), it is likely addressed to Abū Mufarrij, with whom the sender obviously had some kind of joint partnership (*ʿidli*, "my half share [of the investment]"); for more details see chapter 2 and Concluding Remarks of Part One).

Text

recto

١. قمح وجرتين صابون وتسلم منه ثلث شوال
٢. وثلث سلب وتسكها فى موضع جيد
٣. واحرص انك تجعل عدلى كلها فى
٤. شونه الى جانب الجميع ما تحتاج وصيه
٥. وانى سيرت لك زكيه ارز وزكيه كسوت علي>ه)
٦. حرير زاخر وزكيه اشيال وزكيه جلاليب
٧. وست تلاليس كتان وعشر قطع دقيق

١. سوال. ٦. راحر.

verso

١. فتجعل عدلى الجميع فى موضع واحد
٢. وتخلي الغلال تظمن الزكات تحطوهم
٣. لى فى <موضع جيد> عليك السلام وعلى نجيب
٤. السلام والحمد لله وحده و []
٥. عل خلف السلام وقول لخلف الله الله
٦. سير لى البطه سرعه سرعه فانى محتاج
٧. لها []

٢. تظمن = تضمن او تظمنن (?). ٥. عل = على.

in the top and right margins (read from the top down)

[] فان كعك جرا كله سير من الدقيق الستة قطع الكبار سيرنى الغله فى دواب اربع و []

حرا حله.

Translation

recto

1. [W]heat and two jars of soap. You will receive from him three large sacks
2. and three hawsers. Lock them up in a safe place.
3. Be sure to keep all my half-share of the load in
4. a warehouse, next to the rest of the merchandise. Whatever you want, just order it [from me].
5. I have sent you high-quality rice, a fine *kiswa*-robe, tailored in
6. pure silk, fine shawls, and fine *galabiya* clothes,
7. along with six *tillīs*-sacks of flax, and ten *qitʿa*-units of flour.

verso

1. Put all of my half-share [of the shipment] in one place,
2. and use the crops to pay for (?) the *zakāt* taxes. Put them,
3. for my sake, in a safe place. Peace be upon you and Najīb.
4. Praise be to God alone. And [.]
5. Peace be upon Khalaf. Tell Khalaf that, by God, by God,
6. send me the *baṭṭa*-containers as soon as possible! I need
7. them [badly].

in the top and right margin

If the cakes have all run out, then send along flour, in six large containers. Send the crops to me on four riding animals and [.].

Commentary

recto

1. *Shuwāl*, “sack”; note the use of the singular here (pl. *shuwālāt*). The use of singular instead of plural is also seen in *salab* (pl. *aslāb*; line 2).
3. *ʿIdl*, literally “the half of a load”; the text makes it clear that the sender of the letter and the addressee own the load with equal shares, that is, half and half.
5. *Ṣakīya*, “fine, pure,” is written idiosyncratically in that the *k*, without the cross bar on the top, looks like a *ḥ* and the other letters are unpointed.

6. The reading of the unpointed word *zākhīr*, literally “full, profuse, exuberant,” is tentative.

verso

2. *Taṭmanu* < *taḍmanu* (*d-m-n*), that is, “to be liable,” or “to be responsible,” and the like. There is also the possibility of *taṭmanu* < *taṭmaʿinnu* (*t-m-ʿ-ṣ-n*), “you rest assured” that the taxes are paid. To pay taxes in crops (*al-ghalla*) was perhaps very common at the time.

TEXT NO. 28: LETTER CONCERNING THE SELLING OF CLOTHES AND CROPS

RN 1018c

Description: Beige paper, torn on the top, several worm-eaten holes, 8.5 × 18 cm, recto eleven lines plus one line marginalia, verso three lines, in a cursive hand, ignoring the dots, the top bar of the *k*, and the *alif maqṣūra*, black ink.

Introduction: In addition to the main content of the letter that deals with business matters, noteworthy also is the sender’s condolences over the death of the anonymous recipient’s daughter. The background of the girl’s death is unclear. It is attempting to ponder the link between her death and the mention of the illness of one man’s “daughter” mentioned in another letter (RN 1018d*).

Text

recto

١. <وأدام الله> عزه ونعماه وتكرمه
٢. [] علاه ومن حسن التوفيق
٣. <لا> اخلاه و<ج>مع الرسول بيننا عل اسر حال
٤. وسوا ذلك تحفظ قماشى جميعه
٥. وثلثه عشر قطعه دقيق بركين كبار ارز
٦. بركين اخر ارز تحطهم و[] وجميع
٧. الخوايج تحطهم ولا تفرط فيهم انت

٨. وكيلى كل شى وان امتحنوا انجز
 ٩. لى واثبت بالجميع [] الحاج [] وذلك
 ١٠. وتسير لى جواب انجاز وتكشف لى عن
 ١١. المركب ترحل به وتسير لى المشكور

٣. عل = على. ٤. تحفظ. ٨. استحنوا. ٩. اتب ت. ١١. المسكور.

in the right margin

[] لف والله تعال يطول عمرك والحاج وصل وقد عز عليه موت كريمتك

تعال = تعالى.

verso

١. ويتسلم بن مبارك اربع فوط وعبائين
 ٢. تاتيهم الى بتاعى مسعود الذى بقا
 ٣. وتسير الجواب وتسلم []

Translation

recto

1. [To so-and-so]—May God prolong his strength, his happiness, his nobility
2. [.] and his high status. [May God] not deprive him
3. of success. May the Prophet reunite us in the best circumstances!—
4. [And now to the topic:] You should keep an eye on all my fabrics,
5. thirteen *qif'a*-containers of flour, two large *bark*-bales of rice,
6. and [another] two bales of rice. Put them [. . .] and all
7. the commodities [in a safe place]. Don't over charge (?) these. You are
8. my agent in charge of everything. If they inspect [the aforesaid commodities], then you should carry the task out
9. on my behalf, and notify all [parties involved] that [.:] the *hāj* [.]
10. Send me a follow-up and inspect, on my behalf,

11. the cargo with which you have traveled. Send me an acknowledgment note (?) [.].

in the right margin

[.] May God Almighty prolong your life! The *ḥājj* has arrived and he is sorry about your daughter's death.

verso

1. Ibn Mubārak is to receive four *fūṭa*-waist wrappers and two 'abā'-cloaks.
2. Give them to Bitā'ī (?) Mas'ūd, who has stayed behind.
3. Send [me] a receipt. Give my regards [to].

Commentary

recto

1–3. The formulaic greeting *aṭāla allāh baqāhu wa-adāma 'izzahu wa-nuṣmāhu wa-min ḥusn al-tawfiq lā akhlāhu* is seen in RN 969*, 1056a*; also DAA2, nos. 7, 27. However, other elements, such as *takarrumahu* and 'alāhu, do not appear in the parallel examples.

3. A similar expression of *jama'ā al-rasūl bayna-nā 'alā asarr ḥāl* is cited in DAA2, no. 7, *jama'ā allāh bayna-nā 'alā asarr ḥāl*, “May God reunite us. . . .”

4. The phrase *wa-siwā dhālika*, which is also frequently used elsewhere (RN 969*, 998*, 1018a*, 1056a*), is often found associated with the formula *aṭāla allāh baqāka. . . .*

5. *Bark (barak)*, “bag, baggage” (Dozy). Another possibility is that it maybe a distorted version of the *barqalū*, “small bale,” which, according to Goitein, is perhaps related to the Italian *barca*, “boat”; see *MS*, 1: 335–36.

8. The reading of *imtaḥanū* is conjectural. Another possible reading is *istahyaw (istahaw)*, “if they shy away,” as in, “should they refuse, then you go ahead. . . .” The graphemes are similar.

9. Note the *t*, in *ithbit*, is separated from the rest.

10. The reading of the unpointed word *injāz* is conjectural. It probably has to do with the cognate verb *anjiz*, “carry out [the task]!” in line 8; thus *jawāb injāz* would be some sort of “mission accomplished” notification.

12. The word *al-mashkūr* is unpointed; the reading and the meaning are uncertain.

verso

2. The Bitāʿī (so appears in the manuscript) as a name is odd. In Egyptian, *bitāʿ*, in a construct, indicates “possession,” “association,” and “ascribability” (*DEA*, s.v.); thus *bitāʿī* (for *bitāʿʿ*?) here might not be part of the name, but rather something having to do with the personal name proper, to the effect of “the estate of Masʿūd,” “the possession of Masʿūd,” or the like. The reading of the unpointed first word as verb form IV imperative (imperfect) *tuʿtī-him*, instead of verb form I indicative *taʿtī-him* (that which arrive them), is based on the parallel syntax below, i.e., the imperative (imperfect) *tusayyiru . . . wa-tusallimu* (send . . . and give my regards . . .!).

TEXT NO. 29: A LETTER CONCERNING BUSINESS AND PERSONAL MATTERS

RN 1018d

Description: Light brown paper, 8.7 × 11 cm, recto eight lines plus one line marginalia, verso nine lines (the last two entirely erased) plus one line marginalia, in fine *naskh*, black ink.

Introduction: The incomplete text, of which only a quire of the original paper has survived, on both the recto and verso perhaps makes up one lengthy letter. The text on the recto discusses regular business issues such as the *zakāt* taxes and some disputes over money, whereas the text on the verso deals with some family and personal matters, among them a mother’s tender message to her beloved son and her urgent request to buy medicine for her “very ill” daughter. Noteworthy also is the center of the seeming controversy, an unidentified “she” (lines 2–3, recto; perhaps the same “mother” in question), whose activities as discussed in the letter shed rare light on women’s role in the marketplace and community at the time (see chapter 1).

Text

recto

- ١ . فلانه ما نفع احد سواه []
- ٢ . ويا مولا <ي> تكون تعلم هي خبرت لصاحب
- ٣ . الزكاه ووريت له الكتاب قوله
- ٤ . وقال خذ مني العشره ارادب
- ٥ . قلت هاتها قال لى تعال يوم الثلثا
- ٦ . خذها وانا يا مولا <ي> سررت هذه فان
- ٧ . لم يدفع لمحاسن شى غير التى دفعت
- ٨ . له وهو ابو الحج على ثلاثين درهم

٢ . خبرت.

in the right margin

رزقها عشر درهم ورز محاسن ثمان <يه> و نصف وسلمهم للعجوز وقل قراه . . .

ررر . تمانه.

verso

- ١ . امك
- ٢ . حبها وقالت يا ولدى ما عندى اعز منك
- ٣ . تبيع الحاجه التى معك اخرج سرور
- ٤ . كل بد واقضى ما عليك فما عند <ي> اعز منك
- ٥ . ويا مولا <ي> . . . تدخل العطارى
- ٦ . واستقصى لى على شراب مفرح لان
- ٧ . كريمتى متمررضه بالرجفه ووقت قام []

in the right margin

[] وقال هم ذكرو للعجوز لى مع الصبى اربعين درهم []

دكرر.

Translation

recto

1. [B]ecause it will do no good to anyone except for himself [. . . .].
2. O my Master, you should know that she informed
3. the tax collector and showed him the letter that says,
4. "He told me, 'Take from me the ten *irdabbs* [of grain].'
5. And I said, 'Bring them over.' And he said, 'Come this Tuesday
6. and take them.'" O my Master, I was very pleased about that.
- If
7. he has not paid Maḥāsin anything, except that which I have paid
8. him, Abū al-Ḥajj 'Alī, [in the amount of] thirty dirhams[, then. . . .].

in the right margin

She was granted ten dirhams. And the rice for Maḥāsin is eight and a half [*irdabbs*]. Please deliver it to the old man and tell [him] that [. . . .].

verso

1. Your mother
2. [expresses] her love. She said, "O my son, nothing is more precious and dear to me than you.
3. Sell the stuff that you have and go out and have fun
4. by all means! Spend all the money you have. Nothing is more precious and dear to me than you!"
5. O my Master, [. . . .] Would you go to see the druggist
6. and ask [him] for me about the "happy drink."
7. My daughter is severely ill, suffering from tremors and shudders. When she gets up [she would. . . .].

in the right margin

He said that they told the old man that I have deposited (?) with the young man some forty dirhams [. . . .].

Commentary

recto

2–3. For *ṣāhib al-zakāt*, as “collector of taxes imposed on the Kārimī merchants,” see al-Ashqar, 166. Al-Ashqar based his interpretation on al-Qalqashandī, who lists the office of *nāẓir al-zakāt*, or *nāẓir al-bahār*, the latter being a clear reference to the Yemeni and Kārimī connection; see *QS*, 4: 32; *QSM*, 343. For discussion of the Kārimīs and their probable association with the warehouse, see chapters 1 and 2.

3. There are two readings of the largely unpointed clause *kh-b-r-t li-ṣāhib al-zakāt wa-w-r-y-t lahu al-kitāb*, “she informed (*khbarat*) the tax collector and showed (*warayt* < *arat*) him the letter,” or “she attempted to confuse (*hayyarat*) the tax collector and concealed (*warrat* < *warayāt*) the letter from him.” The two readings contradict each other. For more discussion, see chapter 1.

6–8. The conditional sentence *fa-in . . .* is unfinished due to the incompleteness of the text.

7. The verb *dafaʿtu* is unpointed; thus *dafaʿta*, “you have paid,” is also possible.

verso

1. The word *ummuka*, “your mother,” stands alone in this line; it is likely a catchword whose function is to continue from the recto. There is also the possibility that the content on the verso was dictated by the recipient’s mother.

2. The reading of *ḥubbahā* is tentative, insofar as between the *b* and *h* is what looks like a medial shape of ʿ, which is perhaps just an ink stain.

6. The term *shirāb* had been used to indicate some medicinal syrup since ancient times in the Near East; similar examples are found in Khalil Messiha, “Reconsideration and Origin of an Arabic Medical Prescription,” *AI* 9 (1970), 123–25; Rāḡib, “Quatre Papyrus arabes d’Edfou,” *AI* 14 (1978), 10.

TEXT NO. 31: CORRESPONDENCE DISCUSSING PRICES, THE TITHE TAX, AND A MILITARY EXPEDITION

RN 1027a

Description: Yellowish-brown paper scroll, 8.4 × 17 cm, recto seventeen lines plus one line marginalia, in elegant *naskh*, verso seventeen lines plus one line marginalia, in a naïve hand, with irregularities in orthography and colloquialism in the syntax, black ink.

Introduction: This nearly complete document constitutes one of the longest texts among the finds in the “Sheikh’s house.” The texts, on the recto and the verso respectively, seem to be correspondence between two parties involved in the trade of grain and oil, as well as domestic items such as coral, mirrors, and textiles. A wide range of issues, from the volatile prices in the marketplace to collecting taxes and commissions, are dealt with. Of no less interest is the mention of the mobilization of troops heading off to combat the “Franks,” namely the Crusaders. (For more discussion see chapter 2.) This primarily business letter also bears a personal touch by means of a lengthy segment of greetings to a number of men whose identities are unknown.

Text

recto

- ١ . بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
- ٢ . يتسلم الشيخ محمد بن جعفر وفقه الله تعالى
- ٣ . من سنقر بن عياش بن العساوري
- ٤ . ثمانية ارادب وويبه قمح طيب وبرنيه زيت
- ٥ . وهي لـ<ا>بو الكرم بن نصر بالسلام
- ٦ . وصحبت عبد الله بن احمد العساو<ر>ى
- ٧ . سته ارادب وويبه وبرنيه زيت
- ٨ . والعشره اربعين والكره سته امداد والقمح
- ٩ . طيب بالسلام وهي من غله ابو الكرم
- ١٠ . بن نصر بالسلام وحضر حسين بن زكري<ا>

١١. وهو يسلم عليك وعلى الرشيد هرون
 ١٢. وعلى خلف وعلى عمر بن ابو الحسن
 ١٣. وعلى الشيخ يوسف بن قاسم وتعرفه اني
 ١٤. قد سيرت له حملة غلتي اثنين وثلاثين
 ١٥. اردب وويبه والـمـرجانه والمرای
 ١٦. والسلام عليك ورحمه الله وحده
 ١٧. والكرأ سته امداد والعشره اربعين
-
١. لى. ٣. عباس. ٦. صحبت = صحبة. ٨. العره. ١٧. العره.

in the right margin

وان كان السعر جيد فبيع عند كيالات لا كلل []

verso

١. مملوكه
٢. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم محمد بن جعـمـفر
٣. اعلم السيد الشيخ مـ [] وفقه الله لطاعته
٤. وجعله من اهل درايته ان وصلني الطريز
٥. والبطه وقد وصل عسكر المزيد سالمين
٦. فله الحمد على ذاك والسعر كله تحرك
٧. سوى القمح دينارين الا قيراطين والدقيق
٨. دينارين الا عشر درهم اردب والعسكر وصل
٩. اوله والسيد عدل الى الفرنج (؟) والسيد
١٠. ابو عالي جا لبيع وتعرف ابو علي حسين
١١. بن الرحين وصلنا الى سو[و]ق
١٢. وقد باع هرون رجب مجد دينارين
١٣. الاردب ولم نبع شي فلنا لعل زايد وبنعمه
١٤. الله اكرى على غلتك ولا توقف عن امالك
١٥. والناس جا اولهم وما ندرى ايش بعت
١٦. معهم من الاسعار ونحن نبيع ما يتوقف

١٧. والسلام عليك وعلى الشيخ ابي علي حسين

٤. الطير. ٩. الفرنج. ١٠. حا = جاء. ١٥. حا = جاء.

in the right margin

والشيخ ابو قاسم يسلم عليك

Translation

recto

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
2. To be delivered to Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Ja'far—may God Almighty make him successful!—
3. from Sunqur ibn 'Ayyāsh ibn al-'Asāwirī
4. are eight *irdabbs* and one *wayba* of pure wheat and one bottle of oil.
5. They are for Abū al-Karam ibn Naṣr bi-al-Salām.
6. To be accompanied by 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-'Asāwirī
7. [are actually] six *irdabbs* and one *wayba* [of wheat] and one bottle of oil.
8. The tithe tax is forty [*mudds* of wheat?] and the commission is six *mudds*. The wheat
9. is of high quality and in good condition. It is the provision for Abū al-Karam
10. ibn Naṣr bi-al-Salām. Ḥusayn ibn Zakarīyā is here
11. and sends his regards to you, as well as to al-Rashīd Hārūn,
12. Khalaf, 'Umar ibn Abū al-Ḥasan,
13. and Shaykh Yūsuf ibn Qāsim. Please tell him that I
14. have dispatched to him a cargo of my *ghalla* dues[, which include] thirty-three
15. *irdabbs* and one *wayba* [of wheat] as well as corals and mirrors.
16. Peace be upon you. God's mercy alone is to be thanked.
17. The commission is six *mudds* and the tithe tax forty.

in the right margin

If the prices are right, you may sell [them] in small portions, but not [in bulk?].

verso

- 1–2. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. [From] His servant Muḥammad ibn Ja‘[far].
3. I am writing to inform the Master, [. . .] Shaykh—may God make him (i.e., you) successful for his obedience to Him
4. and make him among His acquaintances!—that the embroidery has arrived,
5. and so has the bottle-container. The additional troops (?) have arrived, all in good shape and health.
6. Thank God for that! The prices have all changed
7. except for wheat[, which is now] two dinars minus two *qīrāṭs* [per *irdabb*]. Flour [can be had at]
8. two dinars minus ten dirhams per *irdabb*. The troops have come,
9. one after the other. [They] and the notary [are going] to [battle] the Franks. Sayyid
10. Abū ‘Alī has come to sell [his goods]. Please tell Abū ‘Alī Ḥusayn
11. ibn al-Raḥbayn that we went to the marketplace,
12. and that Hārūn sold to Rajīb Majd [wheat at the price of] two dinars
13. per *irdabb*. We did not sell anything. So we have perhaps some surplus. By the grace
14. of God, I will collect commission for [transporting?] your grain. So do not withhold your money.
15. People [all] came, one after the other. We don’t know at what prices you sold [it]
16. to them. We just sell according to what is fixed [with regard to price].
17. Peace be upon you and Shaykh Abū ‘Alī Ḥusayn.

in the right margin

Shaykh Abū Qāsim says hello to you.

