

Institutions and events of the eleventh century mirrored in Geniza letters (part II)

MOSHE GIL
Tel Aviv University

7. *A strong earthquake in Jerusalem*

Ibn al-Athīr informs us, in AH 407 (begun on 10 June 1016), in a concise note: ‘The big dome of the *ṣakhra* in Jerusalem (*al-bayt al-muqaddas*) collapsed’; Ibn al-Jawzī gives us the date in full: 21 *rabī’* I, i.e. 28 August 1016; whereas the gaon Solomon b. Judah, writing to Jacob b. Joseph regarding a woman who is in Fustat while her husband remains in Palestine, adds at the end of his letter that ‘the splendid building built on it [on His temple, which he mentioned earlier in the letter] collapsed on the seventeenth of the month of Elul, which was a Sunday, at the tenth hour of the day, may there be a will (of God) that a durable building be built’. The seventeenth of Elul fell on a Sunday not in 1016, but in 1015, and it was in September. It appears that the information in the Arab chronicles should have been included among the events of AH 406, not 407. In that year, 21 *rabī’* I fell on 8 September 1015 which is four days later than the date in Solomon b. Judah’s letter (which is undoubtedly the authentic one).¹

8. *The rebellion of the Banū Jarrāḥ*

Following the murder of the caliph al-Ḥākim on 13 September 1021, the internal order in the Fatimid state, which then included *al-shām*, i.e. Palestine and Syria, was considerably weakened. The throne of the caliphate was inherited by al-Ḥākim’s son, Abū’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī, who received the title *al-zāhir li-i’zāz dīni ‘llāhi*, ‘the one who is victorious in order to elevate God’s religion’; he was sixteen years old when he ascended to this position. After only a few years, in September 1024, a Bedouin rebellion took place in Palestine, led by the Banū Jarrāḥ family whose head was then al-Ḥassān b. al-Mufarrij. This was only one chapter in a prolonged historical process which I call ‘The Sixty Years War’; it began in 969 and continued until 1029. Only in 1033 did people begin throwing old papers into the Geniza chamber. Therefore, the Geniza is a source for the history of this war only during its final period, i.e. from around 1024, the central event of which was that Bedouin rebellion in Palestine.²

We have four letters from 1025, written by Solomon ha-Kohen b. Yehōsēf b. Menahem, who in that year was gaon for a short period of time.³

¹ The numbers in bold print refer to the documents in Gil (1997), vols II–IV. See the letter by Solomon b. Judah: Gil (1983), II, 94f. (no. 54); see Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, IX, 295; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntazam*, VII, 283. In my book (Gil, 1992), 386, my computation was 20 *rabī’* I; but in the meantime I have reached the conclusion that when using the formula *baqīn* (remaining), for the days in the month already past, they counted the day they indicated as well. Thus, when it is stated, as in this case, that ten days were left in *rabī’* I, one has to deduct only nine, not ten days from the thirty days of the month. That would give us 21 *rabī’* I; see more references to Arab sources in Gil (1992), *ibid.*

² The battles, which lasted sixty years, began with the Fatimid conquest of Egypt in 969 and involved several parties besides the Fatimids: The Banū Ṭayy’, the leading tribe of the Bedouin in Palestine, headed by the Banū Jarrāḥ family; the Qarmāṭis, an extreme Shiite sect; a Turkish army based in Damascus commanded by Alptakin; Arab tribes of Syria, headed by the Banū Ḥamdān; and the Byzantines. See Gil (1992), 335–97, and the references to Arab sources and to modern research in the notes there.

³ Gil, *ibid.*, 671f.

The first of these letters was written in Jerusalem shortly after Solomon became gaon, and was addressed to the leader of the 'Jerusalemmites' in Fustat, Ephraim b. Shemariah. The letter mentions heavy casualties caused by the rebellion, mainly in Ramla. The majority of the city's population (which was the main source of the Jerusalem yeshiva's revenue) were dead, he writes; only a few of the community, whom he calls 'the hard ones', meaning the poor, survived. Heavy taxes were imposed by the Fatimid authorities on the Jews of Jerusalem, totalling the huge sum of 6,000 dinars, of which 3,000 were to be paid by the Rabbanites, and 3,000 by 'our brethren', meaning the Karaites:

We [already] paid 2,500 dinars and remained empty, naked, depressed, poor; nobody has even kept his garments, nor the outfit of his house. Some of us had to pledge their houses and pay interest in order to pay [the tax], and there are those who had to sell everything. Many died from the torture, after having been denounced and after having been beaten cruelly when nothing had been found in their possession. Some hid themselves in pits, to avoid the heavy floggings and extreme torture ...⁴.

Similar descriptions are found in a fragment of another letter, where it also says:

... and all of Palestine is overburdened by armies, in the fulfilment of which is written: (Is. 24: 17–18): 'Fear and the pit and the snare are upon thee O inhabitant of the earth; and it shall come to pass that he who fleeth from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit', etc. There have come upon us many afflictions and evils which have never been seen in the kingdom of Ishmael ... And also: all Arabs and sons of Kedar ... came, numerous like locusts, and descended upon Ramla in both months of Rabī', the first and the other, furiously, killing anybody they found, capturing the women and children They suspended women by their breasts and hands, and many of them died and were thrown on refuse heaps and in pits in the market places and streets, and in churches and synagogues ... and virgins and babies and adolescents were taken to be abused and tortured ...⁵.

Another letter from Solomon b. Yehōsēf contains high praise and phrases of prayer for the Fatimid caliph, adding that:

His three forefathers were benefactors for us, we have their official orders (*nishtewānīm*; see the Hebrew Bible, used several times, in Ezra, chapters 4, 6 and 7), that of his grandfather's father, and of his grandfather, and of his father, so let him complete this by his own official order.⁶

Solomon ha-Kohen's successor as gaon was Solomon b. Judah; 120 letters and fragments of his letters, written both by him and by his son, Abraham (who wrote for his father), are preserved in the Geniza. Of these, the earlier ones also contain details of what was going on in Palestine during the war and thereafter. We have a letter he wrote himself in around 1025, before he was appointed as gaon.⁷ He also wrote about many afflictions and notes 'a heavy blow with which they hit us ... the people of the Holy City are in great affliction, such as had not happened since the Jews returned to it'.⁸ In a letter written during 1026, he writes about:

⁴ Gil (1983), II, 83f. (no. 49).

⁵ Gil, *ibid.*, II, 85–7 (no. 50) and 90f. (no. 52), a fragment lamenting the fate of the people of Jerusalem. All references to the biblical citations are added by the present author.

⁶ *ibid.*, II, 88–90 (no. 51).

⁷ See on Solomon b. Judah: Gil (1992), 672–719.

⁸ Gil (1983), 97f. (no. 57). Jews had been allowed to settle in Jerusalem almost 400 years earlier, after the Muslims conquered the city in 638. See Gil (1992), 65–74.

The heartbreaking afflictions in which we are immersed day and night, frightened and shaking because of the armies gathering around us; may our Rock give victory to the Lord our King We pray that God may help the armies of the King our Lord, may he live forever, to overcome the people of the Orient (i.e. the Bedouin) who razed the Holy Land, whose paths are deserted and no traveller ever passes, no visitor being able to enjoy safety...⁹.

