

ARTÍCULOS

“The Cloth that the Turkmān Took”: A Record of Trade in Plundered Goods from the Cairo Geniza?

«La tela que los turcomanos se llevaron»:
¿un registro del comercio de bienes saqueados de la Geniza de El Cairo?

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Abstract

Although the Turks are infrequently mentioned the Cairo Geniza texts, two enigmatic lines in a 12th manuscript refer to a Jewish trader who leaves Damascus with cloth obtained by the Turkmen, but provide no explanation about why this trader would purchase textiles from them. Examination of other Geniza texts reveals a profitable trade in second-hand goods, clothes in particular. Some garments were obtained locally in Egypt, but other second-hand garments and textiles were purchased from unnamed suppliers outside of Egypt. Contemporary Arabic sources from Iraq also mention the trade in second-hand goods, but note that the purchase of Bedouin plunder supplied many of these items. This study suggests that the Jewish trader in Syria may have purchased textiles from the Türkmen who, like the Bedouin in Iraq, were selling their plunder. If this interpretation is correct, this Geniza manuscript along with others shed new light on the activities of the Turks in the Mediterranean basin in the decades following the Seljuq conquests in the Middle East and Anatolia.

Keywords: Cairo Geniza; Türkmen; trade; second-hand clothing; plunder.

Resumen

Aunque los textos de la Geniza del Cairo no mencionan a los Turcos frecuentemente, dos líneas enigmáticas en un manuscrito del siglo XII hacen referencia a un comerciante judío que sale de Damasco con telas obtenidas a los turcomanos, pero no dan explicación de por qué este comerciante les compraría textiles. Un examen de otros manuscritos de la Geniza del Cairo revela un comercio lucrativo de artículos de segunda mano, ropa en particular. Algunas prendas se obtuvieron localmente en Egipto, pero se compraron otras prendas y textiles de segunda mano a proveedores no identificados fuera de Egipto. Las fuentes árabes contemporáneas de Irak también mencionan el comercio de bienes de segunda mano, pero tienen en cuenta que la compra del botín beduino suministró muchos de estos artículos. Este estudio sugiere que el comerciante judío en Siria pudo haber comprado textiles a los turcomanos que, al igual que los beduinos en Irak, vendían su botín. Si esta interpretación es correcta, este manuscrito de la Geniza, junto con otros, arroja nueva luz sobre las actividades de los turcos en la cuenca del Mediterráneo en las décadas posteriores a las conquistas selyúcidas en Oriente Medio y Anatolia.

Palabras clave: Geniza del Cairo; Turcomano; comercio; ropa de segunda mano; saqueo.

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Although there are numerous non-literary Geniza manuscripts from the 11th and 12th centuries, only a very limited number of these mention the Turks and their activities. The fourteen manuscripts written in Judeo-Arabic or Arabic that mention the Turks by name use several different terms when referring to them. The most common is *al-ġuzz* (الغز/ألغز), found in seven manuscripts. This is the Arabic form of the Turkic word *oghuz* (*Oğuz* in modern Turkish orthography), a term first found in the 8th century Orkhon River inscriptions in Mongolia. Although *Oghuz* originally designated a tribal union, it later came to be used for a specific group or tribe. In other Geniza manuscripts the Turks are referred to as *al-turk al-ġuzz* (אלתורק אלגוז), *al-turk* (التورك/ألتورك) and its plural form *al-atrāk* (ألتاراك), and *al-turkmān* (ألتركمان). In the two manuscripts where an individual Turk is being referred to the term *turki* (תרכי) is used.