Commentary

recto

3. The surname al-‘Asāwirī could be al-‘Asāwī, insofar as the *r* and *y* are written in one continuous stroke, which could be only a *y*. The same surname, but a different person, occurs in line 6.

5. The last part of the name, bi-al-Salām, is written in a logogram; it occurs thrice in the text (lines 9 and 10; also compare *al-salām* in line 16).

7. The sentence probably means that of the total eight *irdabbs* that Muḥammad is *supposed* to receive, the shipment accompanied by ‘Abd Allāh has carried only six.

8. The term *kirā*, literally “rent, fare,” usually signifies leasing riding animals or space in a shipment to carry the goods as well as the brokerage fees often associated with them; see *MS*, 1: 412 (note 34); *DAA1*, no. 46. For the lucrative business of charging *kirā*-commissions from the shipping boats coming and going on the Red Sea trade route on both shores of Egypt and Yemen, see Ibn Jubayr, 48.

9. *Ghallatī*, literally “my crops”; for the term used as “taxes paid in crops,” see the discussion above.

in the right margin

Kaylāt (sing. *kayla*), a dry measure in medieval Egypt, which is 8 *qadaḥ* (one *qadaḥ* is $1/96$ *irdabb*), or 7.5 liter; see Hinz, 40. The term is perhaps used here in a general sense of “small measures.”

verso

3. The name of the “shaykh” in question, namely the addressee of the letter, is erased; it maybe an acronym for it is too narrow a space to write the full name “Sunqur ibn ‘Ayyāsh ibn al-‘Asāwirī,” the sender of the shipment to Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far and most likely the addressee of this response.

5. The word *‘Askar* could, of course, be a name. The present rendering of “troops” is in light of *sālimīn*, a *ḥāl* circumstantial clause in the plural, as in “all of the *‘askar* have arrived safely.” This notion of plural is reinforced by mentioning, in lines 8 and 9, that “the *‘askar* have come, one [contingent] after the other.”

7. *Qīrāt*, carat, equals $1/24$ of a measure, and in this context, one *qīrāt* is $1/24$ of a dinar.

9. The phrase *awwaluhu* is perhaps a variant of the idiom *awwalan bi-awwalīn*, or *awwalan awwalan*, “one after the other,” “by and by,” “gradually,” and so forth (Dozy, s.v.). The similar usage is found in line 15. The *al-sayyid ‘adl* could be a name as well. The reading of the undotted *al-franj* is tentative.

12. The reading of Rajīb Majd is uncertain, insofar as the vertical stroke of the *d*, in Majd, is awfully long and high, more like a *l*. But this is not uncommon in this particular hand; compare, for instance, the *d* in *al-sayyid*, line 9. It is obvious that this Hārūn, who was perhaps working for Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far, had some profit to make, in that he sold wheat at 2 dinars per *irdabb*, higher than the market price, which was 2 dinars minus 2 *qirāṭs* per *irdabb*, mentioned earlier in the same text.

13. “We did not sell a thing . . .”; from the context, this is perhaps hinting at the possibilities that Muḥammad and his associates did not, or could not, sell anything from the addressee’s stocks deposited with them. In other words, Muḥammad and his associates were perhaps selling the grains on behalf of the addressee of the letter, in the capacity of a broker; and since the sale did not go well, or had not been completed, he had some *zāyid*, that is, some “leftovers” on hand.

14. *Ukrī ‘alā*; it is obvious that Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far charged his client, the addressee of this letter, fees as commission; due to the fact that he still has the latter’s “leftovers,” he would charge the commission, to be paid in crops, which is perhaps the amount offered, by Sunqur ibn ‘Ayyāsh, on the recto, namely forty *mudds* of wheat for the tithe tax and six *mudds* for the *kirā*-commission. The phrase *lā tuwaqqifu ‘an* could also signify, among other meanings, “to designate, to devote, to spend” (Lane), thus the sentence could be understood within the context as meaning “Don’t spend your money,” or, “Don’t send me cash; I still have the credit (in the form of leftover crops) from your account.” The exact context here is not totally clear. Nevertheless, it clearly hints at some kind of working system of credit and deposit between the two parties.

15–16. It is evident that Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far had a business partnership with the recipient of this letter (likely Sunqur ibn ‘Ayyāsh, the sender of the memo on the recto) in that they would, as the text here suggests, sell goods at a price that had been agreed upon by the two; in other words, they would coordinate, or fix, the asking prices for the goods they were to put on sale. In this case, Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far complained that he did not know the prices his partner, the addressee, had set up, and as a result, he had to resort to selling the goods at “the fixed prices” (*mā yatawaqqafu*), probably a reference to the prices agreed upon previously by the two. The quasi-passive verb *tawaqqafa*, according to Lane, could denote “to be limited, to be restricted . . .,” and the like.

17. This Abū ‘Alī Ḥusayn ought to be the same person mentioned above, in line 10, most likely a partner, or friend, of the addressee of the letter.

TEXT NO. 32: LETTER DISCUSSING A SLAVE GIRL AND SOME DAMAGED GOODS

RN 1027g

Description: Yellow paper, 9.1 × 6.4 cm, recto five lines, verso four lines, cursive hand, no dots, black ink.

Introduction: The few lines on the recto and the verso appear to make up one single text. Among the items of business discussed are the selling of a slave girl (*al-jāriya*) and some damaged goods (*al-damār*).

Text

recto

١. محتاجين] [
٢. علما وقيل له الله تعالى التوكلى وتولا لنا عبد الرحم<ن>
٣. على بيعها والله الله اذا هلت لك الجارية الذى
٤. وعد بيانها سيرها لنا سريع وانت تعرف
٥. شرط الحوصه وقد اوقفنا عبد النصر عد<ى>

٢. قيل. ٥. شرط. الحوصه = الحوطة

verso

١. الرقعه التى سيرتها ولم تذكر فيها الدمار
٢. مما عنا ولا الدمار يباع ام اهمل وتوقف
٣. عبد النصر عن دفع العلامه فالله الله سير
٤. تعلمه يدفعهم لنا وام رضوان تسلم عليك لدى

Translation

recto

1. They are in need of [.].
2. [. . . to be] known. He was told—in God Almighty is [our] trust!—that ‘Abd al-Raḥmān has been entrusted, on our behalf,
3. with her sale. O God, O God! If the slave girl, whose sale has been certified, has arrived at your place,
4. dispatch her to us immediately! You [already] know
5. the legal procedures of [her] guardianship. We have notified ‘Abd al-Naṣr about [.].

verso

1. The letter you sent did not mention the damages
2. that would [cost] us. Nor [did it mention whether] the damaged [goods] will be sold or be left out.
3. ‘Abd al-Naṣr has stopped paying for the *‘alāma*-trade mark. O God, O God! Send
4. [him a letter] and tell him to pay them (i.e., the fees) to us. Umm Riḍwān sends her regards to you [.].

Commentary

recto

2. The *k*, in *al-tawakkulī*, lacks the cross bar on the top.
4. *Wu‘ida bayānuhā*, literally “the certificate regarding her [status? sale?] has been promised.”
5. I read *al-ḥawṣa* for *al-ḥawṭa*, “guarding,” “custody.” This ‘Abd al-Naṣr is also mentioned on the verso.

verso

1. The details about this *damār*, literally “destruction,” “ruin,” “damage,” remain unclear.
2. *Uhmilu* could be *ujhīlu*, “to be ignored”; the graphemes are similar.
3. The mechanism of *al-‘alāma* needs further study. One is also tempted to read the undotted word as *al-ghulāma*, “slave girl (?)”; but the feminine form of *ghulām*, “slave boy,” is, to my knowledge, not

known of. Also, the pronoun suffix *hum*, namely the fees for the *‘alāma*, in line 4, can hardly be justified as referring to a woman. In light of the context, it is noted that one has to pay for the *‘alāma*-trade mark.

TEXT NO. 33: A LETTER CONCERNING FOOD SUPPLIES FOR THE
PILGRIMS

RN 1053a

Description: Light brown paper, 8.4 × 2.2 cm, recto two lines, verso two lines, in a clear hand, each line curving up at the end, black ink.

Introduction: The fragmentary text merits attention for its mention of the pilgrims (*hujjāj*) en route to Mecca and for its frequent use of the Egyptian vernacular expressions.

Text

recto

١. القطعه قال لهم في هذا الدقيق السكر لا تشيلوا
٢. لهم شى من هونه الى هونه اخذ منى فى القطعه

٢. احدمنى.

verso

١. احدا عشر قطعه دقيق []
٢. وذكروا له ان نحن خمسه حجاج و []
٣. [] فاطلقوهم منوك عشر در <اهم> []

٣. منوك = منك.

Translation

recto

1. [. . . regarding] the shipment. He told them that the flour was sweetened. Don't move
2. things around. He took, through me, from the shipment [.]

verso

1. eleven *qiṭ'a*-units of flour [.].
2. They told him, "We are five pilgrims and [.];
3. [.] dispatch from your [storage] what is worth ten dirhams [of food supplies . . .].

Commentary

recto

1. The word *al-sukkar* is partially erased; the clause literally means "in the flour there is sugar"; there is also the possibility of *al-musakkar*, namely "sweetened" flour. Note the colloquial *tashīlū*.
2. Note the colloquial expression *min hūna ilā hūna*, literally "from here to there." The reading of the partially erased phrase *akhadha minnī* is tentative.

TEXT NO. 34: AN OFFICIAL LETTER CONCERNING SHIPPING WHEAT TO QŪṢ

RN 1064b

Description: Yellow paper, 10 × 7.5 cm, recto three lines plus one line marginalia, extraordinarily wide spaces between the lines, in extremely elegant *riqā'* style, black ink, verso four lines in a different cursive hand, faded brown ink.

Introduction: The text on the recto demonstrates the paleographical features of a typical Ayyubid chancery communiqué. Qūṣ was the capital city of Upper Egypt during the time. The few lines on the verso seem to make up a working account, or inventory list. The

original paper on which the official letter was written was apparently re-used later by local merchants in their own daily business dealings.

Text

recto

- ١ . وصول كتابنا الكريم للقا <ضى> []
 ٢ . ادام الله سعادته مشتملا على ال []
 ٣ . الى مدينه قوص خمسه اجمال قمح []
-
- ٢ . مستملا .

in the right margin

والحمد لله وحده وصلوا <ت الله تعالى>

verso

- ١ . سته سعد
 ٢ . ثلثى حم [ا] بل
 ٣ . [] ثلثى وحمل
 ٤ . مسلمها عمار الجمال

Translation

recto

1. The arrival of our respectable letter to the judge [.....]
2. —may God prolong his happiness, including [.....]!—[To be dispatched]
3. to the city of Qūṣ are five loads of wheat [.....].

in the right margin

Praise be to God alone. [God's] blessings.

verso

1. Six [loads for] Sa‘d.
2. Two-thirds of a load,
3. [. . .] two-thirds [of a load] and one load.
4. He who delivers them is ‘Ammār the porter.

Commentary

recto

2. The reading of *adāma*, which is written in a code-like logogram, is based on the formulaic phrasing *adāma allāh sa‘ādātahu*.

TEXT NO. 35: A BUSINESS LETTER ORDERING PENS AND OTHER GOODS

RN 1072

Description: Yellow paper, 8.5 × 10 cm, recto eight lines plus one line marginalia, in an elegant but hasty hand, with some irregularities, verso a few scattered words, black ink.

Introduction: The main content of this letter concludes by line 7. Some kind of postscript begins from line 8 and is finished with yet another “peace-be-upon-you” concluding phrase, written vertically in the right margin. The verso contains words at random without any meaningful context. The paper was perhaps re-used as a scrap sheet of sorts for writing practice. Thus, in addition to the observation that the amount of “pens” ordered here is relatively large, one may speculate some form of schooling to have taken place in the house.

Text

recto

١. <ال> سلام و
٢. والله الله يا <أ>خي ان قدرت
٣. تشتري لي عشرين قلم

- ٤ . بسرعه
 ٥ . [] وتشتري []
 ٦ . من كل بد الله لا يعدمني فظلك والسلام
 ٧ . عليك ورحمة الله وير <كاته> والحمد لله وحده
 ٨ . [] <الأ>خ وحده من كل بد

٦ . فظلك = فظلك.

in the right margin

والسلام عليك

Translation

recto

1. Greetings to
2. By God, by God, O my brother! If you can,
3. please buy me twenty pens
4. quickly.
5. [.] please buy [.].
6. by all means. I pray that God will not deprive me from your kindness. Peace
7. be upon you. God's mercy and blessings be upon you. Praise be to God alone.
8. [. my] brother alone by all means.

in the right margin

Peace be upon you.

TEXT NO. 36: A LETTER CONCERNING LUXURY ITEMS FROM PERSIA

RN 1085

Description: Yellow paper, two fragments making up one single text, 15 × 4 cm taken together (15 cm being the width), recto five lines, verso two lines, in a coarse Persian-like hand, black ink.

Introduction: The intriguing word *al-fārisīya* appears twice, referring to luxury items mentioned in the text that were coming “from Persia.” Noteworthy also is the discussion of the exchange of provisions (*al-māʿūna?* *al-māʿūna?*) for luxury items, and the mention of “the pilgrims.”

Text

recto

١. المشتري المذكور و يعرف
 ٢. له عبد الواحد من هذا محمد بن سليمان بن احمد جميع الربح والثلث و . . .
 ٣. الفارسية ومثل ذلك من غلامنا المعونه بادلته بها من احجار واحباب واصطبل و
 ٤. الفارسيه المذكوره وله صبيان شغلنا وعلومنا ومرافقتنا في
 ٥. ونحن نرجوا وصول المراكب تصل فهي
 ٦. مسرعه لدا الناس الى عشيرات الحجاج

٢. التمن. ٣. علامنا. ٤. سعلنا وعلومنا. ٦. لدا = لدى.

verso

١. القصير وكانوا مركبين يحلوا
 ٢. وعن هم في وادى تبيع ما حسن اخذ لعشر فيهم لان السلطان قال
 ١. مركبير. ٢. احد لعسر.

Translation

recto

1. The aforesaid buyer [.] who is by the name of
2. ‘Abd al-Wāḥid [who received?] from this Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān ibn Aḥmad all the profits and the payments, and [. . . .]
3. from Persia, and the like from our slave boy. The provisions [are provided] in exchange for semi-precious stones, pearls and beads, stable [supplies], and [. . .]
4. from Persia, which is mentioned above. At his disposal are youths

whom we employed, together with our own slave boys and company in [.].

5. We hope that the boats will arrive soon [so the shipments could be delivered]

6. quickly, from the people [who held them,] to the pilgrims [.].

verso

1. [To be dispatched to] Quseir; they were in two boats, arriving at [.].

2. And from them (i.e., the two boats), [anchored] at the valley, you may sell whatever is good. Do collect the tithe taxes on account of them, because the sultan demands that [.].

Commentary

recto

3. *Al-Fārisīya*, “Persian,” is apparently an adjective modifying the antecedent missing in the manuscript. Judging from the context, the “Persian” items, together with “all the profits and payments” (line 2), were received by the “buyer” mentioned in line 1, who is likely the ‘Abd al-Wāḥid named in line 2. *Al-ma’ūna*, “aids,” appears in the manuscript, when perhaps *al-ma’ūna*, “provision,” is intended insofar as the ‘ could be a *w* connected by an illegal ligature to the next *w*; for the *al-ma’ūna*, cf. *MS*, 4: 435–36 (note 72). The *ahjār*, “semi-precious stones,” listed as luxury items in al-Qaddūmī, 235–36. The word *ahbāb* is undotted; for *ḥabba* (pl. *ḥabb*), “pearl” or “bead,” see al-Qaddūmī, 83, 98, 121–23, 142.

4. The manuscript has *ghulūm*, likely a rare plural form for *ghulām* (pl. *ghilmān*).

6. *Ashīrāt*, literally “clan, tribe,” i.e., the pilgrimage “groups.”

verso

2. *Akhdh*; the correct spelling of the imperative verb is *khudh*. The reading of *al-sultān* is tentative in that the undotted *n* looks like a flat *r*.

TEXT NO. 37: LETTER CONCERNING THE SHIPPING OF GRAIN AND FRUITS

RN 1093

Description: Light brown paper, torn at the upper left edge, 10.6 × 8.5 cm, recto seven lines, verso two lines, black ink.

Text

recto

- ١ . بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم اخوه مرتضى بن الكعبى
 ٢ . الذى اعلم به الاخ هبة <المنعم> ادام الله عزه <سيرت>
 ٣ . نصف حمل خضر الغله لـ<ا>بو بكر ويط
 ٤ . صغير وثلثمايه بالركابه فرحل دقيق
 ٥ . وقفه تفاح ثلاث وزنات بطيخه خضرا تبيعها عند . .
 ٦ . فهى سالمه وفيها ركب سيرت للصلاح هو له ولا ابطال
 ٧ . فى البيع فانا خلف هذه الحموله والسلام
-
- ١ . لى . ٣ . حصر العله . ٤ . صعر . بالرحابه . ٥ . وزنات . حصر .

verso (address)

- ١ . الى القصير يسلم لهبة المنعم من عبد مرتضى
 ٢ . بن الكعبى السلام

Translation

recto

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. From his brother Murtaḍā ibn al-Kaʿbī:
2. This is to inform Brother Hibat [al-Munʿim]—may God make his glory last forever!—that [I have dispatched]
3. a half load of green grain, for Abū Bakr, and a small

4. *baṭṭa*-container, and three hundred [units of . . .], all in a camel load. The flour was dispatched [together with . . .],
5. and a basket of apples, and three *wazn*-units of green watermelons. Please put them on sale at [. . .]
6. when they remain in good condition. Along with it (i.e., this shipment) there is [another] camel load which I dispatched to al-Ṣalāḥ. It is for him only. Don't delay
7. the sale. I am traveling behind this cargo. Peace.

verso (address)

1. To the shore of Quseir, to be delivered to Hibat al-Munʿim, by the servant of Murtaḍā
2. ibn al-Kaʿbī. Peace.

Commentary

recto

2. Part of the name, after Hibat, is damaged in the manuscript; its reconstruction is based on the full name of the sender that appears on the verso, line 1.
5. The word *wazanāt* (sing. *wazna*), “a standard weight,” is undotted, the reading of the term is tentative, and the exact measure it implies unclear; see detailed discussion in chapter 2.
6. For the expression of *huwa lahu* as a reference to the designated recipient, see chapter 1.

verso

1. *ʿAbd* is undotted, and the reading of *ʿinda*, in *min ʿinda*, “from,” is possible.

Shipping Notes

TEXT NO. 38: A SHIPPING NOTE

RN 970b

Description: Yellow paper, torn at the upper left edge, 8.4 × 7.7 cm, recto six lines, fine *naskh*, verso one line of which only “*niṣf wayba*” readable, black ink.

Introduction: A typical *tasallum*-type shipping note, this incomplete text is nevertheless noteworthy for several reasons: from a technical viewpoint, it sheds light on the relations between the *ḥiml* (measure) and *irdabb* (weight); and from the perspective of the social status of Abū Mufarrij’s clients, not only is there the involvement of a trade head (*al-ʿarīf*), often appointed by the government, but there is also his or someone else’s intriguing *nisba* al-Mālikī, which may imply the Hijazi connection.