The grave events in Ramla are echoed in another letter he wrote to Egypt: '... in Ramla, I did not read (before the community?) about the afflictions and the incidents and panic, as never seen before, may God save us and save you from them and from similar ones ...'.¹⁰ In around 1028 he writes that '[we are left] powerless by the many rumours which are angering, irritating, frightening ...'.¹¹

After the Fatimid victory at Uḡhuwāna (12 May 1029), preceded by more victories, Ephraim b. Shemariah wrote a letter of congratulation, blessing God 'for the victory he granted to the armies of the caliph, may his forefathers rest in peace and let his enemies perish, as they deserve to die ...'.¹² A fragment of a letter by Solomon b. Judah, written in 1029, contains his opinion about the last year of war: 'God knows how this year passed for the rich of the land, the more so for its paupers; if not that God had mercy on me I would have perished ...'.¹³

Owing to heavy taxes (mentioned above), the Jews in Jerusalem had to take out loans with heavy interest. The community was unable to pay the full sum owed, or perhaps, to return the money to the creditors, and some of its leaders were arrested and sent to Damascus. After describing various details regarding these money matters Solomon b. Judah again deplores the past year: 'I am amazed at how I passed this ugly winter'. He has to appeal to one of the Tustari brothers in Egypt, explaining that 'mercy is needed by this poor people'.¹⁴ At about the same time, a letter was sent to Egypt, signed by Solomon b. Judah, like other letters, confirming the receipt of ten dinars: '... ten dinars, weighed and good, which we shall spend, together with what our brethren, the holy communities, have contributed, to redeem souls, who were expropriated, arrested, imprisoned, ruined ...'.¹⁵ Heavy taxes imposed on the people of Jerusalem are mentioned in another letter of Solomon b. Judah; it is stated that they were imposed by Ibn Jarrāh, who is concealed behind the name *ben ḥabūra*, meaning the 'son of the wound', *ḥbr* (Hebrew) and *jrḥ* (Arabic) both bearing the meaning 'wound'.¹⁶ Clearly, the prolonged wars had a very damaging effect on the Jews of Jerusalem, and the complaints about financial difficulties and poverty are repeated far more than in other periods. 'The remaining debt is still more than 900 dinars, which is impossible to repay. How could we, out of the barnfloor, or

⁹ Gil, (1983), II, 116–19 (no. 67) lines 5–9. By 'king' he means the Fatimid caliph. Jews were always in favour with the Fatimids, see e.g. a rhymed text, in a letter from the yeshiva, from Ramla, written at the end of 1024: *ibid.*, II, 78–81 (no. 47). See also the letter of praise written by the community of Ascalon for two officials, Abū Ḥurayz and Abū Ḥurayz, to be presented to the 'Karaites elders', i.e. the Tustaris, probably in order to make them acceptable to the Fatimid rulers: 'both of them deal with us respectfully and do us favours in whatever we need...'; see *ibid.*, 574f. (no. 314).

¹⁰ Gil (1983), II, 198f. (no. 107), lines 20–22.

¹¹ *ibid.*, II, 136–8 (no. 78), a, lines 5–6.

¹² Uḡhuwāna: Gil (1992), 396; Ascalon: Gil (1983), II, 590–92 (no. 323), lines 19–21.

¹³ *ibid.*, II, 147–9 (no. 81), lines 26–7.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, II, 141–7 (no. 80), a, line 19; b, lines 10–12 (written on 7 May 1029).

¹⁵ *ibid.*, II, 201–03 (no. 110), lines 16–8.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, II, 263–5 (no. 147), b, lines 4–6.

out of the winepress?’ (2 Kings 6: 27).¹⁷ Zadok ha-Levi b. Levi, who writes from Jerusalem, mentions the plight of the Jews in Tiberias (called: Rakkath, Joshua 19: 35). In their letter the scholars of Tiberias ‘raise their voice due to their continuous sufferings, while they were hoping to relax from the ... [who] wreak havoc ... are ruined ... they offend their women and virgins who go to the market to find food ... they complain to the commander of the armies...’; the anonymous addressee is asked to intervene with the Tustaris and other Jewish figures in Egypt to act in these matters.¹⁸ In another letter, he describes the plight of Rawḥ ha-Kohen, a cantor, who came ‘from the Babylonian diaspora to Palestine ... and was also caught by the net of the Bedouin (*‘arāvīm*) and was robbed and deprived of everything he had, but saved his life...’.¹⁹ Abraham, the son of the Palestinian gaon Solomon b. Judah, writes, after complaining about the heavy yoke of the taxes, ‘it is undeniable that even that [number of] pilgrims who would gather every year, did not come because of the clashes between the armies and the disruption of the roads ... Palestine is in chaos because of hunger and pests...’.²⁰

9. *Events in Ifrīqiyā*

The Arab chronicles bear witness to the continuing battles in the Maghrib at the beginning of the eleventh century. The main figures in the fighting were the ruler of Ifrīqiyā, the Zirid, Bādīs al-Manṣūr, and his uncle, Ḥammād b. Buluqqīn. A fragment of a letter written by Isma‘īl b. Barhūn al-Tāhirtī from Mahdiyya, probably in August 1011, which unfortunately survives in a very poor state, mentions Ḥammād; somebody is said to have attacked a city, expelled (?) ‘its people, captured prisoners, set the city on fire, killed’. So far as I can tell, we do not have any details of what was happening in that year, AH 401–402 (AH 401 began on 15 August 1010) in the Maghrib. There may have been a connection between what was written in the letter and the acts of destruction perpetrated by Ḥammād in the towns of Masīla and Ḥamza.²¹

In the decisive battle between Bādīs and his uncle, Ḥammād, we find that Bādīs’ personal physician, the *nāgīd* Abraham b. ‘Aṭā’, accompanied him in his exploits. The encounter took place in the summer of 1015, when Tāhirt seemed to be the last refuge for Ḥammād, after the war turned out to be lost for him. A letter by Joseph b. Berekhiah contains further details:

In my previous letter I informed you, Sir, about the situation of panic and great awe we were in, as our *sulṭān* (i.e. Bādīs), may God grant him victory and might, was away and also far from us. In addition, our honoured Sir, Abū Ishāq [= Abraham] b. ‘Aṭā’, may God guard him, was away, with him. We were in a situation of extreme despair and tense expectation, until, with God’s mercy and His blessing, the *sulṭān* prevailed over his enemy and returned in triumph from Tāhirt to Masīla, where he now remains, unhurt and victorious, whereas his foe is beaten and besieged. From now on the *sulṭān* is in our proximity, and letters from him arrive daily, with all good [news]. And letters from Sir Abū Ishāq, may God grant

¹⁷ *ibid.*, II, 155–7 (no. 84), a, lines 9–10.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, II, 387 (no. 210), margin, lines 12–36.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, II, 391 (no. 212), a, lines 26–8. He adds that there is no longer any community in Palestine that could be of aid, except the community of Tyre.

²⁰ *ibid.*, II, 163 (no. 88), a, lines 12–17; also his other letter, no. 89, *ibid.*, 164, a, lines 9–13.

²¹ 122; cf. Goitein (1967/68), 164; Idris, (1962), 106–08. The fighting of that period was between Ḥammād and the Zanāta people. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, IX, pp. 152f. has similar events under AH 389.

him grandeur, reach us, saying that his position with the *ṣulṭān* exceeds even what it used to be.²²

In the eyes of the Jewish merchants in Qayrawān, the war against Ḥammād was a war against the Bedouin, by which the Banū Zanāta were meant. Joseph b. Berekhiah, mentioned above, writes some time after Bādīs' sudden death (in May 1016); his letter is very torn and faded, but we can still read some of it:

The nation is powerless ... the gravity of our situation ... everywhere, in all the Maghrib ... already is dead and in ruins and taken over by ... the roads are uncared for, and the changing of the kings; there is no justice Again ugly circumstances befell our city Qayrawān especially, which ... [lack of] sustenance 'and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes' (Haggai 1: 6); and the numerous campaigns against the Bedouin 'For I sat all men every one against his neighbour' (Zechariah 8: 10); and because of our sins there appeared ... the son of Barhūn al-Tāhīrtī, of blessed memory, when he reached Qayṭūn Zanāta he had to pay a tithe of The matter was discussed and a *fatwa* was issued ... I beg God to thwart it; all the travelling merchants began to be frightened As to the Maghrib, both the far and the near, it is dead ... because of our sins and deviations²³

However, there was a time when things returned to normal; we read of this in a letter from the same Joseph b. Berekhiah, who writes from Qayrawān:

I already informed you about the relaxation of our place after the annoyances, and the security after the terror. This [happened] since the *ṣulṭān* returned unhurt from the Maghrib, victorious, and our Master Abū Ishāq the *nāgīd* returned with him.