The contexts in which the Turks appear in these Geniza manuscripts are, for the most part, unsurprising for the period in question. There is one reference to a Turkic slave, and two manuscripts where the Turks in question were soldiers in the Fatimid or Ayyubid armies. In eight manuscripts the Turks are mentioned in connection with wars, raids for plunder, and the taking of captives. However, in two manuscripts the Turks are mentioned in the context of commerce. In both cases the Turks are mentioned only briefly, and the manuscripts provide no detailed information or larger context.¹

The first of these two manuscripts, T-S 8J18.5, is a letter from the famous Spanish poet, physician and philosopher Judah ha-Levi to a friend in Egypt. Writing from Spain at some point between 1116 and late summer 1125, ha-Levi was seeking help in raising money to ransom a young Jewish woman being held in Toledo who had apparently been taken from a Muslim caravan by Christian raiders. He related that part of the standard 33 1/3 dinar ransom had already been collected; the Jewish community in Toledo had contributed 10 dinars “and the *Ġuzz Turk* sent four or so (ואלתורק ואלגוז ארסל בארבעה או נחזה).” Since the *Ġuzz Turk*

is not mentioned in a military context here, and contributing to the ransom of a member of the caravan (regardless of gender or religion) is in line with the known practice of merchants in this period, it appears that the *Ġuzz Turk* mentioned in this letter was a traders.²

The second Geniza source that mentions Turks in a commercial context is an eclectic manuscript, T-S K2.4. Written in Judeo-Arabic, Arabic and Hebrew, the manuscript is dated to 529 /1134-1135 based on the date given in the description of a dream found on the first page. It appears to be a compilation of unrelated subjects with sections on dream interpretation, magic, alchemy, alphabets, and calendars. Among these there is a short section beginning at the bottom of page 3v and continuing on page 4r written in Judeo-Arabic regarding a commerce. The relevant section is lines 4-6 on page 3v:

ענד עוודי אלי דמשק פדהבת מע אלקמאש אלדי אכדה אלתרכמאן

...upon my return to Damascus, and I departed with the cloth that the *Turkmān* had taken/obtained.

No information is given anywhere regarding the identity of the writer of this section, his profession, where he had been before his return to Damascus, his relationship with the *Türkmen*, how the *Türkmen* came to be in possession of the cloth, or why the writer obtained cloth from them. However, other Geniza manuscripts and contemporary sources can shed light on why a Jewish trader in Syria might be dealing with the *Türkmen*, and the explanation is linked to the lucrative trade in second-hand goods in this period.

While the non-literary manuscripts from the Cairo Geniza provide a wealth of information on many of the activities of Jewish traders in Egypt and other locations in and around the Mediterranean in the 10th through the 13th centuries, information regarding the trade in second-hand goods appears infrequently. Nonetheless, there are individuals mentioned in the Geniza manuscripts whose names indicate that they were involved in this line of work, and second-hand goods, and the trade in second-hand clothes in particular, are mentioned in some Geniza business letters. However, before examining these passages, a brief

¹ In addition to these fourteen manuscripts, one document written in Hebrew mentions the Turks using the name of a people mentioned in the Bible, Togarma, to refer to them, and three additional Geniza manuscripts from this period indirectly refer to the Turks by mentioning events in which the Turks were the main actors. For a more detailed discussion of the 11th and 12th century Geniza manuscripts that mention the Turks see Dietrich, Richard, “The Cairo Geniza as a Source for Turkish History”.

² See T-S 12.338 for an example of captive Jewish merchants who were ransomed by Italians who then took them to Egypt to recoup their out of pocket expenses.

discussion of the terminology of the second-hand goods trade is in order.

In the Geniza manuscripts the vocabulary related to the trade in second-hand goods is derived from two Arabic roots. The first is *qāšš* (קָשַׁשׁ; pl. *qīšāš*, קִישָׁשׁ), derived from the verb *qašš* (قَشَّ), “to gather (up), to collect, to pick up (from here and there).” In manuscripts from the 11th and 12th centuries *qāšš* almost exclusively refers to second-hand clothes, rather than second-hand goods in general.³ A dealer in second-hand clothes was a *qaššāš* (قَشَّاش / קִישָׁשׁ) or, more commonly, a *qaššāšī* (קִישָׁשִׁי), which is occasionally attached to personal names, as in Avraham al-Qashāshī (אברהם אלקשאשי)⁴ In addition, there is even a reference in one document to “a cloth dealer who worked in the bazaar for second-hand clothes” in Old Cairo (*bazāz fi-l-qušāšīyīn*, בזאז פי אלקשאשיין).⁵