Text

recto

- ١ . بسم الله الرحمة <من الرحيم>
- ٢ . يتسلم ابو مفرج <من>
- ٣ . العريف ابو عمر []
- ٤ . ديلم المالكي و []
- ٥ . خمسة احمال ستة عشر اردب
- ٦ . وثلاثي
- ٧ . والسلام

٣ . لو . ٦ . تلتى .

Translation

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, [the Compassionate].
2. Abū Mufarrij is to receive [from]
3. the superintendent Abū ‘Umar [.]
4. Daylam al-Mālikī and [.]:
- 5–6. five *ḥiml*-loads [of wheat, which weigh] sixteen and two-thirds *irdabbs*.
7. Peace.

Commentary

3–4. Because of the abrasion in the manuscript, it is hard to determine whether Abū ‘Umar and Daylam al-Mālikī are the same person or not.

TEXT NO. 39: A SHIPPING NOTE

RN 1001a

Description: Yellow paper, worn on the left edge and the lower part, 16.5 × 6 cm, recto three lines, written along the horizontal side of the page, black ink, verso several lines of various “magic numbers” making up a charm or amulet.

Text

recto

١. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
٢. يتسلم الشيخ ابو مفرج من عند محمد بن شريف الاطصا <خرى>
٣. صحبه على السعري حمل حمص ودقيق

١. لى. ٢. الاطصا.

Translation

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
2. Shaykh Abū Mufarrij is to receive from Muḥammad ibn Sharīf al-Iṣṭā[kharī],
3. accompanied by ‘Alī al-Si‘rī, a load of chickpeas and flour.

Commentary

2. The undotted phrase *min ‘inda*, “from,” can also be read as *min ‘abd*, “from the servant of. . .” The second part of the surname al-Iṣṭā[kharī] (the manuscript has *a-l-i-ṭ-s-a*) is damaged by a worm-eaten hole; Iṣṭakhr is the ancient name of Persepolis, thirty miles northeast of Shiraz, Iran.
3. Al-Si‘rī is undotted; the surname could be al-Shi‘rī.

TEXT NO. 40: A SHIPPING NOTE

RN 1004a

Description: Beige paper, 7.2 × 6.3 cm, recto four lines, black ink, verso blank.

Text

recto

١. يسلم الى الشيخ ابو مفرج
٢. من ناجى حمل ونصف وعدلتين
٣. من حموله السواری
٤. وايضا معين نصف حمل

Translation

1. To be delivered to Shaykh Abū Mufarrij,
2. from Nājī: one and a half *ḥiml*-loads and two bales [of grain],

3. on the boat named “Good Tidings.”
4. Also [to be delivered] from Muḥīn: a half load [of grain].

Commentary

2. For *ʿidl*, “(ship’s) bale,” see *MS*, 1: 220, 335, 336.
3. The term *ḥamūlat al-sawārī* may also be rendered literally “carrier of ship-masts”; for the reference to this particular boat and its probable name, see RN 1027b*.

TEXT NO. 41: A SHIPPING NOTE

RN 1004b

Description: Yellow paper, profuse worm-eaten holes and ink stains, 8.6 × 5.9 cm, recto five lines plus one line marginalia, which is apparently a continuation of the main text, verso four nearly illegible lines on both ends of the page, in a cursive and naïve hand, black ink.

Text

recto

- ١ . يسلم للشيخ ابو مفرج وفقه الله لطاعته
- ٢ . وخضوعه حمل دقيق وهو لابي عروس
- ٣ . فسلمه لعلی بن مره والمسير سبع
- ٤ . والسلام عليكم
- ٥ . [] هو يسلم عداك وعلى الاخ نجيب

in the right margin

[السلام وكتب يا <ا>خى يا نجيب ان كان]

لتب. باحى.

Translation

recto

1. To be delivered to Shaykh Abū Mufarrij—may God make him successful on account of his obedience
2. and humility!—is one load of flour. It is for Abū ‘Arūs.
3. Hand it over to ‘Alī ibn Murra. The shipment comprises seven [units?].
4. Peace be upon you. [.]
5. [. . . is here and] he says hello to you. And upon Brother Najīb

in the right margin

be peace! And he wrote, “O my dear brother Najīb, if [.].”

Commentary

2. *Abū ‘arūs*, literally “the bride’s father.”

TEXT NO. 42: A SHIPPING NOTE

RN 1024

Description: Yellow paper, 8.7 × 5 cm, recto three lines, black ink, verso blank.

Introduction: This short memo consists of four basic segments of a typical Quseir shipping note: (1) the name of the person who is responsible for receiving the delivery, (2) the name of the sender, (3) the description of the item(s)—with the amount in figures—to be delivered, and (4) the name of the recipient of the delivery or the original source of the item in question. Quite often, as is shown in other documents of the same *tasallum/taslīm* type, segment (4) is left out, while segment (2) is elaborated with the names of the persons who escorted the shipment or “accompanied” (*ṣuḥba*) it on the journey. This note also raises the question of the role played by Abū Mufarrij’s warehouse in collecting revenues, and in this case, taxes paid in crops rather than in cash (*al-ghalla*). The text further suggests that some kinds of go-betweens were involved insofar as the taxpayer,

one *ḥājī* Muḥammad, was represented first by a certain Maṭar ibn ‘Imrān, who was in charge of sending the crops to Abū Mufarrij, who, in turn, appears to be no more than a middleman himself.

Text

recto

١ . يتسلم ابو مفرج من مطر ابن عمران
٢ . القادري عشره ارادب وهى من غلت
٣ . الحاج محمد والسلام

٢ . غلت = غلة.

Translation

1. Abū Mufarrij is to receive from Maṭar ibn ‘Imrān
2. al-Qādirī ten *irdabbs* [of wheat], which are part of the *ghalla*-taxes (?)
3. [paid] by the *ḥājī* Muḥammad. Peace.

Commentary

2. Ten *irdabbs* are seven hundred kilograms. For *ghalla* as taxes paid in agricultural products, see the discussion above in chapter 2. Also note the phrase *min ghalla*, literally “among,” that is, “part of” the taxes owed.

TEXT NO. 43: SHIPPING NOTES CONTAINING THE NAME OF A BOAT

RN 1027b

Description: Yellowish-brown paper, 7 × 11.8 cm, recto six lines in two separate parts, two dots under the *y*, black ink, verso blank.

Introduction: Some details remain unclear as to the nature and content of the apparently nearly identical short shipping notes: (1) the

references to “abroad” (*khārij*) and “the south” (*al-qibl*), and (2) the meaning of the term *ḥamūlat al-sawāri* that occurs twice in this page and elsewhere (RN 1004a*). In addition, general questions arise: Why would the two seemingly separate but almost identical notes have been written in the same hand, on the same piece of paper? Why would the two cargo loads, from geographically distant areas, have been loaded on the same “carrier”? One is left with the suspicion that this sheet may not be a working document, but rather a writing sample, something in the line of “business writing for dummies.”

Text

recto

- ١ . يسلم الى الشيخ ابو مفرج من خارج
 ٢ . حمل وثمانيه ويات وغر <بلة زيت>
 ٣ . من حموله اخبارك (؟) السوا <ري>

- ٤ . يسلم <<من>> الى الشيخ ابو مفرج من
 ٥ . <ا> لقبيل حمل وربع وغربله زيت
 ٦ . من حموله السواري

—————
 ٣ . اخبارك.

Translation

1. To be delivered to Shaykh Abū Mufarrij from abroad (?) are:
2. one load and eight *waybas* [of grain] and an [oil] strainer,
3. to be loaded on the carrier “Your Good Tidings.”
4. To be delivered to Shaykh Abū Mufarrij from
5. the south are: one and a quarter loads [of grain] and an oil strainer,
6. to be loaded on the carrier “[Your] Good Tidings.”

Commentary

1. *Khārīj*, literally “outside,” or “foreign land”; the exact reference here is not clear. It could mean the lands that were “outside” of Egypt, but could also signify the places “outside” of Quseir, such as Middle Egypt or the Delta, in contrast to the “south,” i.e., Upper Egypt, mentioned in line 5.
2. *Gharbalat zayt*; the phrase is partially erased; the reading is in light of the parallel wording in line 5.
3. The word *hamūla*, literally “load,” was frequently used to denote “carrier,” “cargo,” or “shipment,” “boat”; for instance, *DAA1*, no. 48; *DAA3*, no. 35. The reading of the undotted *akhbārka*, literally “your news,” is tentative. The word *sawārīn* (sing. *sāriya*) means “ship-masts,” thus *hamūlat al-sawārī* could simply mean “a load of ship-masts.” But with the insertion of *akhbārka*, the *sawārī* appears, in grammatical terms, as an adjective (in plural form, which is itself irregular), not a noun. I read the word as an active participle of the verb root *s-r-w*, “to rid some one of worries,” “to cheer some one up,” and the like; hence the present translation. If this proves to be the case, then *hamūlat al-sawārī* ought to be seen as an abbreviation of the full name of the boat, or cargo, *hamūlat akhbārīka al-sawārī*.

TEXT NO. 44: A SHIPPING NOTE

RN 1077a

Description: Light brown paper, 6.3 × 4.4 cm, recto three lines, black ink, verso blank.

Text

recto

١. المسير الى الشيخ ابو مفرج
٢. من جهة اخاك عدلى بن رزق
٣. غلام عطا الله الكتان وثلثين شعير

 ٣. غلام. الكتاى.

Translation

1. To be shipped to Shaykh Abū Mufarrij,
2. from your brother 'Al[ī] ibn Rizq,
3. the slave boy of 'Aṭā' Allāh are: flax and thirty [*irdabbs* of?] barley.

Commentary

2. Note the hyper-correct *akhā*, for *akhī*. The partially soiled name 'A[ī] could be 'Umar or the like.

TEXT NO. 45: A SHIPPING NOTE

RN 984a

Description: Beige paper, upper part missing, 6.5 × 7 cm, recto six lines, in a clear *naskh*, generous dots (including the ones underneath *y*), vowel signs, occasional misspelling, black ink, verso blank.

Text

recto

١. اسعد {ر} ريس الوقى
٢. حملين وبيين قمع نقى
٣. وايضا فردتين رز واثبتهم المسير
٤. للفقيه علي وابو علي نعمان
٥. الى شونة ابو مـ <ف> رج غله نقيه
٦. وكييل جيد

٣. ابنتهم.

Translation

[To be dispatched from so-and-so, in the company of]

1. As‘ad Rayyis al-Wafqī are:
2. two loads, which weigh two *waybas*, of pure wheat;
3. also two *fardas* of rice. Please verify them. The cargo
4. is for the jurist ‘Alī and Abū ‘Alī Nu‘mān.
5. To be delivered to the warehouse of Abū Mufarrij are fine crops,
6. in full measures.

Commentary

1. According to the usual format, this As‘ad is likely the person who accompanied the shipment (*ṣuḥbat . . .*).
2. *Ḥamlayn waybayn*, literally “two loads two *waybas*”; the exact meaning here, in respect to the relationship between the *ḥiml* (measure) and *wayba* (weight), is unclear insofar as the common scheme, as we learn from most of the texts, is that one *ḥiml* equals approximately three *irdabbs*.
3. The reading of *athbit* is conjectural, because in the manuscript the dots are not written in the right place. The root *th-b-t* also has the connotation of “registration, book keeping,” and so forth; cf. *ALAD*, nos. 49, 53.
5. The name Mufarrij is misspelled, in an otherwise carefully written note.
6. *Wa-kayl jayyid*, literally “and a good scale”; it is possible that the phrase should be taken at its face value as well, i.e., a certain amount of fine grain and a good scale were to be delivered to the warehouse.

TEXT NO. 46: A DATED SHIPPING NOTE

RN 988

Description: Yellow paper, two fragments making up one single text, the lower part of the paper is mutilated, 12.5 × 7.7 cm taken together, recto six lines, verso eight lines in a different hand, black ink,

Date: A.H. 633/A.D. 1235.

Introduction: One of the few dated texts of Quseir provenance, the text on the recto offers a good example of the *tasyīr* type shipping note. Judging from the content, it is also likely that some sort of revenue collecting (*al-ghalla*) is discussed here, but the details are unclear due to the damage to the second half of the text. The text on the verso is a different letter, addressed to one ‘Alī and sent by one Muḥammad, “your brother.” Its content, however, is too damaged to be deciphered with certainty.

Text

recto

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| رج للشيخ نابغ والفقيه | ١. المسير الى ساحل القصير الى شونه ابو مف |
| سبع برانى زيت حار | ٢. عثمان سبعة وعشرين اردب قمح و |
| بتاريخ الرابع عشر | ٣. وعشر سلبات والمسلم علي بن عدال |
| نون المولا يعلم ان الفقيه عثمان | ٤. من صفر سنه ثلاث وثلاثين وستمائه ويكـ |
| سير منا للفقيه عثمان فى ذلك | ٥. [] الغله [] لى وله وفى جملتها المـ |
| | ٦. [] اها |
-
٥. حملتها.

Translation

1. To be dispatched to the shore of Quseir, the warehouse of Abū Mufarrij, for Shaykh Nābigh and the jurist
2. ‘Uthmān [are]: twenty-seven *irdabbs* of wheat, seven bottles of lighting oil,
3. and ten hawsers. He who is to receive it for safekeeping is ‘Alī ibn ‘Addāl. On the 14th,
4. the month of Ṣafar, the year six hundred and thirty-three. The Master should know that the jurist ‘Uthmān
5. [...] the grains [.....] for me and for him; and among its total sum is the [present] dispatched shipment from us to the jurist. And in this regard [...]
6. [.....] its [.....]

Commentary

1–2. Nābigh; the word is not dotted and therefore the name can be Bāligh, Tāligh, Nābi‘, or the like.

2. For *zayt hārr* as “lighting oil,” or “flax oil,” “linseed oil” (variants: *zayt al-ḥārr*, *zayt ḥarr*), see *MS*, 1: 426 (note 28); Smith, “Maritime Trade,” 133 (note D of Table 2).

3. The reading of *al-musallam*, literally “he who is to be delivered [to],” that is, “the receiver,” rather than *al-musallim*, “he who delivers,” is based on the fact that this ‘Alī ibn ‘Addāl was a clerk working for the warehouse at the time. The information about the sender is, as a rule, usually not given in the shipping notes; and for that matter, the persons who escorted the shipment are usually introduced by the phrase *ṣuḥbat fulān*, “accompanied by so-and-so,” as it is frequently seen in the Quseir texts. The term *tastīm* also has the probable connotation of “safekeeping”; see Little, “Documents,” 108, 124. So a *musallam* was not only the one to “receive” the shipment, but also the one put in charge of its “safekeeping.” The terms *musallim* and *musallam ilayhi* were also used in Islamic legal writings, particularly in the *salam* contract (sale with prepayment and later delivery), where the former denotes “the one advancing the cash,” that is, the buyer, whereas the latter is “the one receiving the cash and the delivery,” namely the seller; see Wakin, 41–42.

3–4. 14 Šafar, A.H. 633 fell on 29 October, A.D. 1235.

4. “Master” perhaps refers to Abū Mufarrij.

5. For the possible meaning of *ghalla*, literally “grains,” as “taxes paid in crops,” see the discussion in chapter 2. *Jumlatihā*, “its total sum,” is not dotted, so the possible reading of *ḥamlatihā*, “its shipping,” cannot be ruled out.

TEXT NO. 47: A SHIPPING NOTE

RN 966c

Description: Yellow paper, 8.4 × 8.1 cm, recto eight lines, nearly complete except for a few words in the last line, black ink, verso blank.

Introduction: The note was sent from one ‘Alī ibn Iḥsān to one Aḥmad who was, as the text implies, associated with Abū Mufarrij’s warehouse.

Text

recto

- ١ . الذى اعلم به الاخ أحمد
 ٢ . ان على بن احسان سيرت الى
 ٣ . شونه ابو مفرج زكيه لوز وزكيه
 ٤ . كعك وزكيه دقاق وداك
 ٥ . الثلاثه خمسه مايه رطله
 ٦ . خمسه وتسعين
 ٧ . وجد العيبى الذى فيهم وانا واصل
 ٨ . ورا هاده الروححه []

٢ . سرت . ٤ . داك = ذلك . ٧ . وحد . ٨ . هاده = هذه .

Translation

1. That which I [am writing to] inform Brother Aḥmad
2. is as follows: [I,] ‘Alī ibn Iḥsān dispatched to
3. Abū Mufarrīj’s warehouse high-quality nuts,
4. baked goods, and flour. These
5. three [items total] five hundred
6. and ninety-five pounds.
7. Find the defects in them. I will arrive [immediately]
8. following this shipment [. . . .].

Commentary

2. Note the shift of subject of the verb *sayyartu*, from third person ‘Alī ibn Iḥsān, to first person.
6. The word *khamsa wa tis‘īna*, “ninety-five,” seems to have been added; it ought to be inserted into line 5, between *mi’a* and *raṭla*.
7. The first two words, as they are read here as *wa-jid al-‘aybī*, are unpointed and the present reading is conjectural. For Islamic legal discourse on the so-called *barā’at al-‘ayb*, that is, the proper ways to

handle the goods in the event of some flaw and defect, see Wakin, 57; Udovitch, 109, 136.

8. *Al-rawḥa* (?), literally “journey, errand in the evening”; only the upper part of the word is recognizable due to abrasion.

TEXT NO. 48: A SHIPPING NOTE

RN 968a

Description: Brown paper, slightly worn on the left and right edges, 9 × 8.8 cm, recto five lines, elegant *naskh*, rarely dotted, black ink, verso blank.

Introduction: This complete codex has been analyzed by Thayer (“Land Politics,” 47–48); my reading of the text, however, is slightly different from hers.

Text

recto

١. يتسلم الشيخ نجيب بن مبادى السيدى (الفيومى؟)
٢. حملين دقيق وهم لحمد بن عبد العقال
٣. واللله الله تكون تحطهم فى موضع جيد
٤. الى شونه ابو مفرج والسلام عليك ورحمه <الله>
٥. وحضر اسماعيل وهو يسلم عليك

٢. العفال.

Translation

1. Shaykh Najīb ibn Mabādī al-Sayyidī (al-Fayyūmī?) is to receive
2. two loads of flour, which are for Ḥamd ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aqqāl.
3. O God! O God! put them in a safe place.
4. To the warehouse of Abū Mufarrij. Peace be upon you. God’s mercy [be upon you].
5. Ismā‘īl is here and sends his regards to you.

Commentary

1. For this “Shaykh Najīb,” one of the most frequently mentioned associates, or business partners, of Abū Mufarrij, see chapter 1. The *nisba*-surname al-Sayyidī, as it appears so in the manuscript, might well be al-Fayyūmī, which also occurs elsewhere, e.g., RN 977*.

TEXT NO. 49: A SHIPPING NOTE

RN 979

Description: Light brown paper, slightly worn on the right side, 16 × 8.5 cm, recto six lines, in a large but fine *naskh*, luxuriously large spaces between the lines, all the cross bars on top of the letter *k* missing, verso one line written in the top center of the paper, faded black ink.

Introduction: The significance of this short note is perhaps the information it reveals regarding weights and measures. The “shortage” note on the verso is written in a different hand and perhaps by the person who inspected, and verified, the shipment in question.