The text probably refers to the *nāgīd* who succeeded Abraham b. 'Aṭā' (who died around 1018), Jacob b. 'Amram.²⁴

I have already mentioned (part 1) the *sayyida*, 'the lady'; she was the mentor of her nephew, al-Mu'izz, when he was still too young to take over the burdens of ruling. She was known by the name Umm Mallāl; in practice, was the ruler of Ifriqiyyā and died on 30 Rajab 414/18 October 1023.²⁵ From the Geniza letters we learn that she was the owner of a ship, which was probably famous for a period of several decades; it is mentioned quite often in merchants' letters. Dunash b. Isaac, who writes from Tripoli in Libya, mentions that his partner ben Zaydān hurried to catch the ship of *al-sayyida*, without Dunash's knowledge.²⁶ In later times it was also known as *markab*

²² 146, a, lines 25–30, cf. Idris (1962), 112–19; Goitein (1964/65), 174.

²³ 145, a, lines 11–22; cf. Idris (1962), 119–22; Goitein (1968/69), 22f.; in Gil (1997), II, 415–27 I edited 145 before 146, but Goitein's view, *ibid.*, seems to be more appropriate. Qayṭūn (or: Gīṭūn) Zanāta: see Idris (1962), 165, 469: simply Qayṭūn or Qayṭūn Bayyāda. A letter from Isma'īl b. Barhūn al-Tāhīrtī (120, b, lines 2–5, seems to originate from the time immediately following that troubled period, as he describes the decay of the family's home in Qayrawān,

... the (sewage) pipes are blocked, and the roofs ... and the street is inhabited by ill-bred people; the courtyard needs pebbles ... and bricks and timber and beams which cannot be carried through the house (to the courtyard), only through the corridor; the street-pipe has to be cleaned, from the roof to the ... and the palm branches for covering the roof have to be tied.

²⁴ 148, a, lines 4–5. The death of Abraham b. 'Aṭā': Gil (1997), I, 191. The *ṣulṭān* mentioned here should have been al-Mu'izz, although he was a child of less than nine years when he succeeded his father, Bādīs. I am aware that the timing of what is said in the letter is doubtful, and it might still have been written in the days of Bādīs and of Abraham b. 'Aṭā'.

²⁵ See Ibn 'Idhārī, I, 272; Idris (1962), 141.

²⁶ 204, a, line 18.

(ship of) al-Dūgī;²⁷ al-Mu‘izz’s predecessor, Bādīs, also apparently owned a ship, *markab Abū Dhahab allādhi lil-sulṭān* (‘which is owned by the sultan’).²⁸

During the period 1023–26, fierce battles took place between the leaders of the Zanāta, (in Tripoli and the surrounding area) and al-Mu‘izz. At the head of the Zanāta we find Khalifa b. Warrū, whose father, Warrū b. Sa‘īd, had been involved in the earlier Zanāta uprisings. These events are echoed in a letter, probably written on 4 May 1027, by the merchant Ṣadaqa b. ‘Ayyāsh, in Alexandria. After enumerating several huge transportations of flax, which he intended to send to Sicily, he notes that there was no need to send them there, but rather (as probably planned earlier) to the Maghrib. As he puts it:

We intended to transport most of our flax to Sicily, but news reached us that the *amīr* Sharaf al-Dawla (i.e. al-Mu‘izz), may God make his grandeur permanent, returned to Tripoli and triumphed over his foes. I hope that this is true, with God’s will; so we asked for the blessing of God, may He be exalted, and we carried all we had to Qayrawān.²⁹

A letter written about two months earlier (on 11 March 1027) from Mahdiyya by Hārūn b. Joseph al-Ghazzāl, describes circumstances in the city, where most of the commodities remained stored. ‘I reached our commodities, and they remain; nobody can sell for even one dirham’. The writer even moved from Qayrawān to Mahdiyya, as the news from Qayrawān was bad.³⁰

10. *A Spanish episode*

In 1010 Cordova became the scene of prolonged conflict between the reigning family and its appointees, generally the so-called ‘slavons’ (*ṣaqālība*), European manumitted slaves, on the one hand, and the Berbers on the other. Hishām II al-Mu‘ayyad was reinstated as caliph by the ‘slave’ Wāḍiḥ, who became the real ruler of the kingdom. The reaction of the Berbers culminated in the murder of Wāḍiḥ on 16 October 1011. On 25 February of that year, Mūsā b. Yahyā al-Majjānī wrote from Qayrawān. His letter deals mainly with a transport of silver for Joseph Ibn ‘Awkal in Fustat. The letter is torn all around and partly faded. Nevertheless, one can read about the merchant Hīsdai b. Ḥalābū (or Aḥlābū), who became caught up on some affair, ‘and is in a terrible emergency ... the Berbers ... whereas the “slave” (al-Ṣaqalībī, i.e. Wāḍiḥ) is with Hishām and they would prefer to die rather than [surrender to?] the Berber ...’.³¹

11. *The Earthquake of 1033*

A very severe earthquake struck Palestine at the end of 1033. Nāṣir Khusraw, who was in Ramla on 1 March 1047, some thirteen years after the earthquake, mentions having found an inscription in the *jāmi‘* there, noting the earthquake which occurred on 15 Muḥarram AH 425 (10 December AD 1033). The earthquake is also mentioned in several Arab sources, as well as by Georgius Cedrenus. One of the leading personalities among the Jews of Ramla, Abū

²⁷ 350, a, line 4.

²⁸ 151, a, line 3; see more about these ships in Gil (1997), IV, in the index of the ships, 924–8.

²⁹ See Idris (1962), 103–06, 161–4; 158, b, in the margins. In the early 1160s, mention is still made of ships (of the *khinzīra* type) of b. Warrū, of the people of Iṭrābulus (= Tripoli) al-Gharb; see 452, a, line 18; b, lines 10, 26.

³⁰ 175, a, line 5; Goitein (1966/67), 383–7.

³¹ Lévi-Provençal (1950/67), II, 315–8; 117, a, lines 18–19; cf. Ashtor (1960/66), II, 12f.; Goitein (1967/68, part 2), 71–3.

Bishr Solomon b. Şemaḥ al-‘Aṭṭār (‘dealer in spices’) wrote to Fustat about the earthquake:

...(people) went out of the houses to the streets, as they saw the walls of the houses about to fall, and the beams separate from the walls, and move back and forth, and the reinforced buildings falling and the new ones destroyed. Many died beneath the ruins as they did not manage to escape by any way. So everybody left the apartments, running away, deserting everything they had, to save their lives. Wherever they looked, they saw the mightiness of God. The walls were colliding with each other and falling down and the remaining ones were shattered and split, deserted by their inhabitants, as their owners were frightened lest they fall upon them; this, to this day. If I were to describe even part of what occurred, my hand would be exhausted from writing, and the mind would be distorted by what the eye saw and the ear heard; and it came to pass: ‘Behold the Lord maketh the earth empty and maketh it waste, and turned it upside down and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof’ (Isaiah 24: 1) This happened on Thursday, the 12th of the month of Tevet (5 December 1033), close to sunset, suddenly, both in Ramla and all the country of the Philistines, both of fenced cities and of country villages (I Samuel 6: 18), as well as in all strongholds of the seashore to the citadel of Haifa and all cities of the Negev and the mountains, with Jerusalem and all its (surrounding towns), until Shekhem and all its (surrounding) villages, until Tiberias and all its surroundings, the mountain of the Galilee, and all of the beloved land All this happened before the end of the day, while everybody could see, and warn each other; if it were night with everybody asleep in their beds, only some remnants would have escaped... and very miraculously, during all the days when people were scattered in the fields and streets, no rain fell. Even the city’s governor and those in the king’s service erected tents outside the city and there they still are³²