The other word for second-hand clothes used in the Geniza manuscripts is *ḥalī* (حَلِي / כְּלִיעַ), meaning “cast off, taken off”; less common is the derived form *muḥtala* (مُحْتَلَا / מַכְתֵּלָה).⁶ In these manuscripts *ḥalī* is used not only as an adjective, but also as a noun for a garment that had been cast off, i.e. a second-hand garment or garments.⁷ For example, among the items listed in a young woman’s trousseau was a “blue, second-hand kerchief” (*mandīl azraq ḥalī*, מַנְדִּיל אַזְרַק כְּלִיעַ), while a business letter with list of items to be exported to Egypt from Sicily mentions second-hand clothes (*ḥalī*, כְּלִיעַ) among them.⁸

The previously mentioned market in Old Cairo dedicated to second-hand clothes is one indication of the volume of this trade. However, other indi-

cations are the mentions of, or requests for, the purchase of second-hand clothing to be brought to Egypt. The letter mentioning goods to be purchased in Sicily for export to Egypt lists “silk and lead and second-hand clothes and others” (*min ḥarīr wa min rašāš wa min ḥalī wa ḡayrahu*, וגיריה מן חריר ומן רשאש ואחרים).⁹ Another letter discussing the movement of goods and ships from Palermo, Sicily, also lists silk (אֶלְשֶׁשׁ) and second-hand clothes (אֶלְכְּלִיעַ).¹⁰ A bill of lading for goods from the Maghrib and Sicily that were being sent to Egypt includes “second-hand brocade” (*dībāḡ ḥalī*, דִּיבָאג כְּלִיעַ).¹¹ Writing from Syria, Nissim b. Ḥalfon asks an associate in Egypt about “the price of second-hand Syrian silk” (*si’r al-šīs al-šāmī*, סַעַר אֶלְשִׁישׁ אֶלְשָׁמִי אֶלְכְּלִיעַ), in order to decide if it would be profitable to send some there.¹²

The source of the second-hand garments mentioned in the Geniza is rarely specified, but it is known that affluent women sold garments they no longer wanted to a *qaššāš* or other merchant.¹³ In another case, a man donated clothes that his daughter no longer wore to be sold so that the proceeds could be used to help orphans in Jerusalem:

והמלת פי דאכל הדה // אלרזמה // קשאש עמא כאן תלבסה
בנתי תתפדל [.....] אלי אליתאמה אלדי פי אלקדס ינפקוה

...and I have loaded inside of this package used
clothes that my daughter used to wear; kindly [.....]
they spend it for the orphans in Jerusalem.¹⁴

Finally, clothes were sometimes sold or pawned when their owners were suffering financial difficulties or needed to raise cash quickly.¹⁵ In short, the Geniza manuscripts mention several sources for the second-hand clothing sold by merchants.

However, there was another source for second-hand goods and clothes that, while not

³ Goitein, S. D., *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, Vol. I (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 150, 437-438; Vol. IV, pp. 298-299. For the verb *qashsh* see Wehr, H. *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Ithaca, NY: Spoken Language Services, 1976), p. 764; Dozy, R. *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*, Vol II (Leiden: Brill, 1927), p. 347. For examples of the use of these words in Geniza manuscripts see T-S 18J3.5 *recto*, line 37 and T-S 13J25.9 *recto*, line 18.

⁴ The form *qaššāš* was used in Arabic, see Dozy, *Supplément*, vol. II, p. 348, while the form *qaššāšī* is used almost exclusively in the Judeo-Arabic Geniza manuscripts. For examples of this see BL Or 5566C.10, *recto*, line 9. For “Avraham al-Qashāshī” see ENA 2806.15, *verso*, lines 1-2.

⁵ Sassoon 713, *verso*, line 27. See also Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society* (AMS), vol. I, pp. 150, n. 5, 437-438.

⁶ For an example of the use of *muḥtala*, see Bodl. MS. heb. d. 75/14, end of line 11.

⁷ See Lane, E.W. *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 2 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1865), p. 791.

⁸ The list of trousseau items is in T-S NS J443, *recto* line 4, while the export items are found in T-S 20.122.