Text

recto

١. [] الكاملين دقات وشعير

٢. <ال> كيل عنها ثلاثه اجمال ونصف

٣. البدل عنها احد عشر اردب

٤. وستين وربع وبيبه

٥. خمس وتسعين بطه

٦. <الى شو> نه ابوا مفرج

١. الحاملان دقات.

verso

نقص ثلاثة ارداب

 ارداب
Translation

recto

1. [. . . .] two full [loads?] of flour and barley,
2. in three and a half *himls*,
3. which weigh eleven *irdabbs*,
4. or sixty and a quarter *waybas*,
5. in ninety-five *battā*-containers.
6. To Abū Mufarrij's warehouse.

verso

Balance: three *irdabbs*.*Commentary*

recto

3. *Al-badl*, literally "exchange rate, equivalent."
4. An *alif* may be missing from the damaged paper, so the *wa* might well be an *aw*, "or," that is, three and a half *himls* equal eleven *irdabbs*, or sixty and a quarter *waybas*.
5. This line is badly erased; the reading is uncertain.

TEXT NO. 50: A DATED SHIPPING NOTE

RN 1063a

Description: Yellow paper, 8 × 4.5 cm, recto four lines, each word stacked above the last, black ink, verso blank.

Date: A.H. 612 /A.D. 1215–1216

Introduction: The note was sent from one unidentified al-Marjahī to Abū Ishāq, who was evidently in charge of the business, in the year 612/1215–1216. Also noteworthy is the unusual format in that the text opens with the date and the address.

Text

recto

١. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
 ٢. تاريخ سنة اثنا عشر ستمايه
 ٣. الى ساحل القصير للشيخ ابو اسحاق
 ٤. [] المرجهى على يد سعد غلام
 ١. لى. ٤. علام.

Translation

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
2. The date: the year six hundred and twelve.
3. To the port of Quseir, to [the care of] Shaykh Abū Ishāq,
4. [from . . .] al-Marjahī, to be handed over by Saʿd, the slave boy of [.].

Commentary

4. The missing word before al-Marjahī is expected to be a preposition *min*, *min ʿinda*, or the like. *ʿAlā yad*, literally “by the hand of. . . .”

TEXT NO. 51: A DATED SHIPPING NOTE

RN 967b

Description: Light brown paper, soiled and torn, 8.5 × 5.5 cm, recto six lines, faded black ink, verso blank.

Introduction: The note contains an extremely valuable and rare date of “the end of Jumāda I, A.H. 612,” which falls on the second half of September A.D. 1215. Also worth noting is the intriguing mention of the “cavalry (?)” that accompanied the shipment.

Text

recto

- ١ . بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
 ٢ . <الواصل . . . غلت ابو هاشم []
 ٣ . الى ساحل القصير <لابر> <هيم بن> ابو مفرج
 ٤ . اقبال صحبة الجولين سلخ جمادى الا <ولى سنة>
 ٥ . \ اثنى عشر ستمايه /
 ٦ . بالقد []

٢ . غلت = غلة . ٤ . اقبال . الجولين .

Translation

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
2. [To arrive] . . . is the *ghalla* payment of Abū Hāshim; [it is to be delivered]
3. to the shore of Quseir, [to the care of Ibr]ā[hīm ibn] Abū Mufarrij;
4. [Its] upcoming arrival, accompanied by the cavalry (?), would be in the end of the month of Jumāda I, the year
5. six hundred twelve,
6. at [.].

Commentary

4. The syntax, and meaning, of the first part of the line is not very clear to me. The verbal noun *iqbāl*, “arrival, coming, drawing near,” is clear in the manuscript, although *b* lacks the dot underneath; but the subject, or main verb, is missing. More puzzling is *al-jawltin* (sing.

jawl, “troop of horses, herd of camels” [Hava]); the word has dots underneath *j* and *y*, but between the *l* and *y* there seems to be one more undotted tooth, hence *al-jawlatayn*, “two rounds,” that is, caravan that embarked upon a “round trip”?

TEXT NO. 52: A SHIPPING NOTE

RN 983

Description: Light brown paper, slightly worn on the edges, 6 × 7.9 cm, recto seven lines, in a naïve and raw hand, black ink, verso blank.

Text

recto

١. يتسلم الشيخ ابراهيم بن <ا>بو مفرج
٢. حمل طحين صحبت
٣. عبد الغنى الشنهورى
٤. رسم طرغام الطفيلى (?)
٥. و غلام برکه و حمال
٦. برفع الديون لغير شى
٧. السلام عليك

٢. صحبت = صحبة. ٣. السنهورى. ٤. طرغام = ضرغام. الطفيلى ٥. عليم. ٧. اليك.

Translation

1. Shaykh Ibrāhīm ibn Abū Mufarrij is to receive
2. a load of flour, to be accompanied by
3. ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Shanhūrī.
4. It is decided that Ḍirghām al-ufaylī (?),
5. Baraka’s slave boy, and the porter
6. should forgive the debts altogether.
7. Peace be upon you.

Commentary

3. Shanhūrī, of Shanhūr, an ancient town in Upper Egypt; see Garcin, 607, 637 (index; has “Sanhūr,” for Shanhūr).

4. The reading of the passive verb *rusima* is conjectural: the *r* has only one wave. *ṭ-r-ʿ-a-m* is the spelling that appears in the manuscript, but the common name is *Ḍirghām*; also note the exaggerated long tail of *y*, in *al-ufaylī* (?), pointing back to the right after making a full circle.

4–6. *Rusima . . . bi-rafʿ al-duyūn li-ghayr shayʿ*, literally “it is prescribed that . . . should lift off the debts for nothing.”

5. For this Baraka, apparently a client of the warehouse, and the same name that appears in a wooden key in front of the “Sheikh’s house,” see Preface, note 2.

TEXT NO. 53: SHIPPING NOTE CONCERNING THE DELIVERY OF FLAX

RN 997

Description: Yellow paper, worn on the bottom, 12.7 × 10 cm, recto five lines, black ink, verso blank.

Text

recto

١. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
٢. يتسلم الشيخ ابراهيم بن ابو مفرج رحمه الله من عند الشيخ
٣. حسن التاجر السكندري صحبه مفلح غلام
٤. العريف حملين كتان اربع قطع
٥. والسلام
-
١. لى.

Translation

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
2. Shaykh Ibrāhīm, the son of Abū Mufarrij—may God have mercy on him!—is to receive from Shaykh
3. Ḥasan, the merchant of Alexandria, accompanied by Mufliḥ, the young slave boy
4. of the superintendent, two loads of flax [in] four bundles.
5. Peace.

Commentary

2. “May God have mercy on him!” It is obvious that by the time Ibrāhīm was to receive this note, his father Abū Mufarrij had already died. The undotted phrase *min ‘inda*, “from,” could also be read as *min ‘abd*, “from the servant of,” indicating that it was one of Shaykh Ḥasan’s assistants who sent the shipment.

4. *Al-‘arīf*; the term usually means “head of a profession,” or “superintendent” authorized by the government (*MS*, 1: 84; 4: 434 [note 39]). The exact person involved here is unclear. It is likely referring to the above-mentioned Shaykh Ḥasan, the merchant of Alexandria, whose young slave boy Mufliḥ escorted the shipment.

TEXT NO. 54: SHIPPING NOTE CONCERNING SOME DOMESTIC ITEMS

RN 1022

Description: Brown paper, worn on the top and the right edge, 7.5 × 7.5 cm, recto six lines, very black ink, verso blank.

Text

recto

١. المسير الى ساحل القصير من جعد <فر> \الحاج /
٢. توكل على يد الحمال سلطان بن عونه
٣. فردتين فيهم سته وبيات الا ربع قمح

- ٤ . وحجر كيزان ويطه قطاره وحولها كمد
 ٥ . <و> واحد عشر قمقم ممتاز والمسلم ابراهيم
 ٦ . بن ابو مفرج دامت سعاد <ته>

٤ . كيران. فطاره.

Translation

1. To be dispatched to the shore of Quseir, from Ja'far the *ḥājī*,
2. entrusted to the hands of Sulṭān ibn 'Awnihi the porter,
3. are two *farda*-loads, which contain six minus a quarter *waybas* of wheat,
4. stoneware cups, a sugar container along with (?) a juice presser,
5. and eleven fine sprinkler bottles. He who is to receive and safe-keep them is Ibrāhīm
6. ibn Abū Mufarrij—may his prosperity last forever!

Commentary

1. The word *ḥājī* is written between lines 1 and 2; so there is the possibility that it may refer to Sulṭān ibn 'Awnihi whose name occurs in line 2.
4. The reading of *kīzān* (sing. *kūz*), “cup, mug for ointments,” is tentative; the *z* looks like a redundant stroke, while the *alif* is connected with the preceding letter. Therefore other possible readings such as *kattān*, “flax,” is possible; so *ḥajar kattān* could mean “stones (used to press?) flax.” One is also tempted to read *ḥajar ka-mūzān*, “stones (to be used as) scale.” All these domestic items are found abundantly in the Cairo Geniza documents; see *MS*, vol. 6 (Cumulative Indices), “*baṭṭa*,” “*kūz*,” and “*kammād*.” *Ḥawlahā*, literally “around it,” appears so in the manuscript; the reading is tentative.
5. For the term *musallam* that bears the connotation of “to receive and safe-keep,” cf. RN 988* (Text No. 46, commentary recto line 3).

TEXT NO. 55: A NOTE CONCERNING THE SHIPPING OF MEDICINE

RN 1037a

Description: Yellowish-brown paper, some water stains, 6.5 × 12 cm, recto nine lines, verso two lines, black ink.

Text

recto

- ١ . بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
 ٢ . مملوكه يحيى ابو . .
 ٣ . الواصل على يد نصار حمل
 ٤ . ما وربع وبيات شعير
 ٥ . وست وجور ثلاثه قرب وثلاثه
 ٦ . حفوص عرفت المولا دالك
 ٧ . وتضعه وما عاقني عن الخروج
 ٨ . الا دراهم المولى عرفت
 ٩ . دالك وسلام

٤ . ما = ماء . ٥ . وحر . قرب . ٦ . دالك = ذلك . ٧ . عافنى . ٩ . دالك = ذلك .

verso (address)

- ١ . الى ساحل <القصير>
 ٢ . ابراهيم ابن ابي <مف>رج

Translation

recto

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
2. [From] His servant Yaḥyā Abū [. .]
3. To be delivered by Naṣṣār are: one load of
4. fresh water, four *waybas* of barley,

5. six [units of] medicine [wrapped in?] three cases and three
6. leather-baskets. [You,] the Master know about this.
7. Store them [in a safe place]. Nothing will prevent me from sending forward [the aforesaid goods]
8. except [if the payment is made in] silver dirhams. [You,] the Master know
9. that very well. Peace.

verso (address)

1. To the shore of [Quseir]
2. to Ibrāhīm ibn Abū [Mufa]rrij.

Commentary

4. Judging from the plural *waybāt*, the *r-b-*⁶ as it appears in the manuscript must be *arba*⁶, “four,” not *rub*⁶, “a quarter.”
5. The reading of *wujūr* is conjectural; for its meaning as “medicine poured into the mouth,” see Hava, s.v. The word *q-r-b* is undotted; it can be *qurub* (sing. *qirāb*), “scabbard,” “case,” or *qirab* (sing. *qirba*), “water-skin” (Hava, s.v.). In light that the conjunction *w* is missing between *wujūr* and *thalātha*, it is possible that the “three cases” and “three baskets” have to do with the “six [units?] of *wujūr*.”
- 6–8. Note the shift from the subject in third person, “the Master,” to the verb in second person *‘arafta*, “you knew.”
7. *Al-khurūj*, literally “(going) out”; the exact meaning is not very clear.
- 7–8. *Mā ‘āqanī . . . illā darāhim*, as in, “I will not accept silver dirham for payment.”

TEXT NO. 56: A SHIPPING NOTE CONCERNING THE DELIVERY OF LIVESTOCK

RN 1042a

Description: Light brown paper, torn along the right side, 10 × 5 cm, recto five lines, verso six nearly erased lines, black ink.

Text

recto

- ١ . يتسلم الشيخ ابراهيم بن ابو مفرج
 ٢ . من سعد الجمالى ثلثه ركايب كبار
 ٣ . وحملين قمح اربعين وبيبه لعبد العزيز
 ٤ . ابن الطفال الركايب فيهم واحده
 ٥ . صغيره

Translation

1. Shaykh Ibrāhīm ibn Abū Mufarrij is to receive,
2. from Sa'd al-Jamālī, three adult she-camels,
3. and two loads of wheat, which weigh forty *waybas*, for 'Abd al-'Azīz,
4. the fuller's son. Among the she-camels, one
5. is a foal.

Commentary

2. *Rakā'ib kibār* could also indicate "large female cows"; cf. *APEL*, 6: 7–8.
3. Forty *waybas* are approximately four hundred and seventy kilograms.
4. For *ṭaffāl* as "fuller," see *MS*, 4: 407–8 (note 200).

TEXT NO. 57: SHIPPING NOTES WITH WITNESS CLAUSES

RN 1055a

Description: Yellowish-brown paper, with holes and wrinkles, 10 × 8 cm, recto six lines, in a rudimentary hand, verso four lines, in a different cursive hand, black ink.

Introduction: The text on the recto is a *musayyar*-type delivery note. It confirms the status of the warehouse, now headed by Ibrāhīm, as a transit stop. The text on the verso contains a witness statement. It

is unclear whether the statement has to do with the delivery mentioned in the recto or otherwise.

Text

recto

١. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
٢. المسير الى الشيخ ابي اسحق ابراهيم بن ابي مفرج
٣. صحبه عمر بن فضائل القفطى حمل كتان
٤. مكتوب عليهم للشيخ الضيا ابي الحجاج
٥. يوسف الريافرى وهو يتسلم السلع
٦. ويتركه فى موضع جيد السلام

١. لى. ٤. ملتوب. الصالى.

in the right margin

حضر محمد بن حسن وهو يسلم عليك

verso

١.
٢. مهم صاحباً وكيلاً لصاحبه محمد . . .
٣. شهد على امرين المتكافلين الثلثه بمضمونه
٤. وكتب احمد عبد النجيب موسى بن مخلص فـ<ي> تاريخه

٣. امرين = آمرين.

Translation

recto

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
2. To be dispatched to Shaykh Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Abū Mufarrij,

3. accompanied by ‘Umar ibn Faḍā’il al-Qifī, is one load of flax.
4. It is for Shaykh Ḍiyā’ [al-Dīn] Abū al-Ḥajjāj
5. Yūsuf al-Rayāfarī (?). He (i.e., Ibrāhīm) is to receive the items
6. and put them in a secure place. Peace.

in the right margin

Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan is here and sends his greetings to you.

verso

1

2 them, in the capacity of a partner and agent for his friend Muḥammad [. . .].

3. Its content is witnessed by the three entrusted representatives who issued the orders,

4. and it is written by Aḥmad, the servant of al-Najīb Mūsā ibn Mukhlīṣ, on the same day.

Commentary

recto

3. The writing of *kattān*, “flax,” is too cursive to rule out the possible reading *kitāb*, “a letter,” that came along with the cargo.

4. *Maktūb ‘alayhim*, literally “they are consigned to,” or “destined for. . .” The plural *hum* imply the “items” carried on the shipment.

verso

1. Only the lower half of this line has survived and the reading is impossible.

2. Note the illegal ligature between the *alif* and the *w* in *ṣāḥibān wakīlan*. The last word is missing due to a worm-hole.

3. The word *āmīrīn* appears in the manuscript whilst perhaps *al-āmīrīn* is intended. For the pattern of *shahida bi-maḍmūnihi fulān*, see Stephan Conermann and Suad Saghbini, “*Awlād al-Nās* as Founders of Pious Endowments: The *Waqfiyah* of Yaḥyá ibn ūghān al-Ḥasanī of the Year 870/1465,” *MSR* 6 (2002), 49. On the other hand, the term *maḍmūn* also denotes “source of liability for an agent or partner” in legal writings; see Udovitch, 240.

4. For the combined pattern *shahida fulān ‘alā . . . wa-kataba fulān fī ta’rīkhihi* (with slight variations), see Little, “Documents,” 98–99, 114, 163.

TEXT NO. 58: A SHIPPING NOTE CONCERNING THE GHALLA TAX DUES

RN 1008

Description: Light brown paper, two fragments making up one single text, 12 × 5.5 cm taken together; recto five lines, verso two lines written vertically in relation to the text on the recto, in cursive hand, with some peculiar paleographic features, such as the extraordinary slant of the final *l*, and the *y* with two vertical dots, black ink.

Introduction: This is a rare example of the *ṣādir*-type shipping note. The function of the unusual logo *yu‘lamu al-akh*, at the top of the paper, is unclear. It might imply some registration procedure. The items listed here may all have to do with the *ḥaml al-ghall[a]*, “a load of the *ghalla* dues” (compare with *ḥaml ghall*, “a load of grain”), to be paid by two individuals, one Fā’iz ibn Mūsā al-Kinānī and one arfāl, through the warehouse.

Text

recto

الايخ	يعلم	:١
. صحبه كاتب حسين حمل الغل . .	٢. الصادر ليد الاخ ابراهيم بن ابي مفرج	
الغل وزكيه سمان وزكيه حمص	٣. وييد فايز بن موسى الكنانى زكيه	
. . ري [] صابون ومواهـب؟	٤. ويرنيه زيت حار وييد طرفال	
. وهو الغل علاوه [] الرهائن عليه . .	٥. فيها زكيه لوز وزكيه بياض ومنه ثلث حمل	
\بحق . . /		

٥. بياض. الرهاير.

verso (address)

١. لوكيل ابو اسحاق وهو <ابرا>هيم
٢. <ب>ن ابي مفرج دامـت> سلامته

Translation

recto

1. Let it be known to the Brother:
2. To be delivered to Brother Ibrāhīm, the son of Abū Mufarrij, in the company of Ḥusayn's clerk, is a cargo of *ghalla* dues and [. . .].
3. To be handed over from Fā'iz ibn Mūsā al-Kinānī are fine grain, butter, chickpeas,
4. and a bottle of lighting oil. To be handed over from arfāl al-[. . .]rī are [jars?] of soap and some presents
5. that include fine almonds and eggs, which make up one third of the [entire] cargo. This is the *ghalla* dues, in addition to the [. . .] as the *rahn*-security deposits for [the debt of. . . .].

verso (address)

1. To the care of the agent of Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm
2. the son of Abū Mufarrij—may God make his prosperity everlasting!

Commentary

recto

2. *Li-yad*, literally “to the hand of. . . .”
3. *Bi-yad*, literally “at/from the hand of. . . .”
4. The *y*, in *zayt*, has two dots written vertically, and are placed *after* the word. The reading of *ṣābūn* is tentative; the *n*, unpointed and lacking the full loop, looks like an *r*.
5. *Ilāwa*, “addition, increase,” could also be used as a technical term for “the attaching of a package to a larger container by fastening it on top of the latter”; see *MS*, 1: 337. The second part of this line is erased, and the present reading is conjectural. For discussion of the *rahn* (pl. *rahā'in*), “pledged *commenda* property as security for a debt,” see chapter 2.

verso

1. *Wa-hwa*, literally “and he is. . . .”; the expression can be used, according to Khan (citing Grohmann), to indicate various things, such as “the tenant” of a person or to prevent confusion with people

bearing the same name; see *APK*, 79. The textual device here was perhaps meant as a confirmation, thus highlighting the seriousness of the message.

TEXT NO. 59: SHIPPING NOTE CONCERNING THE DELIVERY OF
FLOUR AND RICE

RN 967a

Description: Thick yellow paper, 8.3 × 12.5 cm, recto eight lines, in a large and elegant hand, letters rarely dotted, black ink, verso blank.