12. *More trouble in the Maghrib*

In AH 420, (AD 1029), the Zanāta started a new uprising against al-Mu‘izz. When the news reached al-Mu‘izz, he mobilized his army and went himself to lead it. Fierce battles took place at Jamūnis al-ṣābūn (South of Qayrawān), where the Zanāta suffered a grave defeat.³³ The troubles continued, and in 432/1032 the Shiites rebelled, but al-Mu‘izz defeated them and slaughtered many of them.³⁴ During the period of these troubles, Ephraim b. Isma‘il al-Jawharī, on 2 April 1032, wrote a letter from Alexandria to Joseph Ibn ‘Awkal. ‘Our situation’, he writes, ‘could not be better; I have already written to you about Salāma b. Barrāk, that he reached Abū Qīr, and arrived in Alexandria safely’. Further:

³² See Solomon b. Şemaḥ’s letter: Gil (1983), II 382–4 (no. 209). See also Nāṣir Khusraw (text), 19, (translation), 64. See Gil (1992), 399f., and note 53 with the references to the Arab sources and to Cedrenus. The date as given in the letter, corresponding to 5 December 1033, is authentic and more trustworthy than is the one in the literary sources. ‘The fenced cities’ etc., the expression in the original: *kōfer ha-perāzī* is understood to mean the places mentioned in the Bible in the previous verse: ‘Ashdod, Gaza, Askelon, Gath, Ekron’ (the spelling as in the KJV). Ibn al-Jawzī, ‘*Ajā’ib* (MS Paris 1567) writes that half the city of Ramla was destroyed, a part of the well of the Temple Mount (*bayt al-maqdis* may also mean Jerusalem) collapsed, as did the *mināra* (chandelier) in the *jāmi’* of Ashkelon. We have indirect evidence of the earthquake in an agreement drawn up in Ramla, in 1030, by which the community lets half of a ruined house belonging to the Synagogue of the Palestinians to Ṣedāqā b. Yefet al-Shīrajī (the dealer in sesame-oil) for twenty years.

³³ Ibn al-Athir, *Kāmil*, IX, 377; cf. Idris (1962), I, 163.

³⁴ Ibn al-Athir, *Kāmil*, IX, 427; cf. Idris (1962), I, 163.

While loading any freight in the ship, the people are worried about the men that were taken to the battleships (*qaṭā'i*). I beg God that he eases the matter for them. No ship had even half of its freight completely loaded; while people await the arrival of the rest of the Nile vessels, from Rashīd, the coastguard ships did not allow anybody to load any goods.³⁵

13. *Abraham al-Tustarī*

On 25 October 1047, the Karaite Abū Sa'd Abraham b. Yāshār (Sahl) al-Tustarī was killed by soldiers of the Turkish units in the Fatimid army. Abraham had been a very influential figure in the Fatimid administration, and together with his brother, Ḥesed, more than once intervened in favour of the Jewish communities, in Jerusalem and in other localities. The murder was the result of a long, ongoing feud between Turks and Blacks in the Fatimid army, and of a power struggle at the highest levels of the administration, in which Abraham was deeply involved.³⁶ Here are a few Geniza texts in which the Tustarī is mentioned. In correspondence concerning power of attorney, we find the leader of the Jewish community in Tyre, Samuel *he-ḥāvēr* b. Moses mentioning: 'The deed written by the eminent elder, his honoured holiness, our Lord and Master Abraham, may God guard him, nicknamed Abū Sa'd, may our Rock help him [play on the name Sa'd, meaning help], who is known as al-Tustarī'... Power of attorney was given to him by two ladies who wanted him to take a gilded garment, which they had inherited from their late father, as a deposit; Abraham, 'may God guard him', is authorized to sell it.³⁷

Moses ha-Sōfēr (=the scribe) asks the Tustarī, in a very flowery letter, to grant him a subsidy to travel to Palestine to visit his sick father.³⁸ A Karaite leader, Tūviya b. Moses, writes to the Tustarī, asking for a letter to the tax collectors in connection with his poll-tax.³⁹ In a letter written from Tiberias, Hillēl b. Yeshū'a mentions the murder of Abraham: '... due to our many sins, the helping hand of the old man was done away with'.⁴⁰

14. *The secession of Ifriqiyā*

In AH 440 (1048/49), al-Mu'izz broke away from the Fatimid rulers of Egypt. In fact, it was a process which took several years, with the rupture taking place gradually. If one relies on numismatic evidence, it started in AH 439 (1047/48) and was completed in 443 (1051/52).⁴¹ In August 1048, Judah b. Salāma writes from Ṣahrajt in Egypt to his partner Abū Sa'id in Fustat, complaining: 'To this day, which is Thursday ... in Elul, no letter nor any news has arrived from Qayrawān, except for one brought by a *fayj* [a postman], seven and a half months ago.'⁴²

Very soon, however, the Maghrib had to face the invasion of the Bedouin tribes from Egypt. The way to Ifriqiyā led them first to the region of Barqa, then ruled by the *amīr* of Barqa, Jubāra b. Mukhtār. A Geniza letter contains

³⁵ 182, a, lines 6–7, 16–19.

³⁶ See Nāṣir Khusraw, *Safar nāmeḥ*, 55 (text), 159 (translation); Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, II, 195f.; Gil (1992), 405, with more references.

³⁷ Gil (1983), II, 494f. (no. 278).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 412f. (no. 224).

³⁹ Gil (1983), 523–5 (no. 294).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 455f. (no. 251).

⁴¹ Ibn 'Idhāri, *Bayān*, I, 277. See the discussion and the references: Idris (1962), 189f.; see also: Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, IX, 566; Ibn Taghrī Bardī, *Nujūm*, V, 50f.

⁴² 718, a, lines 10–11.

an account referring to both father and son, Mukhtār and Jubāra. It is written in Hebrew, torn at the beginning and the end, and along the right margin. It deals with the redemption of Jewish captives.⁴³ In it, we also find the name Yabqā b. Abī Razīn, a close associate of Mukhtār and his son. A group of elders are said to have waited ‘in his [Mukhtār’s] tents, sitting there during the heat of the day and the cold of the night’. He was ready to accept the sum for the redemption, provided that they also buy an *edōmī* (i.e. European) slave, for 20 dinars, ‘and then take your brethren’. To which they replied: ‘This we cannot do, to get the fame of a dishonest religion’. Apparently, there was some hard bargaining going on between Mukhtār and his son and the Jewish delegates.⁴⁴ Another letter apparently connected with the matter of the captives was written by Mardūkh b. Mūsā, probably in 1046, where it says:

On this very day the *qārib* [a type of vessel] of b. Mulayka arrived from Lukk [a locality close to Tripoli in Libya]; he reports that the *amīr* Jubāra returned the ship and all the freight that he had unloaded, to Barqa; I hope it is true and I beg God to protect anybody who had something on this ship.⁴⁵

A court record drawn up in 1042, in Fustat, concerning a conflict between two Barqa merchants, mentions fifteen loads of flax, which had arrived from Barqa in 1038, carried on Jubāra’s ship.⁴⁶ The Jewish merchants were apparently compelled to co-operate with Jubāra; some information about it can be found in a letter written by Abraham b. Joseph el-Šabbāgh from Alexandria in about 1050:

The merchants who went to Barqa are now back, without any freight, having had to leave the loads [of flax] there, until they pay the money in Fustat. On the very day of their arrival they put together 1,300 dinars and paid them in Gīza to Jubāra’s associate ... who would send them to Gīza I was informed that the ship was unloaded by Jubāra, who transferred [the goods] to his own ship, which left for Alexandria.⁴⁷

The local *dayyān* of Barqa, Joseph b. Shemariah, states in his letter from Alexandria that ‘he received bad news from the city (i.e. Barqa) and that it is now in ruins, and most of its Muslims have been deported. Wheat costs a dinar for a *wayba* and everything is paralysed; nobody sells or buys’. This is perhaps related to the reaction of the Fatimid administration following al-Mu’izz’s secession. Indeed, Ibn ‘Idhārī recorded the receipt in Qayrawān of a letter from ‘the *amīr* Jubāra b. Mukhtār al-‘Arabī, from Barqa, in which he declares his complete submission (*al-sam’ wa’l-tā’a*) to al-Mu’izz b. Bādīs. He announced that he and the people of Barqa set fire to the *minbars*, on which blessings were said for Fatimids, and they burnt their banners and dissented from them and cursed them on their *minbars*, saying blessings for al-Qā’im *bi-amri’llāh* al-‘Abbāsī’.⁴⁸

⁴³ TS 13 J 14, f. 20, lines 15–21, edited by Mann (1970), II, p. 87, and see *ibid.*, vol. I, 90; cf. Goitein (1967/93), I, 327.

⁴⁴ TS 13 J 20, f. 25, edited by Mann (1970), II, 88; cf. *ibid.*, vol. I, 90f.; Yabqā b. Abī Razīn is apparently identical to Yabqā b. Isma’īl, who carried a purse with 174¼ dinars on the ship of Mi’dād, for an unidentified Jewish merchant, see 135, c, lines 32–4.

⁴⁵ 530, a lines 19–22.

⁴⁶ 632, b, lines 28–9. See the whole letter translated in Goitein (1973), 95–101 (no. 17).

⁴⁷ 209, a, lines 5–11; cf. Goitein (1976/93), I, 327.

⁴⁸ 733, a, lines 22–3; cf. Goitein (1967/93), IV, 242, who assumed that the time of the letter was ‘1060 or so’. See Ibn ‘Idhārī, 288; see also Idris (1962), 202f.

A letter from Nehorai b. Nissim describes another insolent act by Jubāra, showing that there was a real battle between him and the Fatimids: ‘...The news from Alexandria is bad. Jubāra and Ibn Abī Yadū besiege it from the land, and the war fleet from the sea. Nobody can enter or exit it. I pray to God for a good outcome’. This event, not mentioned—as far as I know—in any Arabic source, was probably a direct result of Jubāra’s decision to side with al-Mu‘izz.⁴⁹

15. *The rebellion in Sūsa*

While the pressure from the Bedouin invaders gradually endangered the rule of al-Mu‘izz, local rebellions took place in several cities of Ifrīqiyyā in around 1053. The people of Sūsa refused to pay their taxes, claiming the money was needed for their own security. They also confiscated the inheritance of al-Mu‘izz’s sister. Al-Mu‘izz sent a naval force and military units. These forces suffered severe losses, but in the end the city was subdued by forces led by Tamīm, Mu‘izz’s son.⁵⁰

Barhūn b. Mūsā al-Tāhīrī writes at the time, from Trapani in Sicily, that his brother Abū Sa‘īd Joseph is blocked in Sūsa, and cannot leave.⁵¹ His cousin, Nissim b. Isaac, also writes from Sūsa around that time, apparently when things were already returning to normal—and in the parts of the letter that are legible, we find: ‘... what our companions had to pass through ...’.⁵² Isma‘īl b. Farah writes, apparently at the same time, that:

For the past eight months, they were striving to go to Sūsa, but it was impossible: a group of Muslims went of whom ... the Bedouin killed [them] and searched their bellies, saying: ‘perhaps you swallowed the dinars’; and our companions told us that this was how al-Ashqar b. Abī Sulaymān the jeweller, son of poor Sulaymān, died. I did not go, but I nearly did, and would have met the same fate. If not for our belongings in Sūsa, he would not have gone either. He arrived in Sūsa, and lo, there was a terrible rebellion there. They mutinied against the king, the shops were plundered and so was the *funduq* (= inn) of b. Abī’l-Miskīn; the citadel of the *ribāt* and the citadel of Ṭāriq were burnt down. It was a miracle that he left Sūsa safely.⁵³

16. *Nāṣir al-dawla and Fakhr al-‘Arab*

One of the high-ranking officials of the Fatimids was Nāṣir al-dawla, Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥasan b. Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Taghlibī, *al-amīr al-muzaffar*. We find him first as the *amīr* of Damascus on behalf of the Fatimids. He was appointed to this post on 16 Jumādā II, AH 433, 10 February 1042. The significance of this

⁴⁹ 240, b, lines 5–7. Jubāra is still mentioned, in around 1069, as having been in charge of guarding loads of flax sent to Sicily. See a letter from Palermo, cf. Ḥayyim b. ‘Ammār Madīnī, 654, b, lines 22–3.

⁵⁰ See Idris (1962), 224f.; al-Tijānī, 28; Ibn ‘Idhārī, I, 293; Ibn Khaldūn, *Ibar*, VI, 326. All this happened in AH 445, which began on 23 April 1053.

⁵¹ 344, a, line 4.

⁵² 393, a line 16; the date there apparently needs to be changed to c. 1053 (instead of 1052).

⁵³ 488, a, lines 10–15; its date should be corrected to 19 September 1053, and see also the note to line 8. In the summer of 1056 Labrāt b. Moses b. Sughmār wrote a letter from Sūsa, in which he says that the maritime way from the city to Mahdiyya was cut off by warships; this might be connected with the flight of al-Mu‘izz and his retinue to Mahdiyya, as described by Idris (1962), I, 229. See 613, a, lines 12–13; the maritime siege of the city is mentioned in another letter by the same writer, Labrāt: ‘... as to rice and lentils: it is that the war fleets were positioned in front of us, in Sūsa, therefore they decayed ...’; see 615, a, line 40.

appointment was that he became the commander of the Fatimid army in Syria. Nāṣir al-dawla was a scion of the Ḥamdānids of Aleppo; he led the expedition against Thumāl the Mirdāsīd, ruler of Aleppo.⁵⁴ In his day, apparently for the sake of balance, a Turk was appointed to be the governor of Damascus. This was Dhukhayrat al-dawla Ḥaydara, who held this position from February 1050 until 1059. The Bedouin schemed against the Jews of Damascus, based on the decision by the qadi, 'the nephew of Abū'l-Sayyār'; the water supply to the Jews was to be cut off.⁵⁵ A letter written by the Jewish community of Damascus describes the distress of the Jews there when the Fatimid rule over the city was weakening, and ritual slaughter was forbidden. They describe how they managed to obtain a *nishtewān* (see above, part 1, p. 166) from al-Mustaṣhir, abolishing what was decided by that Ḥaydara.⁵⁶

The Geniza has preserved an additional fact about Nāṣir al-dawla: he was the owner of a ship which transported goods for the Jewish Maghribī merchants, mainly flax. These were noted by Joseph b. Mūsā al-Tāhīrtī in the autumn of 1063. Thus Abraham b. Farrāḥ, writing from Alexandria on 11 October 1056: 'qārib [the ship of] *mawla'ī al-amīr nāṣir al-dawla* just arrived from Māzar in Sicily after a journey of 20 days'. Abraham b. Farrāḥ also mentions it in his letter of 11 June 1066; we read about goods being sent with the ship of Abū Naṣr in a letter by Mūsā b. Isaac al-Safāquṣī, of 7 September 1059.⁵⁷ Nāṣir al-dawla's brother, Fakhr al-'Arab, also owner of a ship, is mentioned as well. He too bore the title *al-amīr*. Abū Ishāq, whose exact identity we do not know, only that his name was Abraham, as shown by the *kunya*, purchased a large quantity of books from the legacy of the sons of Berekhiah in Qayrawān, and sent it with the ship of Fakhr al-'Arab.⁵⁸ Fakhr al-'Arab is mentioned in Arab sources, though in a rather succinct manner. He was murdered by the Turks in AH 465 (1072/73), as were his brothers Nāṣir al-dawla and Tāj al-ma'ālī; the entire family of the Ḥamdānids in Egypt was then wiped out.⁵⁹