Introduction: This complete text, a *wāṣil*-type shipping note, presents a rare example in which the *tarjama* is not that of the sender, as would have usually been the case, but rather the recipient, one Shaykh Abū al-Ḥamd. Of the several named and unnamed parties involved, it is clear that the shipment in question had been sent from an unknown source, perhaps an anonymous “accountant” (*al-ḥisābī*), to the “master” (*al-mawlā*), most likely Shaykh Abū Mufarrij, who, in turn, would later relay the items to their destination to one Abū al-Ḥamd named in the *tarjama* and repeated twice in the text. It is less clear, however, what the relation of this Abū al-Ḥamd was to Abū al-Qāsim al-Nājī, who was, if the present rendering is correct, supposed to take possession of the rice. It could be that Abū al-Ḥamd was to receive the whole shipment, which included flour and rice, from Abū Mufarrij, and then to give the rice to Abū al-Qāsim al-Nājī. If that is the case, then one more chain could be added to this long line of transmission.

Text

recto

١. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم لمملوكه ابو الحمد
٢. الواصل صحبه مساعد الحسابي بما هو
٣. للشيخ ابو الحمد سته قطع دقيق
٤. وقطعتين ارز على الرز مكتوب ابو القاسم
٥. الناجي مسلمهم المولا حين (؟) وتكتب لهم

- ٦ . رقعته والسلام عليك رحمه الله وبركاته
 ٧ . وهو أبو الحمد صهـ <ر> يوسف زيتون
 ٨ . السلام

١ . لملوله . ٤ . ارر . الرر . ملتوب . ٥ . مسلمهم . الملاحيه .

Translation

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. To His servant Abū al-Ḥamd.
2. Having arrived—in the company of the assistant to the accountant—
3. for Shaykh Abū al-Ḥamd are: six containers of flour,
4. and two sacks of rice. The rice is consigned for Abū al-Qāsim
5. al-Nājī. He who is to receive them (i.e., the commodities) for safe-keeping in a timely manner (?) is the Master. Please write, on account of them,
6. a receipt. Peace be upon you. God's mercy and blessings be upon you.
7. The recipient is Abū al-Ḥamd, the son-in-law of Yūsuf Zaytūn.
8. Peace.

Commentary

2. *Al-wāṣil*, “that which has arrived,” is the subject of the sentence; its predicate is the “six containers of flour . . .” in line 3.
4. *ʿAlā al-ruzz maktūb*, “the rice is consigned for . . .,” is a tentative reading because the words are not dotted; the cross bar on the top of the letter *k*, in *maktūb*, is missing as well.
5. Since the loop of *m*, in *musallam*, is nearly unrecognizable, the possibility of a *t* (or *y*), i.e., *tasallama/tusallamu* (or *yusallamu*), “he is/you are to receive,” cannot be totally ruled out. Note that the word *musallam* is misspelled in the manuscript, which seems to be a common scribal error; see the similar example in *ABPH*, no. 15 (line 15). The reading of *al-mawlā ḥīn* is tentative in that the letter after the *m* appears to be an *r*, not a *w*, and the final *n* is not fully developed.

Another possibility is that it is actually all one word. “The master” here perhaps refers to Abū Mufarrij. The un-dotted imperfect <imperative verb *taktubu*, also can be jussive *yaktub*, “let him (i.e., the master) write”; but, in any cases, it implies the same person, the “master.”

7. For the expression *wa-hwa*, see RN 1008* (Text No. 58, commentary verso line 1). In the present context, the phrase is apparently used to reiterate the name of the recipient Abū al-Ḥamd.

Accounts

TEXT NO. 60: A CERTIFICATE ISSUED BY ABŪ MUFARRIJ

RN 1027c

Description: Yellow paper, 9.3 × 13.4 cm, recto ten lines, divided into two parts, lines 1–7 in a fluent and clear hand, whereas the three lines on the opposite side of the paper in a naïve and inexperienced rough hand, verso two lines, in fine *naskh*, brown and black ink.

Introduction: The text on the recto presents a unique example of the *tadhkira*-type certificate. It remains unclear whether the contents written in various hands represent, in fact, different entries or accounts. The relationship between the contents on the recto to that on the verso is unclear either. It is possible that the paper was re-used several times. Noteworthy also is the writing of the *basmala* logogram, with a long tail stretching all the way down to the bottom of the paper.

Text

recto

١. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
٢. تذكره مبارك <ة> ان شا الله
٣. الذي قبض <ا> بو مفرج فلفل العادي
٤. ليوسف بن برطوط سبعة وعشرين وبيه

٥. واحد عشر ويبه الا سدس لك
٦. قبض ذلك الشيخ يوسف المذكور
٧. الفلفل

١. لى. ٢. ان ساله.

turn page upside down and read from the top down

٨. الذى و [] . . . عيسى عن عبد
٩. الوهاب رقه لمحمد اربعه دراهم
١٠. واحدى عشر قيراط من

verso

١. بقى على عيسى خمسه وثلاثين
٢. درهم الا ثمن

Translation

recto

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
2. A blessed certificate by God's will.
3. Received by Abū Mufarrij is pepper of regular quality.
4. [It is] for Yūsuf ibn Barṭūṭ and [weighs] twenty-seven *waybas* plus
5. eleven *waybas* minus one-sixth *wayba*. And on your behalf,
6. [this is to confirm that] the aforesaid Shaykh Yūsuf has received
7. the [aforesaid] pepper.

turn page upside down

8. That which [.] ‘sā from ‘Abd
9. al-Wahhāb a letter to Muḥammad [regarding] four dirhams
10. and eleven *qīrāṭs* of [. . .].

verso

1. ‘sā still owes thirty-five
2. minus one-eighth dirhams.

2. [signed] by Abū Mufarrij. Ninety-five *waybas* forty-nine
3. [*mudds*; and] four *waybas* and [.]
4. [at the price of one thousand three hundred] and twenty dirhams.

Commentary

1. A long vertical stroke stretching all the way down to line 4 is inserted between the word *daqīq* and *al-marʿa*. For a discussion of the use of *al-marʿa* when a specific woman is intended, see Smith, “Ibn al-Mujāwir,” 333. The exact function of *al-ʿalāma*, “trademark (on paper)” (*MS*, 1: 81; 2: 578 [note 59]), needs further exploration; cf. chapter 1, note 19.

2. *Bi-yad*, literally “in the hand of. . .” Due to the incompleteness of the text, it remains unclear as to what extent is the relation between the nine-five *waybas* and the forty-nine something (*mudds*?).

4. If we take the common price of two dinars per *irdabb* in Quseir at the time (see chapter 2), then the approximately one hundred *waybas* (16.7 *irdabbs*) dealt with in this note would command roughly thirty-three dinars, or 1,320 dirhams (at the rate of 1: 40). But this, of course, is just a speculation.

TEXT NO. 62: A GROCERY SHOPPING LIST

RN 965

Description: Thick brown paper, 8 × 10 cm, recto nine lines, slanting down at the end, verso one line on the top, black ink.

Introduction: The text contains a grocery shopping list; the items range from flour to vegetables and other foodstuffs. The statement on the verso also reaffirms the speculation that this is an ongoing account.

Text

recto

١. وبيت قرطاس . . . عمران الحمال
٢. ثلثين درهم

٣. وبيت يوسف الدمنهورى النجار عشرة
 ٤. عطا عشره ثابت عشره
 ٥. حوالة الاستلام بها دقاق \ثلاثه/ وسبعين \ونصف/
 ٦. حمص نصف بصل درهم ليمون درهمين
 ٧. جزر درهم وربع لبن ثلاثه وربع
 ٨. زیده نصف
 ٩. بيض الدجاج وباقى درهمين ونصف وربع
-
١. فرطاس. ٥. الاستلم. ٧. حرر.

verso

على مدفوع منها سبعين درهم

Translation

recto

1. The household of Qirṭās [. . .] ‘Imrān the porter:
2. thirty dirhams.
3. The household of Yūsuf al-Damanhūrī the carpenter: ten [dirhams].
4. ‘Aṭā: ten [dirhams]. Thābit: ten [dirhams].
5. The money order for the received goods—flour included—totals seventy-three and a half [dirhams].
6. Chickpeas: half [dirham]; onions: one dirham; lemon: two dirhams;
7. carrots: one and a quarter dirhams; milk: three and a quarter [dirhams];
8. butter: half [dirham];
9. chicken eggs and other items: two and a half and a quarter dirhams.

verso

Of the [amount mentioned] above, seventy dirhams have been paid.

Commentary

recto

3. *Al-najjār*, “carpenter,” is unpointed; the reading could be *al-bahḥār*, “the sailor.”
4. *Thābit* is unpointed; so *nā’ib*, “the agent,” is also possible.
5. *Al-istilām*, literally “receipt”; the reading of the word is conjectural: it is written in one long stroke, without dots, and the supposed *alif* is missing. *Thalātha* and *niṣf* are stacked above the end of the line.
8. *Ḍubda*, “butter, cream”; the first letter appears to contain a small flat loop, making it look like an *f* or *q*, thus allowing the possibility of *qidra*, “cooking pot.”

TEXT NO. 63: ACCOUNTS OF BROKERAGE/HOARDING ACTIVITIES AND GRAIN PRICES

RN 966a

Description: Yellow paper scroll, worn on the right edge, several worm-eaten holes on the lower right side, 5.8 × 16 cm, recto seventeen lines, verso five lines, black ink.

Introduction: On the recto are two tables of accounts separated by a line. Although the functions of the two separate accounts are not entirely certain, the word *ṣafā*, which heads the second account (line 8), makes it clear that the itemization, at least in the second part of the text, has to do with the paid debts, or “cleared” accounts of the individuals named in the list. The two different figures at the bottom of the chart (lines 15–17, recto) may reflect the discrepancies between the actual payments and the amount that was supposed to be brought in. As for the first account, no such definitive word can be found to determine whether the itemization reflects the credits, that is, the cereal grains that were actually given to, or brought in, by the individuals listed herein, or the debts, namely, the amount owed by these people, to the “head of the hoarders,” most likely Shaykh Abū Mufarrij. Whatever the case may be, what we learn from the first account are some concrete figures that reflect the grain prices in Quseir at the time. The contents of the second table or account are incomplete, due to holes and abrasions, but thanks to the relative completeness of the parallel first table, some comparisons

may be drawn to help fill in the lacunae. It is clear that the second account deals with a much larger amount of wheat: a total of thirty-three *irdabbs* (approximately two hundred *waybas*). The problem is that the extant figures of weight under the six persons' names do not add up to this total amount: it yields only some twelve *irdabbs* out of the thirty-three. It is also unlikely that the right margin of the paper, which is badly worn, would have contained another column in the tabulation; judging from the manuscript as a whole, this is evidently very much near the edge of the paper. One plausible explanation would be that this account is a tentative one, wherein only a portion of the thirty-three *irdabbs* is accounted for. We have reached here a ratio of twelve *irdabbs* (or seventy-seven *waybas*) costing several "hundred and fifty-one dirhams," as is written in the first line below the word of *al-qīma*, "total cost." If the same price quoted in the first account is applied here, that is, 11.43 dirhams per *wayba* or 1.72 dinars per *irdabb*, the word before the recognizable *mī'a* (hundred) could be *thamāniya*, that is, "eight hundred and fifty-one dirhams." As for the figure given below in line 17, which is partially read as "six hundred (?) and fifty-nine," it is unclear precisely what this stands for. If it means the alternate price for the same twelve *irdabbs* in question, then we have a different scenario of price range: approximately fifty-five dirhams per *irdabb*, or nine dirhams per *wayba*, which is much lower than the price mentioned in the first account. But, as discussed above, this figure may also mean that this amount was actually received by the "head of the hoarders," or taken by him as the brokerage fee, so the price range remains the same. Also noteworthy is the certification sign of *thabāt al-ʿarīf*, which occurs at the very end of the badly damaged text on the verso, preceded by several lines the reading of which is still uncertain; these are likely to be idiosyncratic acronyms or perhaps signatures of the persons involved.

Text

recto

- | | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|
| | ١ . <عرف الحكار سعر اربعه وعشرين ونصف |
| ٢ . | مفرح محمد واسمعد >يل |
| ٣ . | اردب ونصف اربعه وبيات |

٤. وام جفانی (؟) ام اسمع<ی>ل
 ٥. احد عشر ویه ویه
 ٦. القیمه
 ٧. مایتي وثمانیه دراهم
-
٨. <د>اله العریف صفا سعر ثلثه وثلثین الاراد<ب>
 ٩. [] ساس عبد الرحیم الوالی
 ١٠. [] له ویبات ویتین اردب
 ١١. خلف مرزوق نجیب
 ١٢. احد عشر ویه اردب سته ارادب
 ١٣. و نصف
 ١٤. <القیمه>
 ١٥. [] مایه واحد و خمسین درهم
 ١٦. <عریف الحد>کار وعلایقه (؟)
 ١٧. سد<تما>یه تسعه و خمسین درهما
-
٤. دعایی. ١١. حلف. ١٢. سته ارادب. ١٦. وعلایقه.

Translation

recto

1. [Owed to? paid to?] the head of the hoarders [are] the costs of twenty-four and a half [*waybas* of wheat]:
2. Mufriḥ: Muḥammad and Ismā‘īl:
3. one and a half *irdabbs*; four *waybas*;
4. And Umm Jafānī (?): Umm Ismā‘īl:
5. eleven *waybas*; one *wayba*.
6. The total costs:
7. Two hundred and eighty dirhams.

8. Brokerage commission [owed to? paid to?] the head [of the hoarders] is cleared; [and] the costs of thirty-three *irdabbs* [of wheat] are:

- | | | | |
|-----|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 9. | [. . .]sās: | ‘Abd al-Raḥīm: | The mayor: |
| 10. | [three?] <i>waybas</i> ; | two <i>waybas</i> ; | one <i>irdabb</i> ; |
| 11. | Khalaf: | Marzūq: | Najīb: |
| 12. | eleven <i>waybas</i> ; | one <i>irdabb</i> ; | six <i>irdabbs</i> |
| 13. | | | and a half. |
14. The total costs:
 15. [Eight?] hundred and fifty-one dirhams.
 16. [Owed to, or paid to, the head of?] the hoarders and his associates:
 17. Six hundred and fifty-nine dirhams.

Commentary

recto

1. The right margin is partially worn at the first word, which presumably would be something similar to the heading of the second part of the manuscript (line 8), <dā>llat al-‘arīf. The heading ‘arīf al-ḥukkār in this line is conjectural, and is problematic on paleographic and lexicographic levels. With regard to paleography, the similarity between the writing of the oblique *f*, in the incomplete []īf, and the *f* in the complete *al-‘arīf* (line 8) prompts the present reading. As for *al-ḥukkār*, the unusual lengthening of the *ḥ* may be written this way for the purpose of margin justification, or it was simply a whimsical impulse by the scribe. While the *r* is a little questionable, the *k* is clear. On the lexicographic level, the word *al-ḥukkār*, “hoarders,” is read here as the plural of the active participle of the verb root *ḥ-k-r*, which Lane lists forms V and VIII as in “he withheld wheat, waiting for a time of dearness,” or “he bought wheat and withheld it in order that it might become scarce and dear”; the practice is thus called *ḥukra* in postclassical usage (Lane, s.v.).

8. The reading of *dālla* (or *dilāla*) is conjectural; another possibility would be *ḥawāla*, or *ihāla*, “certificate of transfer of credit,” since the letter on the right does look like a *w*, to be connected with the *alif* by an unconventional ligature. For *dālla*, see *DAA2*, no. 23. For *dilāla*, “brokerage commission,” see *MS*, 1: 160–61; Smith, “More on the Port Practices and Taxes of Medieval Aden,” *New Arabian Studies* 3 (1996), 212–14.
 10. The first word of this line is damaged, with only the surviving *tā’ marbūṭa*, thus leaving it wide open for any numbers, from *thalātha* (three) to *‘ashara* (ten).

16. The incomplete []*kār* points to the possible reading of *al-ḥukkār*, and the conjectural *‘arīf* is based on the singular pronoun suffix *h*, “his,” attached to the unclear word *‘alā’iq*, literally “those who are related to him,” or “those who are attached to him.” The reading of *‘alā’iq* is uncertain, in that the *q*, with a rounded loop, looks like an *‘* (or *gh*), with a pointed and curved loop.

TEXT NO. 64: ACCOUNTS OF CEREAL GRAIN COLLECTING OR DISTRIBUTION

RN 966b

Description: Yellow paper scroll, 8.5 × 21 cm, slightly worn on the right side, recto twenty-five lines, in two columns, verso six lines, black ink.

Introduction: This is a well-preserved document. The text on the recto contains an itemized account of grain collection or distribution. Each individual account, divided by a short line, includes (1) a person’s name, (2) the number of “loads” of grain he brought in, or carried out, and (3) the exact measure of its volume. All the numbers add up to the total, which is the “forty-three *irdabbs*” claimed at the top of the document. Prices are not mentioned. Another interesting observation about this document is that on the verso, the persons whose cargoes, or shipments, fell short (*naqaṣa*) of the supposed weights are singled out, and the exact amount of the discrepancy is indicated. All of the six lines on the verso, written on the left side of the paper, and in different hands, are crossed through with a stroke, suggesting some sort of finished business. Perhaps the “shortage” was either owed by these individuals to Abū Mufarrij’s warehouse or vice versa, or the debt was canceled. After all, the amount at stake—several *mudds* (i.e., less than a kilogram)—is merely a small fraction of the large amount dealt with here.

Text

recto

ثلثه واربعون اردبا

.١

.٢ مفصلها

سته ارادب	عجيان . ۳
ثلثجارب	۴ . حملين
سته ارادب	۵ . جلال
ثلثجارب	۶ . حملين
اربعه ارادب	۷ . <حم>د
سدس	۸ . حمل
اردبين	۹ . مكرم
نصف	۱۰ . <ا>سمع<ي>ل
ثلثه ارادب	۱۱ . مرداد
ثلثجارب	۱۲ . حمل
	۱۳ . وويتين
اربعه ارادب	۱۴ . ابو ريس
وسدس	۱۵ . حمل
خمسه ارادب	۱۶ . ديب
	۱۷ . حمل
	۱۸ . نصف
سته ارادب	۱۹ . \سياد /
ونصف وثلث	۲۰ . حريص بن
	۲۱ . حملين
\ثلثه ارادب /	۲۲ . وويبه

وثلث /نبيل/ .٢٣

.٢٤ نصر بن

.٢٥ حمل

٣. عجيان. ٤. تلتحارب. ٥. حلال. ٦. تلتحارب. ١٢. تلتحارب.

verso

.١ نقصه عجيان وجلال نصف

.٢ مد و

.٣ نقصه ديب وحريص خمسه امداء <د>

.٤ نقصه حمد /ريس/

.٥ نقصه نصر ابي رفعي <و> ابو

.٦ ثلاثه امداد

١. نقصه. حلال. ٣. نقصه.

Translation

recto

1.

Forty-three *irdabbs*

2. In detail:

3. 'Ajyān:

six *irdabbs*

4. two loads

[and] one-third *jārib*

5. Jalāl:

six *irdabbs*

6. two loads

[and] one-third *jārib*

7. [Ḥam]d:

four *irdabbs*

8. one load

[and] one-sixth [*jārib*]

9–10. Mukram Ismā'īl:

two *irdabbs* [and] a half

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 11. Mirdād: | three <i>irdabbs</i> |
| 12. one load | [and] one-third <i>jārib</i> |
| 13. and two <i>waybas</i> | |
| <hr/> | |
| 14. Abū Rīs: | four <i>irdabbs</i> |
| 15. one load | and one-sixth [<i>jarīb</i>] |
| <hr/> | |
| 16. Dīb: | five <i>irdabbs</i> |
| 17. one load | |
| 18. and a half | |
| <hr/> | |
| 19–20. Ḥarīṣ ibn Sayyād: | six <i>irdabbs</i> and a half and one-third [<i>jarīb</i>] |
| 21. two loads | |
| 22. and one <i>wayba</i> | |
| <hr/> | |
| 23–24. Naṣr ibn Nabīl: | three <i>irdabbs</i> and one-third [<i>jarīb</i>] |
| 25. one load | |

verso

1. Balance [owed by] ‘Ajyān and Jalāl: half
2. *mudd* and [. . .]
3. Balance [owed by] Dīb and Ḥarīṣ: five *mudds*
4. Balance [owed by] Ḥamd: [.]
5. Balance [owed by] Naṣr Abī Rif‘ī [and] Abū Rīs:
6. Three *mudds*.