The continuing internal struggles of that period, and particularly the Bedouin raids and battles and those made by the battalions of slaves (*al-'abīd*), are echoed in a letter from the beginning of 1052, whose writer remains unknown and of which an important part is lost:

There befell the people, these days, a situation the solution for which I beg God; the Banū Qurra and the 'abīd have reached Gīza, and the people are in an extremely precarious situation, in every sense and way. Also, the status of the 'helping leader' (*ha-qāṣīn ha'ōzēr*, which probably refers to the vizier al-Yāzūri, to be mentioned shortly) is the opposite of what we would like. These are matters about which you already undoubtedly have read and are known to you.... I was informed, in the presence of a group of

⁵⁴ Ibn Muyassar, *Akhbār*, 6, and see the editor's note, *ibid.*, Ibn Taghri Bardī, V, 45, 63, 81, 83, 90f.; cf. Gil (1992), 405f. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, X, 80–87, has a lengthy description of events in which Nāṣir al-dawla was involved.

⁵⁵ On the animosity between Nāṣir al-dawla and the Turkish army units see Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, 83–5; it was the Turks who killed him (*ibid.*, 87). See also Ibn Muyassar, *Akhbār*, 33f.; Ibn al-Ṣayrafī, 41.

⁵⁶ Gil (1983), II, 506f. (no. 285); Gil (1992), 405f. and the references in note 57. Ḥaydara: see Ibn Muyassar, *Akhbār*, 10–11, and see there his titles, and the editor's note 37.

⁵⁷ See 374, b, line 28; 553, a, line 8; 556, a, lines 14, 17; 748, a, line 9.

⁵⁸ See Gil (1997), I, 689; 688, a, line 16, written in Mahdiyya; 556, a, lines 13, 22, the letter by Abraham b. Farrāḥ mentioned in the previous note; the ship of Fakhr al-'Arab is said there to have arrived in the region of Ṭubruq. Fakhr al-'Arab was much involved in business with Jewish merchants, see below and note 60.

⁵⁹ See Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, X, 87; Ibn Muyassar, *Akhbār*, 39 (where he is called Fakhr al-dawla).

people: ‘Your brother received an income of 500 dinars: a mule and its saddle for 200 dinars and 300 in gold, from Fakhr al-‘Arab’.⁶⁰

17. *Al-Yāzūrī*

The qadi Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Yāzūrī was—as reflected in his name—from Yāzūr in Palestine, where his father had been a peasant. He became rich and moved to Ramla, where he became a qadi (some said that it was his elder son, brother of Ḥasan, who became a qadi). Ḥasan inherited this position from him. He became vizier in Egypt (1 June 1050–April 1058) after a long period of co-operation with the Karaite Tustarī brothers, trustees for the caliph’s mother. He was appointed vizier on 7 Muḥarram 442, 1 June 1050. In addition to the Tustarīs, among his main supporters was the above-mentioned Nāṣir al-dawla.⁶¹ Al-Yāzūrī’s principal assistant in matters of the economy was the Jew Judah b. al-‘Uṣfūra, a trustee for Caliph al-Mustanāṣir’s mother. Two letters from a member of the Palestinian yeshiva in Jerusalem mention (in cryptic lists) huge sums of money deposited by al-Yāzūrāy, the two Yāzūrīs, apparently the vizier and his son. Abū Zikrī Judah b. al-‘Uṣfūra is said to have died in December 1059, as noted in a letter written in Jerusalem by a member of the Saḥāḥ family, Solomon b. Moses al-Saḥāḥ.⁶² The influence the Jewish Maghribī merchants had on al-Yāzūrī can be seen in a letter from Nehorai b. Nissim, written around 1053, dealing with (among other matters) a *sijill*, an official document intended to give the addressee, Faraḥ b. Isma‘īl, a position (probably in matters of flax) as a kind of trustee of the authorities. It says:

You mention the matter of the *sijill*; do not think that I neglected it. I claim it every day from Ibn Sha‘yā [an influential money changer: David b. Isaiah], but he tells me: the chief of the *dīwān* said: I shall not write 200 letters to the qadi every day until he issues an order of the caliph (*tawqī‘*) about his official service in that region for him. Whenever I ask for it, I receive the same pretext, until I told him: you wish to fight me. I shall not accept this pretext from you. He then said: I shall do everything I can. I shall also claim it from him.

Undoubtedly, al-Yāzūrī is meant here by the qadi.⁶³

18. *The downfall of Qayrawān*

The invasion of Ifrīqiyyā by the Bedouin tribes from Egypt began in AH 442 (which began on 26 May 1050). It was a result of the conflict between the Fatimid rulers of Egypt and the Zirid rulers of Ifrīqiyyā, described above as the

⁶⁰ 816, a, lines 10–13; Fakhr al-‘Arab is also mentioned there further, b, lines 12–13, about pecuniary matters, in which the governor (*‘amil*) of Ifṭīḥ is also involved.

⁶¹ See Lane-Poole (1968), 142–4; Gil (1992), 403–05 and note 36, with references. Ibn Muyassar, *Akḥbār*, 16–17, has a succinct biography of al-Yāzūrī and mentions the support he received from Nāṣir al-dawla. He was killed by the Turks on 22 Ṣafar; see also Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir‘āḥ*, MS Paris 1506, fol. 30.

⁶² Gil (1983), III, 117 (nos 463, 464; see the introduction to no. 464). Judah b. al-‘Uṣfūra: *ibid.*, 199 (no. 490, b, line 10); he is mentioned in a letter written in Fustat, in about 1040, sent to Jerusalem, in a Hebrew name, ben al-Ṣippōrī, *ibid.*, II, p. 326 (no. 190, a, line 14); see also: Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir‘āḥ*, MS Paris 1506, fol. 30b. Heavy fines were imposed on al-Yāzūrī and eighty of his followers. The fine on Yāzūrī was three thousand thousand dinars. He possessed huge properties in Yāzūr (in Palestine), for which he avoided paying the taxes due to the authorities. This is somewhat in line with the huge sums referred to him in the Geniza letter mentioned here.

⁶³ 255, a, right margin. See a survey of al-Yāzūrī’s role in centralizing the administration in Egypt: Walker (2002), 46.

secession of the Zīrid ruler, al-Mu‘izz, from the generations-long subjection to the rulers of Egypt. The symbolic expression of the secession was the mention in the *khutba*, the Friday sermon, of the Abbasid caliph, al-Qā‘im, instead of the Fatimid al-Mustanṣir. Qayrawān was taken and plundered by the Bedouin (Banū Hilāl) during Ramaḍān 449, November 1057.⁶⁴ In the midst of these troubles a serious revolt occurred in Sūsa, in the year 445 (began on 23 April 1053), against the Zīrid ruler al-Mu‘izz b. Bādīs. The cause of the revolt was the local population’s refusal to pay taxes. Al-Mu‘izz’s sister died there, and her properties were confiscated by the city. A war fleet was sent against the Susans, and it burnt sixty ships moored in the port. The end result was that the Bedouin took over the city.⁶⁵

Labrāt b. Moses b. Sughmār writes from Sūsa in August, probably in 1053:

I am in a situation where I beg God that He look at us in this distress. My brother, I swear by my father, that most times we only pray for death, as we in fact reached the time when it is said (Jeremiah 8: 3): ‘and death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue’, etc. May God hasten to bring us either redemption or death, as life is no good to anything in such a poor miserable time, as for whoever is caught in it, death is his life, as we read (Job 3: 21): ‘long for death but it cometh not’ and dig for it more than for hidden treasures; (Lamentations 3: 50): ‘until the Lord look down and behold from heaven’.⁶⁶

It is worth noting the local nature of such events. War was going on around Sūsa, while other towns and cities flourished. Thus we have a letter from the great Alexandrian merchant Abraham b. Farrāḥ, written in Alexandria on 21 July 1053. He writes about a ‘man who set sail from Tarābulus on a ship laden with oil for Barnīq, which was retained in Bandariyya’ and who told ‘good tidings from the Maghrib’, and that there is an immense abundance in the land of Ifrīqiyyā. He also mentioned the price of wheat in Qayrawān.⁶⁷

In AH 439, 1046/47, al-Mu‘izz was still engaged in collusion with the Byzantines.⁶⁸ Very soon after that, he had to direct his attention to the invasion of the Banū Hilāl. The tension is felt in the autumn of 1048, when Judah b. Salāma writes from Ṣahrajt to a certain Abū Sa‘īd in Fustat: ‘I did not receive any letter nor any (other) news from Qayrawān, except one by a postman [*faḥḥ*], after an interval of seven and a half months’.⁶⁹ Thereafter, several events occurred, which culminated in the fall of the city of Qayrawān, after a siege which began in April 1052.⁷⁰

In the early 1050s, Isma‘īl b. Jacob al-Andalusī writes, apparently from Mahdiyya, that ‘the city was until now dead, because of what we suffered from the enemy. This winter we were in terrible distress, until God had mercy and the enemy was driven away’.⁷¹ Also from Mahdiyya, Khallūf b. Mūsā, who writes on 8 September 1051, mentions an apparently grave event which occurred in the city, ‘as you will find out’ and which made the summing up of the accounts impossible.⁷²

⁶⁴ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, IX, 566–9; cf. Lane-Poole (1968), 138; Idris (1962), 210–31.

⁶⁵ Ibn ‘Idhārī, 293; al-Tijānī, 28–30; cf. Idris (1962), I, 223f.

⁶⁶ 614, a, lines 3–7.

⁶⁷ 545, a, lines 14–15; 28 *thumna* of wheat for a dinar (*thumna* seems to be c. a quarter of a litre), see Hinz (1970), 52.

⁶⁸ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, IX, 542.

⁶⁹ 718, a, lines 10–11.

⁷⁰ Ibn ‘Idhārī, 289–94; see Idris (1962), I, 189, 205–31, and see more sources listed there.

⁷¹ 573, a, lines 65–6; cf. Goitein (1967/93), I, 376 (no. 28), who assumed that the letter was from 1064.

⁷² 581, a, line 28.

An act of court, written in the early 1060s, contains a copy of a power of attorney concerning money owed by Manasseh b. Da'ūd, written on Monday 26 Tammuz 4815 of the creation (24 July 1055) in Qayrawān. This shows that there was still a Jewish population there, and even a functioning court in the city, which was soon to be completely demolished.⁷³ Information seems to have come from the same venue, as stated in a letter of Abraham b. David b. Sughmār, apparently written in Alexandria, to his son David in Fustat: '[I could not describe to you] how much I was worried by this news ... from you (2 Kings 21: 12): "that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle"'; and further: 'God knows how we would have passed these [holidays?] because of the news, were it not for the letter from the *ḥāvēr*, may God guard him, in which he writes that generally our people were not hurt'.⁷⁴

An account, containing three leaves, written by Barhūn b. Mūsā al-Tāhirtī in 1055, mentions: 'I had given him orders of payment, from Qayrawān to Mahdiyya, since it was impossible to get out of the city, and I changed it for him in Mahdiyya.⁷⁵ In about 1056, Barhūn b. Šālīḥ al-Tāhirtī is worried about the Maghrib: 'my heart is much concerned (*muta'alliq*) about the news from the Maghrib, may God show good tidings about them'.⁷⁶

Sometime in the summer of 1056, Labrāt b. Moses, writing from Sūsa to his brother Judah in Fustat, bewails what is happening in the Maghrib (Psalms 69: 2–3): 'I sink in deep mire where there is no standing. I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me'. Further: 'I only get answers to letters that I send to Mahdiyya, if they safely arrive a month later, since regarding us it is said (Lamentations 3: 9): 'He hath enclosed my ways with hewn stone, he hath made my paths crooked'. Thereafter, the writer expresses his wish that the head of the yeshiva (apparently the Palestinian one) 'may God make his grandeur permanent, write to the community and console them about what they had to go through, and their having been exiled ... from their city and excluded from their land, and from their quarter and the magnificent temple (Jeremiah 19: 8): "Every one that passeth thereby should be astonished and hiss because of all the plagues thereof"; and let him admonish them to collect from the people all deposits of the yeshivot and proclaim a solemn ban about it'. Obviously, the flight of the Qayrawān community is meant.⁷⁷

On 3 August 1057, the same Labrāt writes to Nehorai b. Nissim in Fustat from Mahdiyya, without mentioning Qayrawān. One may assume that the Jewish community there no longer existed, its people probably having fled to Mahdiyya.⁷⁸ Again Labrāt, who writes from Mahdiyya on 9 January 1058 to his brother Judah in Fustat: he mentions a difference of about 20 dinars, adding: 'be not anxious about it. What is it worth compared with what we lost in Qayrawān'. He also adds further on: 'As to Qayrawān, it is empty, destroyed, nobody is left but the poor of the people, whereas the Arabs are in a terrible commotion among themselves'.⁷⁹

19. *The rebellion in Safāqus*

After having evacuated Qayrawān, the ruler of Ifriqiyā, al-Mu'izz b. Bādīs, installed himself in Mahdiyya (in 1057), and put his son, Tamīm, in command.

⁷³ 818, lines 33–50.

⁷⁴ 609, a, lines 6–8.

⁷⁵ 354, part 9, lines 6–7; see there the note to part 1, line 7.

⁷⁶ 333, b, lines 9–10.

⁷⁷ 613, a, lines 10–11; 20; b, lines 1–4; in a, line 13, the arrival of warships facing Sūsa is mentioned.

⁷⁸ 616.

⁷⁹ 617, a, lines 28–9, b, lines 36–7.

Following the tremendous changes that took place in the affairs of Ifrīqiya, there were revolts and uprisings against the Zīrids.⁸⁰ The most serious events occurred in Safāqūṣ, where a local leader, Ḥammū b. Malil al-Barghūṭī, was at the head of a prolonged conflict against the Zīrid Tammām b. al-Mu'izz. It is said that he took command of the city after having killed his relative, Maṣṣūr.⁸¹ Ḥammū is the one whom the Jewish merchants called *al-qā'id*, the chief. Mūsā b. Isaac al-Safāqūṣī, writing from Safāqūṣ on 7 September 1059, asks the addressee, Judah b. Moses Ibn Sughmār, in Fustat, to add to some garments which he is requested to send: *shay' min 'ūd 'ālī wa-mukhazzan* 'a quantity of superior, preserved aloes, together with perfume, which I shall offer to our Master the *qā'id*, may God grant him victory'. This was, if we are to believe Ibn 'Idhārī, while Maṣṣūr was still the *qā'id*, some two months before his death at the hands of Ḥammū.⁸² The Fatimids might have intended to come to the aid of these insurgents (or perhaps to do more than that), since we read in a letter by Benaiah b. Mūsā, written from Tinnīs in around 1060, that the commander of the Egyptian army had arrived and 'the warships are now at sea'.⁸³ The conflict between Ḥammū, the *qā'id* of Safāqūṣ and the Zīrid Tamīm developed into a real war; Ḥammū was defeated, after having tried to march against Mahdiyya. The decisive battle, in which Ḥammū was aided by the Bedouin, took place at Salaqta, in AH 455 (1063).⁸⁴