Commentary

recto

1. The word *irdabban* is written in a logograph.
2. *Mufaṣṣaluhā*, literally “its details.” A similar use of the term is found in the Ḥaram al-Sharīf documents as well; see Little, “Documents,” 113, 117.
4. *Jārib* appears in the manuscript, but most likely *jarīb* is intended, which, besides its more common use as “a patch of arable land,” was also used for dry weight or liquid measure. Its amount varied; see Hinz, 38; al-Qaddūmī, 341. *Thulthu*, “one-third,” a reading of *thalātha*, “three” is also possible, but given the distinction made in

the same manuscript between *sitta*, “six” and *sudsu*, “one-sixth,” in the two columns, the reading of *thulthu* on the left column (the right in the translation) is more plausible.

7. The reading Ḥamd is based on the reference to the Ḥamd mentioned in the verso (line 4) as among those whose shipments fell “short” of the amount due. All the names on the verso appear on the recto.

19–20. The name Ḥarīṣ ibn Sayyād is written across two lines; judging from the uniform format throughout the entire document, it is likely that these lines (19–22) make up one account under the name of one person.

22–24. The name Naṣr ibn Nabīl is written across lines 23 and 24; and the amount, three *irdabbs* and a third [*jarīd*], is written on the line above, where it is supposed to be (that is, line 23, instead of line 22 where it appears), and belongs to this person, not the one above.

verso

1. ‘Ajjān and Jalāl are mentioned on the recto, in lines 3 and 5, respectively.

3. Both Dīb and Ḥarīṣ are mentioned on the recto, in lines 16 and 20, respectively.

4. This Ḥamd must be the same person mentioned on the recto, in line 7, whose name is all erased but the letter *d*.

5. Naṣr Abī Rif‘ī; the corresponding name on the recto, in lines 23–24, is Naṣr ibn Nabīl; thus Abū Rif‘ī is likely his *kunya*-surname.

TEXT NO. 65: AN ACCOUNT

RN 977

Description: Thick beige paper, only the lower half has survived, 8.5 × 6.5 cm, recto four lines plus one line marginalia, main text in elegant *naskh*, with wide spacing between the lines, marginalia in bold letters, black ink, verso blank.

Introduction: One extraordinary thing about this short account is the semi-official titles in the left margin, which, together with the paleographical features in the main text, indicates the influence of chancery writing practice. The marginalia are perhaps registration marks for bookkeeping. The title of “slave owner” is intriguing as well.

Text

recto

- ١ . على عشرين درهم رهن
 ٢ . وهي كتبت بيد الريس
 ٣ . وكتب نجيب الفيومي
 ٤ . عدد ست اجرام
 —
 ٢ . لتبت. ٣ . لتب. ٤ . احرام.

in the left margin

[المالك الرق العريف]

Translation

1. [O]n a twenty-dirham loan deposit,
2. it is underwritten by the head of merchants.
3. Najīb al-Fayyūmī has written down
4. the numbers: six Nile barges.

in the left margin

[.] the slave owner, the head of merchants.

Commentary

2. *Wa-hya kutibat*, literally “it was written”; the reference to this “it,” presumably an account or certificate, must have been indicated in the now missing upper portion of the page.
4. For *qjām* (sing. *jām*) as specifically “Nile barges,” see *MS*, 1: 295, 322, 473 (note 4).

TEXT NO. 66: TAX REGISTERS

RN 987b

Description: Yellow paper, torn on the right side, several holes in the middle, 15.5 × 6.5 cm, recto thirteen lines at various levels, black ink, verso blank.

Introduction: The text on the recto appears to be a work-sheet of tax returns, or an account of revenue collecting. Divided into two columns and separated by several bordering lines, the entries are nearly identical. The most interesting thing about this account is the probable use of a letter numeral, in line 12, instead of the usual practice of writing out the numbers in words as is seen in the other documents. There are, though, some unanswered questions, chief among them the term *niṣāb*, which only occurs in the first entry, with no numeral, whereas all the other entries have a numeral, “one thousand,” but not the term *niṣāb*. Presumably a total of nine entries are dealt with here, five in the right column and four in the left; however, the third entry in the left column (right in the translation) is missing.

Text

recto

اول	اول نصاب ١
الف	ويبه سوا	. ٢
ويبه سوا	_____	. ٣
_____	ثانى الف ٤
ثانى الف	ويبه سوا	. ٥
ويبه سوا	_____	. ٦
رابع	ثالث الف	. ٧
الف	ويبه سوا	. ٨
ويبه سوا	_____	. ٩
_____	<رابع> الف	. ١٠
الجملة	<ويبه سوا>	. ١١

ط	<خامس الف>	.١٢
	<ويبه سوا>	.١٣

Translation

1. The first <i>niṣāb</i> payment installment	The first
2. in <i>waybas</i> : paid.	thousand
3. _____	<i>waybas</i> : paid.
4. The second thousand	_____
5. <i>waybas</i> : paid.	The second thousand
6. _____	<i>waybas</i> : paid.
7. The third thousand	The fourth
8. <i>waybas</i> : paid.	thousand
9. _____	<i>waybas</i> : paid.
10. The [fourth] thousand	_____
11. [<i>waybas</i> : paid.]	Total:
12. [The fifth thou]sand	Nine [payment installments].
13. [<i>waybas</i> : paid.]	

Commentary

1. *Niṣāb*, “minimum amount of property liable to payment of the *zakāt* tax” (Hans Wehr, *An Arabic-English Dictionary*, s.v.). It is noted that three dots precede the word (the same in line 4), but they do not seem to be the zero sign in Arabic numerals.
2. *Alf*; the word is written in a monogram, with the *f* attached to an extra tail; similar example is found in Ifrah, 544.
3. *S-w-a* appears in the manuscript, but perhaps *sawīy* (*a* < *alif maqṣūra*), literally “straight, even, proper,” was intended. Possible readings include: *siwā*, “except,” or *sawwā*, verb form II, “to equalize, to get even,” and the like.
13. The letter is unpointed; it can be either *t*, for 9, or *z*, for 900; the former is more likely in the context here.

TEXT NO. 67: ACCOUNTS

RN 1023

Description: Yellow paper, soiled and torn, profuse worm-eaten holes and abrasions, 15.7 × 25.3 cm, recto twenty one lines, verso twenty-six lines plus one line marginalia, various hands, black ink.

Introduction: This partially preserved text proves to be one of the most important among the documents found in the “Sheikh’s house.” Written in two columns, on both the recto and the verso, it contains detailed accounts of at least fifty clients. In reading the lengthy and at times confusing text, it is helpful to follow the basic pattern that is in fact quite straightforward: each entry begins with a client’s name and a monetary figure, which perhaps indicates either the debt owed to, or payment made by, the person in question. As a rule, the commodities dealt with are usually not mentioned, except for a few cases where new patterns emerge; lines 17 and 18, recto, for example, list some exotic commodities, such as “Ethiopian gowns and Jewish cloaks”; other merchandise such as “necklace” and “nuts” are cited as well (lines 2 and 10, verso). The occasional mention of commodities, nevertheless, does not break the basic pattern of “name and monetary figure.” It is perhaps simply a reflection of the fact that unusual items deserve more detail than others. It is also worth noting that each line is crossed with a stroke, a probable “check” sign of finished business. The various styles of handwriting further reveal the origins of the document as a sheet containing working accounts, written down by various people at different times. To facilitate reading and synthesizing, the translation is arranged in two separate columns.

Text

recto

- | | | |
|---------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| [.] | [.] موالى | ١ . [.] |
| [.] | [.] بن | ٢ . [.] |
| [.] | [.] الواء؟ الى ثلاثين | ٣ . العريف سالم |
| [.] | [.] | ٤ . سته درا > هـ م |

٥. عرفات نصف وربع [. . . .]
 ٦. حموده الحاوی خرص علی [. .]
 ٧. [. . . .] سلطان ربع
 ٨. حسین الحجازی الصیرافی ثمانیه دراهم
 ٩. وربع و سدس العساکر ربع
 ١٠. القاضی الحکم درهمن و نصف [. . .] الحاوی ربع و خر و > به
 ١١. الرشد علی [.] [.] علی سته در > اهم
 ١٢. وانصار [.]
 ١٣. عشره درهم الا خر و > به
 ١٤. الریس خرص علی درهمن و نص > ف
 ١٥. [. .] الحریسی خرص و بلاذر علی
 ١٦. درهمن و ثلثمایه (؟) دراهم و ربع
 ١٧. بن الشاعر علی سیدوق و یعسر
 ١٨. فیدله رهن علی ثمانیه عشر درهم
 ١٩. [.] الوالی عنده رباع و سبع
 ٢٠. محمد بن مالک الجزی درهمن > ن
 ٢١. الشریف ابو الفرج خمسہ دراهم

٦. حرص. ٧. کرر. ١٠. حربہ. ١٣. حربہ. ١٤. حرص. ١٥. حرص. و بلاذر. ١٧. الساعر. سدوق. ٢١. حربہ.

verso

١. [. . . .] کرام [.]
 ٢. الوصیه الع [.]
 ٣. حمزه بن بنت العزی درهم [. .]
 ٤. دراهم و ربع مسدس
 ٥. [. .] غلام سعید اربعه در > اهم
 ٦. [ص] فی و ربع
 ٧. جابر العزیز ربع
 ٨. فرج الزمام ثلاثه در > اهم علی
 ٩. [. .] و ربع
 ١٠. طوق لام قشاش درهمن . . .
- [. . .] در > اهم خر [ص] علی [. . .]
 [. .] سلین معه لوز اغر
 [. .] الوصیه الدناوی ثمانه
 [. .] جعفر درهم و [. .]
 [. .] بن حماد الملاهی [. . . .]
 سعد غلام الوالی رباع [. . . .]
 ابو محمد غله بطه علی درهم

وٹمن وخمس	.۱۱
[. . .] خرقه رهن على	.۱۲ [.]
[. . .] <نه>صف الاخر<و>به	.۱۳ [.]
[. . .] سى نصف	.۱۴ [.]
لقيمه الكيال ثلاثه دراهم وربع و . .	.۱۵ [.]
مخروج الكيال درهمين سوا	.۱۶ [.]
عالى شرف الدين قتاده رهن على عشر دراهم	.۱۷ [.]
وربع وسدس	.۱۸
عثمان بن حمزه تمام رهن على عشرين د[رهم]	.۱۹ عبد الله الطرناحى ربع
ونصف سوا	.۲۰
عبد الله بن ياسى خمسه دراهم ونصف	.۲۱ عزيز بن سى الناجى درهم وربع
	.۲۲ ابو خميس اربعه عشر درهم هى
	.۲۳ لجلب جروم ومرسله وقد [. . .]
	.۲۴ يمانى
	.۲۵ ابو حسن ثمانيه دراهم ونصف و[. .]
	.۲۶ رزفته قادمه ومرسله جروم [. . .]

۱. حر<ص>. ۱۰. قساس. ۱۳. حربه. ۲۲. حميس.

in the right margin

[.] وثلاثه دراهم [.]

Translation

recto (right column)

1. [. . .] the client of [. . .]
2. [. . .] ibn [.]
3. Sālīm the superintendent [: . .]:
4. six dirhams [.].
5. ‘Arafāt: a half and a quarter [dirhams].
6. Ḥamūda al-Ḥāwī: estimated at [. .].
7. [. . .] Sulṭān: a quarter [dirham].
8. Ḥusayn al-Ḥijājī the money changer: eight
9. and a quarter, and one-sixth dirhams.

10. The municipal judge: two and a half dirhams.
11. al-Rushd 'Alī: [.....].
12. And Anṣār [:.....:]
13. ten dirhams minus a fraction (?).
14. al-Rayyīs: estimated at two and a half dirhams.
15. [...] al-Ḥuraysī and Balādhurī: estimated at
16. three hundred (?) and two and a quarter dirhams.
17. Ibn al-Shā'ir owes Saydūq and Ya'ṣir
18. [an amount] that is the equivalent of a pledge of eighteen dirhams.
19. The [...] of the mayor owes a quarter and one-seventh [dirhams].
20. Muḥammad ibn Mālīk al-Jazzī: two dirhams.
21. Sharīf Abū al-Faraj: five dirhams.

recto (left column)

1. [.....].
2. [.....].
3. [...] the ma]yor: thirty [...]
4. [...] a half and a quarter and [...].
5. [...] al- āhir: two dirhams.
6. [...] ibn Nāṣir: a quarter and $\frac{1}{32}$ [dirham].
7. Kurz ibn Yāsīn the carpenter: two and a half dirhams
8. and six d[irhams].
9. al-ʿAsākīr: a quarter [dirham].
10. [...] al-Ḥāwī: a quarter [dirham] plus a fraction.
11. [...] 'Alī: six dirhams.
12. [blank]
13. [blank]
14. Ja'far ibn Ḥasan: one dirham [...].
15. Yāsī ibn Anktū (? or Anktuwā): one dirham [...].
16. [blank]
17. The Ethiopian gowns and Jewish cloaks [are valued] at
18. twenty-one dirhams.
19. Ḥasan the water carrier: a half and one-eighth [dirham].
20. Murjān ibn Humām: one and a quarter dirhams.
21. Shaykh 'Allām: a quarter [dirham] and a fraction.

verso (right column)

1. [...] Kirām [.....].
2. The orders by the super[intendent.....]

12. [.] clothes on loan, [valued] at
13. [.] and a half [dirhams] minus a fraction.
14. [. . .]ī: a half [dirham].
15. The sum [weighed by] the grain measurer is worth three and a quarter dirhams and [. . .].
16. Yield [at the estimation of] the grain measurer: two dirhams. Account cleared.
17. ‘Alī Sharaf al-Dīn Qatāda: owes ten
18. and a quarter and one-sixth dirhams worth of the *rahn*-pledges.
19. ‘Uthmān ibn Ḥamza Tammām: owed twenty
20. and a half dirhams of the *rahn*-pledges. Account cleared.
21. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsī: five and a half dirhams.

in the right margin

[.] and three dirhams [.].

Commentary

recto (right column)

5. The *f*, in ‘Arafāt, is without the closing loop; the reading of the name is tentative.
6. The reading of the undotted *khariṣ* ‘*alā* is conjectural. The same term appears consistently throughout; e.g., recto, lines 14, 15; verso, line 1. A similar use of the *kh-r-ṣ* is found in *AB*, 112–21, especially 117 (nos. 24, 25). However, the preposition ‘*alā* does not occur in the cases cited in *AB*. Alternate readings include *h-r-ṣ*, “to be vigilant,” “to be keen on . . .,” and *qard*, “loan” (the supposed *q* without a closing loop), i.e., Ḥamūda owes the amount quoted here.
13. The problematic *ḥ/kh/j-r-b-h* appears several times in the text and is apparently used in the context as part of the dirham figures. It could be *khirba*, “ruins,” or *kharba*, “sieve,” hence “dust,” “fraction (?),” or *juz’a*, “small portion.” An alternate explanation would be that it was a scribal error for *kharrūba*, “¹/₂₄ dirham”; the term was used, accordingly to Goitein, in speaking of a “fraction,” or “very small portion” of a dirham; see *MS*, 1: 360.
14. The name al-Rayyis also means “trade head.”
15. The problem here is the nearly illegible word inserted between *khariṣ* and ‘*alā*. The word, which I tentatively read as Balādhurī, looks like having been either added or erased; so in the normal word order

this would be *al-rayyis wa-Balādhurī kharṣ ʿalā* . . .; or simply *al-rayyis kharṣ ʿalā* . . .

16. The word *thalāth-miʿa* seems to have been doctored; it is not clear whether the change was meant to correct the figure or simply erase it.

17. This is another problematic line. The reading of the two names *saydūq* and *yaʿsir* is not certain, nor is the function of the *ʿalā*. Compared with the similar use in the same line, left column, the possible meaning could be “on account of,” “to be valued at,” among others.

18. It is obvious that the content of this line is related to the line above, hence the present translation. The term *rahn ʿalā*, “pledges as security for a debt,” appears frequently in this text (e.g., verso, lines 12, 17, 19), but the context here is not totally clear.

19. For the word *rubāʿ[ī]*, “a quarter dinar,” see *MS*, 1: 343–44.

recto (left column)

6. *Thumn murabbaʿ*, literally “one-eighth by four,” i.e., $1/32$.

15. The spelling of the unusual name *a-n-k-t-w-a* is very clear in the manuscript; in light of the Ethiopian connection alluded to below (lines 17–18), it could be an Ethiopian or East African name.

verso (right column)

6. [*Sa*] *fā*; the barely recognizable *f* is horizontally elongated along the base line as a device to fill in the space; a similar use of the term is found in RN 966a*.

24. The word *yamānī*, with two dots under the first *y*, is very clear in the manuscript, whereas the noun it was meant to modify (place? commodity?) is missing.

verso (left column)

3–4. An independent letter *m*, with a slanted tail, is written below *thamān[ī]a*, the function of which is unclear.

11. The reading of the last word of this line as *khums* is tentative; the tail of the supposed *s* stretches flat, instead of going down to make a loop.

12. The word *khirqa*, literally “rag,” “tatter,” perhaps refers to second-hand clothes and the like.

16. For the use of *sawwā*, literally “got even,” in the sense of “account being cleared,” cf. RN 987b*.

TEXT NO. 68: A GROCERY SHOPPING LIST

RN 1077b

Description: Yellowish-brown paper, 8.5 × 8.6 cm, recto six lines, verso nine lines, black ink.

Introduction: The text on the recto appears to be a list of personal accounts wherein certain items, such as clarified butter and bread, are repeated several times. While the text on the verso is virtually of the same nature, each item is crossed out, suggesting some kind of finished business: either the item was delivered, or the payment was made.

Text

recto

١. [] ودرهم حنا وربع وخبز مرسل
 ٢. [] و نصف هریسه و سمن
 ٣. و نصف وربع خبز ودرهم فضه . . .
 ٤. و . . . بصل و اربعه و نصف سمن
 ٥. و []
 ٦. [] عشر درهم وربع زعفران

 ١. حبر. ٣. حبر.

verso

١. ودرهم سمن او ثلثه و []
 ٢. و خرف عطریه ودرهمین فضه []
 ٣. ودرهم و نصف عن حمل قطع []
 ٤. ودرهمین ما ورد و نصف []
 ٥. ودرهم عن ید غلامه و خمسہ علی ید حمزه
 ٦. و [] مایه دراهم ودرهم و نصف
 ٧. [] درهم فضه و نصف ملوخیه

Commentary

recto

1. The exact meaning of the word *mursal*, expected to be an adjective of *khubz*, is uncertain.

verso

2. The ʿ, in ʿit̄r̄ya, is written above the word; it is to either replace the *alif* for ʿit̄r̄ya, or add to the *alif* for ʿat̄ir̄ya.

3. *Ḥaml qīṭaʿ*, literally “a load of various sorts of. . . .”

5. *ʿAn yad*, *ʿalā yad*, literally “by, or from, the hand of. . . .,” and “on, or at, the hand of. . . .,” respectively.