A letter from Salāma b. Mūsā al-Safāqūṣī, apparently written on 7 September 1064, describes events which had taken place a year earlier.⁸⁵ He mentions the crossing of the Zīrids' war fleet from Mahdiyya to Safāqūṣ. A ship carrying a large load of olive oil was confiscated by the *sulṭān* (meaning: Tamīm b. al-Mu'izz; Ḥammū is called here *al-qā'id*). The *sulṭān* confiscated any goods sent to Safāqūṣ or to the *qā'id*, and they were carried to Mahdiyya.⁸⁶ He writes:

As you know, a struggle (*fitna*) took place between the *sulṭān* and the *qā'id*. The army of the *sulṭān* attacked Safāqūṣ and advanced on the army of the *qā'id* and conquered the greater part of his country and wrested all the forts of the littoral from the *qā'id*, those which overlook the sea. The *sulṭān* got hold of the greater part of the area [of the *qā'id*]. The *sulṭān* proclaimed in the townships: whoever gives a man of Safāqūṣ a *qafiz* of oil, will have his blood and his properties unguarded. Only a few people who owed me [olives for sums of money] which I distributed, remained under the rule of the *qā'id*, as naturally everything is now under the control of the *sulṭān*. By God: one man, who is now under the rule of the *sulṭān*, owed me 100 dinars for 5,000 *qafiz*s of oil, and until now, I have gotten nothing from him.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Al-Mu'izz left Qayrawān on 29 October 1057, see Idris (1962), 228f.; he died on 2 September 1062; *ibid.*, 240. In 758, in a letter written on 1 January 1063, a certain Manasseh in Damascus asks his addressee in Fustat to inform him 'whether it was true that al-Mu'izz our king (*al-malik allādhi lanā*) had died; may God bring about good things'. These merchants felt themselves to be *maghribīs* and for them al-Mu'izz was 'our king'.

⁸¹ Ibn 'Idhārī, 294; in AH 451, on a Saturday, 2 Shawwāl (11 November 1059); the text in Ibn 'Idhārī repeatedly has Ibn Wamlil. Apparently, they belonged to a Bedouin tribe. See also: Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, X, 16; who calls him *al-qā'id*.

⁸² 748, a, line 31–2.

⁸³ 604, b, lines 6–7.

⁸⁴ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, X, 29 f.; Ibn 'Idhārī, 299; Nuwayrī, XXIV, 219; Ibn Khaldūn, *Ibar*, VI, 344; Idris (1962), I, 255 f. Salaqta: to the south of Mahdiyya, *Sullectum in Antiquity*, see Idris, (1962), II, 452f.

⁸⁵ 751, a, line 8: 'it is today one year' (since these things happened to me).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, a, lines 35–8; however, a part of the load was spared and sent to Sicily.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, a, lines 58–62; *qafiz*, a little more than four litres, see Hinz (1970).

Salāma—this we learn from his letter, which is the longest in the Geniza (it contains eighty-three full lines on the recto, plus fifty-seven shorter lines on the margin and another seventy-three full lines and the address on the verso)—gradually transferred his business to Sicily and intended to settle there:

I bought a house in Māzar and sent for my family to be brought from Safāqūs and they are about to arrive. All this, since I saw that the situation becomes impossible. In Ifrīqiyā I cannot live; I cannot enter Sūsa nor Mahdiyya, whereas I cannot go to my city (Safāqūs), as the *sulṭān* fights against it, and to travel there is impossible.⁸⁸

The writer, Salāma b. Mūsā, had had, prior to this, a special relationship with the *qā'id*, i.e. Hammū b. Malīl, and was even his trustee in assessing the taxes (*a'shār*, plural of *'ushr*; tithes) and collecting them from the olive growers in Yanūnash. On this occasion he also made several acquisitions of olives for his partners and for himself, but then the war started just as the olive harvest began.⁸⁹

Salāma has complaints regarding Mahdiyya. He blames his partner, Judah b. Moses, who stayed in Fustat, for not having congratulated him on having escaped unhurt from Mahdiyya, when he managed to extricate himself from 'perdition, the gruesome situation which I would not wish for anybody'. Further: 'my emotions have not ceased up until this moment, and I still have fear in my heart'; 'I was in a terrible situation'. All this was written after the *sulṭān's* (i.e. Tamīm's) people discovered that, despite his denials, Salāma carried with him a load of indigo worth 200 dinars. Nobody dared to help him, out of fear of the *sulṭān*, 'especially since all these villains are Jews, who know every secret'.⁹⁰ Another merchant, Nathan b. Nehorai, writing in around 1062 from Alexandria, also complains about what happened to him in Mahdiyya:

In the matter of [earning] my living, as I have already informed you, I remained with only one dinar in small change, which I have already spent. God, may He be exalted, will guide me; we continually find out about the abuses in Mahdiyya, matters on which it is impossible to elaborate.⁹¹

So also Bahlūl, writing from Mahdiyya in August 1062. After having fled from Qayrawān, he complains:

We were captured and exiled, we lost our properties and our houses were destroyed and left empty. I already informed you that all the books which I had copied and which my father, of blessed memory, had copied for me were scattered and lost. I proclaimed a ban on whoever finds them, may their foes, Jews and gentiles, devour them. This is what caused me even more distress, as I have nothing left for teaching, not even one leaf, nor are there even a few people [*minyān*, literally: ten people] whom to teach. Torah was destroyed at one blow in the Maghrib.⁹²

At the same time, in the summer of 1062, the above-mentioned Salāma b. Mūsā was in Alexandria, observing the influence of events in the Maghrib on Egypt. 'Fabrics are not marketed at all, neither Andalusian nor Sicilian. The city is at a standstill; nobody buys nor sells. People avoid buying or selling

⁸⁸ Ibid., b, lines 37–9.

⁸⁹ Ibid., a, lines 54–8; Yanūnash, see: Yāqūt, *Buldān*, IV, 1042: a village on the coast; Muqaddasī, 56, 217, 227: it has 360 oil presses; the editor there preferred the spelling BNWNH. See also Idris (1962), II, 453f.

⁹⁰ 751, a, lines 6–17.

⁹¹ 417, a, lines 17–19.

⁹² 782, a, lines 2–3, 22–5.

until they grasp what will happen there [in the Maghrib] may God save us and them'. However, he states: 'Mahdiyya is now safe and active'.⁹³

In around 1063 Nathan b. Nehorai writes from Alexandria. He mentions having received letters from Safāqūṣ (so it appears) about the spotting of ships. 'But they write that they are still overcome by fear, may God grant them peace'. He adds that he had not received any news from Mahdiyya, nor had anybody arrived from Tripoli nor from Safāqūṣ, 'Our people are in a situation known only by God, and Him I beg for solution'. Here is obvious evidence that shipping was interrupted by the events.⁹⁴

It seems that the situation returned to normal towards late autumn of 1062, as hinted at in a letter from Mūsā b. Abī'l-Ḥayy, dated 23 Kislev, 28 November (1062), written in Alexandria. Things are related in a quiet tone, except that the people of Tripoli were found to be in a terrible panic, since the *sultān* (i.e. Tamīm b. al-Mu'izz) imposed a fine on the community.⁹⁵

On 1 Iyyar, 20 April 1064, an unidentified merchant writes from Alexandria, mentioning that 'news which made my heart pleased arrived from the Maghrib'. He intends to travel to Mahdiyya.⁹⁶

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⁹³ 749, a, lines 9–12, 15.

⁹⁴ 435, a, lines 9–14; the same statement—that nobody arrived from Tripoli nor Safāqūṣ—is also found in another letter by Nathan, 420. Both letters were written in the month of Av (roughly August).

⁹⁵ 449, and see especially a, lines 19–20.

⁹⁶ 828, b, lines 1–3.