TEXT NO. 69: A BUSINESS DIARY

RN 1090b

Description: Yellow paper, two fragments making up a single text, 4.8 × 6 cm and 4 × 4.8 cm each, recto five lines, black ink, verso blank.

Text

recto

١. يوم الاحد ابوا . . . ثلثه ويبه
 ٢. ويبه ين ونصف . . . <قم>ح
 ٣. يوم الثلثه يوم الاربع
 ٤. ويوم الخميس ويبه ونصف يوم الجمعه
 ٥. وثلثين ونصف

٢. ويبه ين = ويبتين (?)

Translation

1. Sunday: Abū . . . : . . . and three *waybas* of.; [Monday:]
2. Two and a half *waybas* . . . [of] wheat.;

3. Tuesday and Wednesday:;
4. Thursday: one and a half *waybas*. Friday:
5. Thirty and a half *waybas*.

Commentary

1. Abū so-and-so; since the rest of the account does not specify any parties involved in the daily transactions of wheat, it is assumed that the text deals exclusively with this particular Abū so-and-so.

TEXT NO. 70: A LETTER DISCUSSING BUSINESS LITIGATIONS

RN 1015c

Description: Glossy yellow paper, torn on all sides, 8.2 × 5.8 cm, recto four lines, verso four lines, in an elegant chancery hand, each line slightly slanting up towards the end, black ink.

Introduction: Although some details remain unclear due to the incompleteness of the document, the extant text deals with the involvement of a municipal judge, Zayn al-Dīn, in a legal dispute concerning the business transactions of the “two stores” in an unnamed “port,” most likely Quseir. A *maḥḍar*-court document was drafted and court witnesses were called upon. It is also evident that as the results of the trial, a payment in *waraq* silver coins was ordered. Also noteworthy is the mention of the ‘*ulamā*’, which is rarely seen in the documents from the “Sheikh’s house.”

Text

recto

١. [ابو الرضى بن طاهر بن سيدهم]
٢. [به عند القاضى الفقيه زين الدين النايب فى الحكم]
٣. [>الس<ماحل المذكور بطريق النقل عن القاضى الاجل الفقيه]
٤. [حال العلما النايب فى الحكم]

verso

١. [] وحنوتين فى السوق المشد<سيد؟>
 ٢. وغيره بالساحل المذكور وحلف قسد<هما> []
 ٣. ذلك لمحضرت الشهود المعدلين الو []
 ٤. اجره بمبلغ من الورق ال []

٣. ذلك = ذلك. محضرت = محضرة. ٤. اجره.

Translation

recto

1. [.] Abū al-Riḍā ibn āhir ibn Sayyidihim [.]
2. [.] in the presence of the *qāḍī*, the jurist Zayn al-Dīn, the municipal judge,
3. [.] of the aforesaid port, by means of transfer from the most notable *qāḍī* and jurist
4. [.] the ‘*ulamā*’, the municipal judge [.].

verso

1. [.] and the two stores at the roofed (?) marketplace [.]
2. and others at the aforesaid port. He swore that [.].
3. Hereby is the court report [signed by] the legal witnesses [.].
4. His fees [will be paid] in sum, in *waraq* silver coins [.].

Commentary

recto

2. The unpointed word ‘*inda* could be ‘*abd*, “the servant of. . . .” The identity of this *qāḍī* and *faqīh* Zay al-Dīn needs further verification.
4. The rarely seen *al-‘ulamā*’ is intriguing in the present context, insofar as the involvement of the ‘*ulamā*’ in this mercantile dispute is evident.

verso

1. *Al-musha[yyad]*, literally “built, constructed”; the reading could be *al-mash[hūr]*, “famous,” or *al-mush[ār ilayhi]*, “aforesaid,” and the like.
2. “The aforesaid port” should refer to the same “port” mentioned in line 3, recto.
4. For the *warāq* “black” silver coin, see chapter 2.

TEXT NO. 71: A LEGAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT WITH WITNESS CLAUSES

RN 1079

Description: Yellow paper scroll, torn at the upper left side, 8.3×24.5 cm, recto twenty-eight lines, black ink, verso blank.

Introduction: This is a so-called *iqrār*, or “formal acknowledgments.” According to Little’s description of the same type of documents found in the Ḥaram al-Sharīf: “The text of an *iqrār* always begins with the word *aqarra/aqarrat*; . . . The name of the *muqirr* follows, complete with two *nasabs* and distinguishing *laqabs*, *nisbas*, and *shūhras*. At this point a statement is made in a stereotyped phrase to the effect that the *muqirr* is qualified to make an *iqrār*, that is to say that he is sound of mind and body and legally competent: ‘fi ṣiḥḥa minhu wa-salāma wa-jawāz amr,’ or a variant thereof. Then the main body of the acknowledgment appears, in which it is stated that the *muqirr* received such-and-such an amount from the *muqarr lahu* or that the former owes the latter a certain amount, and so forth. The text closes with the date on which the document was written, and the witnessing clauses of the witnesses appear at the end. Such is the form of a simple, non-judicial *iqrār*, . . . an acknowledgment that is not accompanied by ancillary documents and that was not signed or certified by a judge” (*CHSH*, 60, 188–89; the quote is from 189). Although the main content of the document, which touches upon the selling of rice and flour, has yet to be fully deciphered, several elements make it clear that it fits the above description; among these are: the beginning clause introduced by the *aqarra* (line 2), the “stereotyped phrase” for the qualification of the *muqirr*, or “declarant” (line 3), the mention of *al-muqarra lahu*, or “the beneficiary” of the document (line 14), and the witness clauses (lines 16–26). The only difference is that a variant of the “stereotyped phrase” for the qualification of the *muqirr* is reiterated, in line 15, after the main body of the acknowledgment

(lines 5–14). A total of nine witness clauses are to be found. Appearing in two columns, the statements are written in various hands, apparently either by the witnesses themselves, or by others who wrote on their behalf. To facilitate comprehension, in the translation below each witness clause is separated from the others by quotation marks.

Text

recto

١. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
٢. أقر الاستاذ ماهر
٣. يكتب عليهم في صحته
٤. «منه وسلامه وجواز أمره»
٥. المعظم ذكره شهور اربع
٦. لى غله و عليه سلم و
٧. الباقي الدقيق الى
٨. لى بيعه
٩.
١٠. عليه مني ما طالب
١١. للدكان او نهارا صباحا
١٢. باول الله سبحانه
١٣. والحاكم وهو الرز المذكور
١٤. وهو المقر له لدالك ببيع
١٥. واقر على نفسه طوعا في السلم وشهد على هذا
١٦. شهدت بذالك كتب والزبان موسى وحجاج شهد
١٧. شهدت وكتب بذلك وكتب عنه بامرہ وبحقه
١٨. في تاريخه في تاريخه
١٩. شهد بذلك كرام شهدت بذلك
٢٠. بن سعد وكتب عنه وكتب قاسم بن خدمه
٢١. بامرہ وبحقه في تاريخه في تاريخه
٢٢. شهدت بذلك شهد بذلك ويل
٢٣. وكتب حسن بن ابى الحسن بن محمود وكتب

عنه بامرہ وبحقہ	۲۴. شهدت بذلك
في تاريخه	۲۵.
شهد بذلك ساور	۲۶. وكتب ابو الكرم بن
بن حيله وكتب عنه	۲۷. يوسف في تاريخه
بامرہ وبحقہ>ه)	۲۸.

۶. عله. ۱۶. الربان. حجاج. ۲۷. حبله.

Translation

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
2. Master Māhir [...] acknowledges [the following]
3. in writing. [This is done while] he is sound of body
4. [and mind, and legally competent.]
5. [...], whose mention is to be glorified, for four months
6. [he has provided?] me with grains, and upon him be peace!
7. [...] the remaining flour to [...]
8. [...] sell it on my behalf [...]
9. [...]
10. [...] upon him from me whatever he has demanded
11. [...] the store, day and night
12. [...] gradually [...], God is praised!
13. The judge [...] regarding] the rice in question.
14. This is the beneficiary of this document, by the authority of which he would sell [...].
15. And he is issuing the acknowledgment on his own, voluntarily, and sound [of body and mind]. To serve as witnesses to that [are]:
16. "I witness that in writing." "The customers Mūsā and Ḥajjāj witness
17. "I witness that in writing, and write it at his order and in his right,
18. on the document's date." on the document's date."
19. "Karām ibn Sa'd "I witness that, and
20. witnesses that and writes, Qāsim ibn Khadamihi writes,
21. at his order and in his right, on the document's date." on the document's date."

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 22. "I witness that, and | "Wā'il ibn Maḥmūd witnesses that |
| 23. Ḥasan ibn Abū al-Ḥasan | and writes |
| writes." | |
| 24. "I witness that, and | at his order and in his right, |
| 25. | on the document's date." |
| 26. Abū al-Karam ibn Yūsuf | "Sāwir ibn Ḥīla witnesses that |
| 27. writes, on the document's | and writes, |
| date." | |
| 28. | at his order and in his right." |

Commentary

16. *Shahīdtu dhālika wa-kutiba* (or *kataba?*), literally "I witnessed that and it (i.e., my testimony) was written down." This implies that perhaps the testimony was not necessarily written down by the witness himself; cf. lines 19–21 (left column), "I witness that and *Qāsim ibn Khadamihi* writes it down . . ."; lines 22–23 (right column), "I witnessed that and *Hasan ibn Abī al-Ḥasan* writes it down"; and lines 24–27 (right column), "I witness that and *Abū al-Karam* writes it down. . . ." For the *shahādāt*, or "testimony clauses," in medieval Arabic legal documents in general, see *CHSH*, 248–59; for the *ish-hādāt*, or "attestation clauses," associated with the *iqrār* documents, see *CHSH*, 224–42; *MS*, 1: 250–51; *Wakin*, 44–45, 55, 66–67, 92–93.
17. *Wa-kataba 'anhu*, literally "he wrote about it," that is, the witness wrote the testimony himself. Similar pattern is found in lines 19–21 (right column), lines 22–25 (left column), and lines 26–28 (left column).

TEXT NO. 72: NOTE CONTAINING INSTRUCTIONS OF LEGAL PROCEDURES

RN 1017b

Description: Thick brown paper, 8 × 2.5 cm, recto two lines in black ink, verso blank.

Text

recto

١. وعلى حامل كتاب يوقف القاضى عليه ويختمه
٢. وسلمه لصاحب الرهن بيدك

Translation

1. [A]nd the carrier of the letter ought see to that the judge looks at it and seals it off with a stamp.
2. And [then] deliver it, by hand, to the person who owes the *rahn*-security deposit.

Commentary

1. The reference to “it,” in *‘alayhi* and *yakhṭimuhu*, is unclear due to the incompleteness of the text. It is likely referring to the “letter” in question, which in turn must have to do with *al-rahn*, “pledged *commenda* property as security for a debt,” or “safe deposit,” mentioned in the text.

Official and Semi-Official Correspondence

TEXT NO. 73: PETITION TO A HIGH-RANKING OFFICIAL

RN 1049

Description: Light brown paper, soiled, with profuse worm-eaten holes, 7.7 × 7.3 cm, recto five lines, verso six faded illegible lines, black ink.

Introduction: The fragment bears the beginning of a petition addressed to an apparently high-ranking official, a certain Rashīd al-Dīn whose honorific titles occupy all of the four extant lines. The *tarjama* of the author of the petition, of which only the title *al-mamlūk* has survived, is written in the right margin.

Text

recto

- ١ . بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
 ٢ . يقبل الارض بالمجلس السامى الاجلى
 ٣ . المولوى المخدومى المحترمى الصدرى
 ٤ . الاميرى العالمى العاملى الـ [] ى
 ٥ . الامجدى رشيد الدين علا []

 ٥ . الامجدى.

in the right margin

[المملوك]

Translation

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
2. [The servant] kisses the ground before the exalted, the most noble seat,
3. the master, he who is to be served, the highly respected, the superintendent,
4. the *amīr*, the knowledgeable, the practical, the [. . . .],
5. the most glorious Rashīd al-Dīn ‘Alā’ [al-Islām?].

in the right margin

The servant [.].

Commentary

recto

2. The grammatical subject of the verb *yūqabbilu* must be *al-mamlūk* so-and-so in the right margin.
3. The titles *al-makhdūmī al-muhtaramī* were, according to al-Qalqashandī, used by sultans and a number of *amīrs*; see *QS*, 6: 26–27. The title

al-ṣadrī had, according to al-Qalqashandī, been reserved for the head of merchants, but was later used as one of the generic honorific titles for the head of any given profession; see *QS*, 6: 18, 116–17.

4. The titles *al-‘ālimī al-‘āmilī* are listed in *QS*, 6: 19–20. The combination of *al-mawlawī* and *al-‘ālimī al-‘āmilī* is listed in *QS*, 6: 156.

5. The honorific title *al-amjadī* has not been found in the sources I have consulted; a cognate *al-mājidī* is listed in *QS*, 6: 152. In most of the Ayyubid and Mamluk petitions, the adjective honorific titles are to be followed by compound honorific titles such as *Sayf* (or the like) *al-Dīn wa-al-Dawla*, *Majd* (or the like) *al-Islām wa-al-Muslimīn*, *‘Umdat al-Mulūk*, and so forth.

TEXT NO. 74: OFFICIAL PETITION REQUESTING WHEAT SUPPLY

RN 1057

Description: Yellow paper, 8.5 × 14.5 cm, recto nine lines, in a clear cursive *nashk*, unconventional ligatures between letters, scarce dots, black ink, verso blank.

Introduction: This is one of the few documents that have survived in their entirety. The recto contains a complete petition, with both the petitioner’s and the recipient’s names, the opening stock clause of official petition and the closing greetings. No address is given. It is to be noted that this petition is not addressed to Abū Mufarrij. Although the identity of its recipient cannot be verified, judging from the honorific titles, he must have been a high-ranking official at the Ayyubid court in Cairo or Qūs, the capital of Upper Egypt. This petition was perhaps presented to Abū Mufarrij, or his business partners, as a certificate or power-of-attorney connected with the supply of wheat as well as other provisions. We do not know the context of the *nafaqa*, “expense,” mentioned in the text, nor the identities of the petitioner Abū ‘Alī Munajjā, his son, and others, mentioned in the petition as “our family,” and “the youths”; they seem to have been associated with some sort of company, perhaps a military expedition or pilgrimage caravan that was in need of cash and a food supply.

Text

recto

- ١ . بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم المملوك ابوا على منجا
 ٢ . يقبل الارض بالمجلس السامى الاجلى العالى الموقر
 ٣ . السعيد ابا زكريا وفقه الله وينهى اليه ان ولد
 ٤ . المملوك جا اليوم من عند اهلنا وهم يشتكوا
 ٥ . قلت النفقه وذكروا ان ما هى عندهم عيـ>ش
 ٦ . وانا اريد من بسط المولا نفقه للعيال من تفضل
 ٧ . المولا واحسانه وهو يرسم الولايـ>ة
 ٨ . على المولا والمملوك منتصر تفضل المولا
 ٩ . واحسانه بقليل قمح للعيال والسلام عليك

٤ . حا = جاء . ٥ . قلت = قلة . ٧ . وهيو . ٨ . منتصر = منتظر . تفضل = تفضل .

Translation

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. The slave Abū 'Alī Munajjā
2. kisses the ground before the sublime, the most exalted, the lofty, the reverend
3. and auspicious seat Abū Zakarīyā—may God give him success!—and reports that the son
4. of this slave has come today from our family who have complained about
5. the lack of funds; they have mentioned that it is for them the source of livelihood.
6. I wanted to request [your] the Master's granting of expenses for these youths from [your] the Master's grace
7. and benevolence. He (i.e., my son) pledges allegiance
8. to [you] the Master. This slave is (i.e., I am) waiting for [your] the Master's grace
9. and benevolence in [granting] a small amount of wheat for the sake of the youths. Peace be upon you!

Commentary

2. For *al-majlis*, see discussion above in chapter 1. Examples of related use found in the Cairo Geniza papers are: *al-majlis al-‘ālī . . . al-ajallī* (*ALAD*, nos. 78, 80, 82, 83, all in letters addressed to Fatimid viziers), *al-majlis al-sāmī al-‘ālī al-ajallī*, or *al-majlis al-‘ālī al-sāmī al-ajallī* (*ALAD*, nos. 84, 85, 87, addressed to Fatimid viziers), *al-majlis al-karīm* (*ALAD*, no. 98, addressed to a Fatimid *qāḍī*), *majlis al-mawlā* (*ALAD*, no. 102, to an Ayyubid dignitary; *ABPH*, no. 69, to a Mamluk *qāḍī*); the title of *al-majlis*, and *majlisuhu*, is also found in a Mamluk letter (*ABPH*, no. 70, to an *imām*).

4. I read *wa-hum yashtakū* as a *ḥāl* circumstantial clause modifying *ahlīnā* and thus the proposed translation.

6. The reference of *al-‘yāl*, literally “the children,” is not clear; from the context, they were closely associated with the author of this petition, who refers to them as “our family” in line 4.

6–7. *Tafaḍḍul al-mawlā wa-iḥsānuhu*, “the Master’s grace and benevolence,” are metonymic references to the person of *al-mawlā*. The use of this phrase was, according to Ibn Shīth, common in Ayyubid chancery writing: the sender of an official petition may call himself (other than *al-mamlūk*, *al-‘abd*, or *al-khādim*) *shākir tafaḍḍulīhi*, “the grateful to his grace,” and *shākir iḥsānihi*, “the grateful to his benevolence”; see *MK*, 34. A related phrase is also found in the Cairo Geniza letters (*ALAD*, no. 89, *raʿfatīhi wa-iḥsānihi*, “his compassion and benevolence”).

TEXT NO. 75: AN OFFICIAL PETITION FROM MECCA AND A REGISTER OF ACCOUNTS

RN 1060b

Description: Yellowish-brown paper, profuse worm-eaten holes, 11 × 9.2 cm, recto three lines, in fine chancery *riqāʿ*, two dots under the *y*, verso ten lines, in various cursive hands, black ink.

Introduction: The text on the recto merits special attention. From the viewpoint of paleography, the wide spaces between the lines are extraordinary by Quseir standards, and the way the *tarjama* is arranged is rarely seen as well. With regard to historical background, the petitioners claim themselves of the “Banū Shayba,” the “pious guardians

of the Holy Mosque” in Mecca. The verso contains some ten accounts, each separated from the other by horizontal and vertical lines. It appears that each account consists of a person’s name, the amount of grain, and a calculation of, probably, the cost. But this pattern is not always followed throughout insofar as some accounts do not give names or amounts of grain. It could be that either these accounts are not independent, but rather related to others (for example, in the first right column, lines 4–6 seem to be a continuation of lines 1–3), or that omissions and shorthand codes were used. In light of our knowledge of the grain prices, at roughly two dinars (or eighty dirhams) per *irdabb*, the “costs” mentioned here (the only complete one being that of ‘Imrān Bashīr, in the middle column on the top, which is itself divided into two columns, with a figure of “two hundred plus one hundred fifty dirhams,” i.e., three hundred fifty, for “ten *irdabbs*”) are not necessarily the full price (which would seem to be too low) but rather the “paid” portion only. It is unclear whether the two texts, on the recto and verso, are related or otherwise.

Text

recto

١. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
 ٢. بني شيبه صالحى بالمد<سج>د الحرام
 ٣. يقبلون الارض وينهون انهم يسالون
 ٢. سيبه.

verso

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| رام [] الثانى
تسع ارادب [] و []
استو<فا> [] ي وثلاثين | عمران <ب>شير \تقريبا ميتى
عشر ارادب ميه
فاستوفوا وخمسين / | ١. [] الثانى
٢. ست اراد<ب>
٣. الا ثلث
٤. استوفا
٥. ميه اثني وثلاثين |
| | ضمدا [] عي
ا[ل]ربيع ارادب ونصف | |

.٦ .ونصف

[]	استوفا ميه تسعه	.٧ .خمسه وثمانين
[]	وسبعين ونصف	.٨
[]		.٩ .ثمان ميه سبعه
[ربع]		.١٠ .وستين و]
			.١ .التانى.

Translation

recto

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. The servants
2. from the Shayba tribe, the pious guardians of the Holy Mosque [in Mecca]
3. kiss the ground and report that they would like to ask for [.].

verso

- | | | |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| 1. The second [. . .]: | ‘Imrān [Ba]shīr: | Rāmī[. . .], the second: |
| 2. six <i>irdabbs</i> | ten <i>irdabbs</i> . | nine <i>irdabbs</i> and [. . .] |
| 3. minus one third. | Paid: nearly two hundred plus one hundred and fifty [dirhams?]. | Paid: [. . .] and thirty [dirhams?]. |
| 4. Paid: | Ḍamad[. .]‘ī: | |
| 5. two hundred thirty-two | four and a half <i>irdabbs</i> . | |
| 6. and a half [dirhams?]. | | |
| 7. Eighty-five | Paid: | [.] |
| 8. [waybas of grain?]. | seventy-nine and a half [dirhams?]. | [.] |

9. Eight hundred	[.....]
10. sixty-seven and [. . .] [<i>waybas</i> of grain?].	One quarter [.].

Commentary

recto

2. For the Banū Shayba, “the custodians of the Holy Sanctuary in Mecca (*ḥajab al-kaʿba*),” see *QS*, 1: 410; 4: 269; and discussion in chapter 2.

verso

1. The reading of the undotted *al-thānī* is tentative; it could be a surname, such as al-Bāqī, al-Bālī, al-Bānī, and the like.

2–3. The *mīʿa* and *wa-khamsīn*, in the middle column, are written between the lines, indicating perhaps one numeral unit.

3. *Istawfā*, “[prices] received in full”; similar usage is found in legal writings as well; see Wakin, 54, 57.

5. The reading of the middle column is uncertain; the original wording *al-rub*^c, “a quarter,” does not seem to make sense, while the supposed *arādīb* is slightly erased.

TEXT NO. 76: OFFICIAL COMMUNIQUÉ TO ONE AMĪR NĀSĪR AL-DĪN

RN 1069

Description: Light brown paper, soiled, 13.5 × 5.5 cm, recto four lines, verso one line, black ink.

Introduction: This is an official letter sent to the highest ranked official in the court, an *amīr* either associated with, or he himself being, the *amīr al-muʾminīn*, “the Commander of the Faithful.”

Text

recto

١. المملوك مود مسرور لشبابتك
٢. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
٣. <ام>ام المجلس السامي العالي المحترم الامين الاخص ناصر الدين
٤.] امير المؤمنين وينهى ان [
-
١. لسبابتك.

verso (address)

- خدمه سفرى(؟) الى مجلس الاميه<ر> [] الموقر ناصر الدين
-
- خدمه.

Translation

recto

- 1–2. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. The loving servant, the one who salutes your Majestic Youth
3. [kisses the ground] in front of the sublime, lofty, respectable, truthful, and the most special seat, Nāṣir al-Dīn,
4. [.] Commander of the Faithful, and reports the following:

verso

Via special delivery service (?), to the seat of the reverend [. . . .] Amīr Nāṣir al-Dīn.

Commentary

recto

1. The most likely reading of the combination *m-w-d* is *mawadd*, as a verbal noun. The use of the cognate verbal noun *al-wadd* as

“Epitheton des Adressaten” (Diem) is documented in a Mamluk court correspondence; see *DAA3*, no. 45 (*mamlūkūhu al-wadd*); *DAA1*, no. 23 (*al-akh al-‘azīz al-muwaqqar al-wadd*); *MK*, 34 (*wāddūhu*; discussed in chapter 1). *Masrūr bi-shabābat fulān* is likely another “Epitheton des Adressaten” the parallel of which has not been found in the contemporary sources consulted.

3. The identity of this Nāṣir al-Dīn remains unclear. Many Ayyubid sultans, including Saladin and al-Kāmil, and *amīrs* bore the *shuhra*-title Nāṣir al-Dīn.

verso

1. The word *safarī*, literally “travel,” is slightly erased and the reading uncertain.

TEXT NO. 77: AN OFFICIAL PETITION

RN 1092a

Description: Yellowish-brown paper, torn and soiled, 12.3 × 6 cm, recto four lines plus one line marginalia, verso a few erased lines of which only the word *al-mamlūkī*, in the last line, is readable, black ink.

Introduction: The petition, submitted by one merchant named Abū al-Faṭḥ ibn Ma‘ālī, was sent to a high-ranking official whose honorific titles are the only extant part of the text and, therefore, the main interest here.

Text

recto

١. المملوك
٢. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
٣. يقبل الارض بالمجلس العالى السامى الاجلى الافضى المخدمى المحترمى
٤. الموفقى السعيدى المفظلى <سيف> الدوله والدين <كنز> الفقرا <والمساكين>

٤. المفظلى = المفضلى.

in the right margin

والامر بحمد الله تعالى

Translation

1–2. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. The servant Abū al-Faṭḥ ibn Ma‘ālī

3. kisses the ground before the high, the noble, the most exalted, the most revered seat, Who Is To Be Served, the respected,

4. the successful, the auspicious, the favored, the Sword of the State and the Religion, [the Treasure for] the poor [and needy. . . .].

in the right margin

The command [is from God.] Praise be to God Almighty!

Commentary

3–4. Similar, but not identical, combination of the honorific titles is found in *DAA1*, no. 45: *al-majlis al-sāmī al-ajallī al-mawlawī al-amīrī al-kabīrī al-muwaffaqī al-sa‘īdī amīn al-dīn ‘umdat al-mulūk wa-al-salāṭīn kanz al-fuqarā’ wa-al-masākīn khālīṣat amīr al-mu‘minīn*. The letter in *DAA1* was sent by a merchant named Yūsuf and is dated from the twelfth or thirteenth centuries. For *al-majlis al-‘ālī*, see the discussion above in chapter 1; for *al-sāmī al-ajallī*, *al-muwaffaqī al-sa‘īdī*, and *kanz al-fuqarā’*, see *DAA1*, 271 (notes 3–5); for *al-afḍalī*, *al-muḥtaramī*, and *al-makhdūmī*, see *QS*, 6: 9, 26–27.

Private Letters

TEXT NO. 78: A PERSONAL LETTER FROM IBRĀHĪM’S NEPHEW TO HIS MOTHER

RN 1056a

Description: Light brown paper, two fragments making up a single text, 6 × 8.2 cm and 3.4 × 7.3 cm respectively, recto nine lines, verso five lines on both ends of page, black ink.

Translation

recto

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
2. That which I am writing to inform the dear, successful, and auspicious mother—may God
3. prolong her life, make her strength and happiness everlasting, and assure that success will never elude her!—
4. is the following: Your letter to me arrived. It was delivered by Khalīfa ibn al-Ḥāwī.
5. [From it we learned that] you have been ill. Everyone was very upset about that. We thank God Almighty
6. [for granting] you all good health, for seeing to it that you will only be in thankfully [improved conditions], and that there will be no
7. [more] mistrust between you and me. We pray to God that nothing but
8. [good will come out of this; and He] will bring [good] things to you as long as
9. [you are in need; and as long as you are] in hardship [.].

verso

1. [.] the price [has risen?] over two dirhams [.] for all [.].
2. [Greetings to] your neighbors Aḥmad al-Jinnī ibn Karīma [and]
3. [Hope that] the brother [will visit with] us soon. [Greetings] to my uncle Abū Ishāq.
4. [.] To be delivered to Shāfiʿ for sale is a quarter [of . . .], which will be paid for
5. [by]. Nūḥ has fulfilled his master's wishes.

Commentary

recto

4. *ʿAlā yad*, literally “by the hand of. . . .”
6. The subject of the plural verb *yaraʿuna* ought to be God.

8. Note the verb *jāb*, which is Egyptian colloquial, in the optative, “may he bring.”

verso

4. The term *rubʿ* could refer to “quarter of a dinar” (*Dictionary*, 78–79), but also a dry measure.

5. Judging from the format of letter writing at Quseir as we know it, the lines written on the other end of the paper are usually reserved for the address where the name of the recipient and, occasionally, of the sender, is mentioned. Nūḥ (Noah) is thus likely the sender of the letter.

TEXT NO. 79: A PRIVATE LETTER OR PRAYER

RN 991a

Description: Yellow paper, 8.2 × 5.4 cm, recto five lines, black ink, verso blank.

Introduction: The addressees of this letter, or prayer, include men and women. They could be on a pilgrimage mission traveling to Mecca, or with a trade caravan, or both. The writer’s concern over their well-being and safe return is genuine, although at times seems overly dramatic.

Text

recto

١. والله تعالى يكتب سلامتكم ويردكم الينا سالمين
٢. معافين ونحن ما ننقلب فى الليل صاحين حين
٣. الى حين الا ندعو الى فالله تعالى يجعلكم عا <فين>
٤. وبنت اخوك وابو محمد واصحابه الجمع ذلكين
٥. [] <الله تعالى> يكتب سلامتكم والمسلمين بما له

٣. الاندعوالى.

Translation

1. May God Almighty destine your safety and well-being and bring you back to us, safe and
2. in good health. We have been turning over [in bed], vigilant and awake all night long,
3. only to pray that God Almighty may safe-guard all of you,
4. your niece, and Abū Muḥammad, and his friends, all of them.
5. [. May God Almighty] destine your safety and [the safety of] all those who surrender themselves to His will.

Commentary

1. For *allāh yaktubu salāmatakum*, cf. *DAA1*, no. 43; *DAA2*, no. 27.
- 2–3. *Ḥīn ilā ḥīn*, literally “from time to time.”

Miscellanies

TEXT NO. 80. A PRAYER WITH THE SCRIBE'S MOTTO

RN 964a

Description: Brown paper, slightly torn on the top, several worm-holes, 13.5 × 7.5 cm, recto five lines, verso three lines, brown and black ink.

Introduction: The lines on the recto are rhymed but fail to scan any meters of Arabic poetry. A woman's name, Asmā Umm Mūsā, is written on the other side of the paper, to be read from the top down. The function of the text is unclear. One scenario would be that by expressing the woman's yearning for her departed loved ones and her prayer for their safe return, the text could be carried by those travelers as some kind of amulet for protection. On the verso is something resembling the *ʿalāma*, or scribe's motto (see chapter 1, note 19), with various combinations of the formulaic utterances in intricate calligraphic styles. The hands on the recto and verso are different and they do not seem to be related. It is likely that the paper was re-used and that the *ʿalāma* motto constitutes merely calligraphic practice.

Text

recto

١. لقد حلت [] [وراح]ت و تعدلت بالانس منهم وحشتي
 ٢. لم أزل بعدهم أبكى عليهم طول نهاري وأواصله بليد<تى>
 ٣. تراهم يعودوا لمنازلهم وترجع مسلمه فهى [] اي

verso

١. اسما ام موسى
 ٢. [] نافه

turn page upside down

١. الحمد لله وحده الحمد لله وحده الحمد لله وحده وصلاته على سيدنا محمد
 ٢. الحمد لله الحمد لله الحمد لله الحمد لله
 ٣. الحمد لله على نعمه الحمد لله على نعمه الحمد لله على نعمه

Translation

recto

- [She/it] had come and gone, and, thanks to their companionship, my longing has since subdued.
- Now that they are gone as well, I am weeping over their departure, day and night.
- O, would they come back soon? Would she/it return safely [. . . .]?

verso

- Asmā Umm Mūsā
- [.]

turn page upside down

- Praise be to God alone! Praise be to God alone! Praise be to God alone and may God bless our Lord Muḥammad!

2. Praise be to God! Praise be to God! Praise be to God! Praise be to God!

3. Thank God for His grace! Thank God for His grace! Thank God for His grace!

Commentary

recto

1. The subject of the singular, third person verbs, *ḥallat* and *rāḥat*, is erased; it could refer to a female person, but is more likely referring to a caravan, a mission, and so forth.

TEXT NO. 81: AN AMULET

RN 1016b

Description: Yellow paper, worn on the right edge, profuse worm-eaten holes, 9 × 7.5 cm, recto seven lines, verso seven lines, in cursive *nashk*, black ink.

Text

recto

١. من اصلح [] <الاي>من []
 ٢. ومن اصلح محذله (?) الايسر ادلى على غايب يذكره
 ٣. بساب اصلح ذقن
 ٤. من اصلح ذقنه []
 ٥. /.....\
 ٦. [] الايسر يستفيد كلامه
 ٧. [] ظلت تطيل []
 ٧. ظلت.

verso

١. [] ربه صحيح [] وسيم []
 ٢. باب اصلاح الصدغين
 ٣. من اصلح صدغه الايمن سعا البدراقرب الناس اليه
 ٤. ومن اصلح صدغه الايسر صح جسمه وقرت عينه
 ٥. باب اصلاح الاذنين
 ٦. من اصلح اذنه الايمن فرج رشده والفا []
 ٧. الل [] املاك سو []ه

Translation

recto

1. He who maintains the soundness of [his] right [.....].
2. He who maintains the soundness of his left [...], he will be able to foresee the invisible.
3. Chapter: On the Maintenance of the Beard.
4. He who trims his beard [on the right side, he will].
5. [He who trims his beard] on the left side, his speech will be improved [...].
6. [.....] will last long [.....].

verso

1. [.....] his [...] will be healthy [...] and handsome [.....].
2. Chapter: On the Fitness of the Two Temples.
3. He who maintains the soundness of his right temple, the full moon will draw people closer to him.
4. He who maintains the soundness of his left temple, his body will be healthy, and his eyes will stay firm.
5. Chapter: On the Fitness of the Two Ears.
6. He who maintains the soundness of his right ear, his senses will be at ease and [his...] will be smooth [...].
7. [.....] the possession of his [.....].

Commentary

recto:

2. *m-ḥ-d-l-h* appears in the manuscript; its reading is uncertain.

TEXT NO. 82: A CHARM FOR WOMAN WISHING TO GIVE BIRTH TO A BOY

RN 1031a

Description: Yellowish-brown paper, a few worm-eaten holes, 10 × 7.4 cm, recto eight lines, verso seven lines, naïve hand, black ink.

Introduction: On the recto is a charm, in rhyming prose, for a woman wanting to give birth to a boy. The verso contains a letter to a judge (*al-qāḍī al-ajall al-murtaḍā*); the content of the letter is too cursive to be deciphered with certainty.

Text

recto

١. للمرأة ازاد <ت> [] ها الولد
٢. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم لطحيظهطيل الله لكل شي
٣. اذا السما انشقت واذنت لربها وحقت واذا الارض
٤. مدت والقت ما فيها وتخلت القت كل مسلمه فى
٥. بطنها مسلمه افيق افيق من تحت طلقك الوثيق
٦. ارمى واوثق هذا شهرك الحقيق حتا ولدت
٧. مريم مريم يا رب عيسى عليه السلام وان انشقت السما
٨. فكانت وردة كالدهان فبأى <آلاء> ربكما تكذبان

Translation

1. For woman who wanted [to have] a boy.
2. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. (Mystical letters.) May God bless everything!

3. *When heaven is rent asunder and gives ear to its Lord, and is fitly disposed; when earth*
4. *is stretched out and casts forth what is in it, and voids itself,* every Muslim woman may cast forth [what is] in
5. her womb. [O] Muslim woman! Wake up, wake up from under [the effect of] your tight labor!
6. Cast forth and hold tight! This is your month of truth! Until
7. The Virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus, O Lord, peace be upon Him! *And when heaven is split asunder,*
8. *and turns crimson like red leather—O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*

Commentary

2. For the “mystic” letters, of the so-called *al-tahāṭīl*, see al-Suyūṭī, 249. Seven variants, all with the suffix of *ṭahṭīl*, can be used in the case of granting a woman fertility.
- 3–4. Qur’an 84: 1–4.
5. Note the incorrect verb conjugation of *afīq*, for *afīqī*.
6. Note the incorrect verb conjugation of *awthiq*, for *awthiqī*.
- 7–8. Qur’an 55: 37–38.

TEXT NO. 83: WORDS OF MAGIC

RN 1052

Description: Yellow paper, 7.8 × 6.6 cm, recto five lines, dots and the top bar on the *k* missing, black ink, verso blank.

Introduction: This text deals with the magic power of invoking the story of the “Men of the Cave” in everyday situations, and in this case, putting out the fires. The Christian story of the “seven sleepers,” as related in the Muslim tradition, has drifted in the course of time “into the realm of the magical. In this way can be explained the custom of hanging up leaves on which the names of the sleepers are inscribed, for the sake of *baraka* or for averting evil” (R. Paret, “Aṣḥāb al-kaḥf,” *ET*²; also cf. Fodor, 54 [no. 95, a modern-day pendent with the names, for general protection]). The Arabic spelling of the names varies in different sources. Following Ibn Iṣḥāq, al- abarī has it that

the number of the youths was eight, and they are: Maksimilīnā, Maḥsimilīnā, Yamlikhā, Marṭūs, Kaṣūṭūnas, Bīrūnas, Rasmūnas (?), Baṭūnas, and Qālūs; see *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, IV, trans. by Moshe Perlmann (Albany, 1987), 155–59; also see al- abarī’s *Tafsīr* (Beirut, 1992), 8: 183. The names and their order in the present text are slightly different from al- abarī’s.

Text

recto

- ١ . بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم اسما اهل
- ٢ . الكهف يملخوا ومكسملينا
- ٣ . وقالوس وبطونيوس وتواتر قال
- ٤ . كانوا يرون انها اذا كتبت والقيت في
- ٥ . الحريق ان ذلك ليطفى

٢ . اللف. ٣ . فالوس.

Translation

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. The names of the “Men
2. of the Cave” are: Yamlikhā, Maksimilīnā,
3. Qālūs, Baṭūniyūs, and the remainder. It is said that
4. they saw to it that if these [names] were written down and then thrown in
5. the fire, the fire will be put out.

Commentary

3. Baṭūniyūs; al- abarī’s version, both *Tafsīr* and *Ta’rīkh*, has Baṭūnas. *Tawātara*, literally “to follow in succession.”

TEXT NO. 84: A POEM

RN 968c

Description: Fine yellow paper, a few worm-eaten holes, 16.5 × 8 cm, recto three lines written horizontally along the side of the paper, first line in black ink, the verses in brown ink, verso blank.

Introduction: The couplet appears to be a farewell song, in memory of a departing traveler or sailor. The source of the original is unknown. The verses are of the *sarī‘* meter, with some irregularities. An *‘alāma*, the scribe’s motto, is found in the first line. The codex perhaps could serve as an amulet of sorts.

Text

recto

١. الحمد لله وحده

٢. صلّوا في ليل فاني مخبركم وارحموا حررا قد اتوا عندكم
٣. لا تدفيق <١> جفانكم انني راحلا والقلب باقي عندكم

٢. مخبركم. ٣. ندفيق. جفانكم.

Translation

1. Praise be to God alone.
2. Pray at night! I am telling you;
Be kind to those free-born men that have come to you.
3. Let your eyes shed no tears, as I am leaving,
[my] heart will stay, forever, with you.

Commentary

2. *Mukhbirukum*, is unpointed; it could be *muhayyirukum*, i.e., “I am making you bewildered.” *Huraran*, “free-born men”; the reference and the context here are unclear.

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