⁹ T-S 20.122, *verso*, lines 28-29.

¹⁰ DK 230.1 (Alt: 22), *recto*, line 5.

¹¹ T-S AS 147.28, *recto*, line 4.

¹² OR 5566B.20, *recto*, line 10. Note that the spelling of two words here appears to be defective. The word for “silk”, written *šīs* (שִׁישׁ) here is generally written *šeš* (שֶׁשׁ), without the *yod* (for other examples see T-S 10J14.17, *recto*, line 10; T-S 8J31.10, *recto*, line 8; and CUL OR 1080 J55, *recto*, line 9). The word for “second-hand”, *ḥalī*, is written here without the *yod* (כְּלִיעַ), although it is consistently written with the *yod* (כְּלִיעַ) in other Geniza manuscripts such as T-S 20.122, *verso*, line 29, and T-S 12.227, *verso*, line 16.

¹³ Goitein, AMS, vol. I, p. 150.

¹⁴ T-S 13J25.9 *recto*, lines 18-19.

¹⁵ For a list of Geniza documents that mention the sale or pawning of clothing see Goitein, AMS, vol. IV, p.413, n. 273.

specifically mentioned in the Geniza manuscripts, does appear in contemporary histories of other regions, namely plunder. Many of the items taken in uprisings or raids by sectarians, *‘ayyārūn* (عيارون) or the Bedouin eventually appeared for sale in the markets for second-hand goods, and were referred to as *al-saqat* (السقط).¹⁶ An example from Baghdad in 1087 can be found in Ibn al-Jawzi's 13th century history:

وفي شوال: وقعت الفتنة بين السنة والشيعة، وتفاقم الامر الى ان نهبت قطعة من نهر الدجاج، وطرحت النار، وكان ينادى على نهوب الشيعة اذا بيعت في الجانب الشرقي: هذا مال الروافض وشراؤه وتملكه حلال.

*And in Šawwāl: Strife/Discord between the Sunni and Shia occurred, and the matter worsened to the point that a section of Nahr al-Dajāj was looted and set on fire; they called for plunder of the Shia, and then it was sold on the eastern side. This is the property of renegades and its purchase and owning it are permissible (ḥalāl).*¹⁷

This passage does not make it clear whether it was members of the public or merchants in second-hand goods who purchased the plundered goods, but, in either case, the passage does show that those who acquired plunder sold at least part of it as a source of income.¹⁸

This brings us back to the Geniza manuscript mentioned earlier, T-S K2.4, and its brief note that the writer had “departed with the cloth that the Türkmen had obtained.” In order to understand the possible connection between the Jewish merchant in Syria, the cloth, and the Türkmen

several points need to be kept in mind. First, the Geniza manuscripts make it clear that there was active trade in second-hand clothes in the 11th and 12th centuries, and that not all of them were obtained locally (i.e. in Cairo or Fustāt). For example, one letter mentions the purchase of silk and second-hand clothes in Sicily for sale in Egypt, another lists second-hand brocade among goods acquired in the Maghrib and Sicily to be sold in Egypt.¹⁹ A more relevant case is a letter requesting the recipient to sell some silk and enquiring about the prices of second-hand Syrian silk clothing in Egypt.²⁰ However, none of these sources mention who sold these second-hand clothes to the Jewish merchants.

T-S K2.4 may indicate one source for these items. If this trade in second-hand Syrian silk is considered together with the example of the second-hand goods market in Baghdad where plundered goods were sold by those who took them to merchants in second-hand goods, then it is entirely plausible that the passage in T-S K2.4 is a record of the purchase by a Jewish merchant, probably based in Syria, of textiles taken as loot by the Türkmen.

Such raids for plunder by the Türkmen, or Guzz, are documented in the Geniza manuscripts. One particularly striking example is found in a 12th century letter written (or dictated) by a Jewish merchant to his wife in Egypt that describes his losses following a Guzz raid on the town of Minya where he had been at the time.²¹ According to the writer:

واشتريت ما يحتاج اليه من زاد الطريق فجوز الغز ونهبو المنية
وخرجنا عرايا ما لنا ساترة وبقيت بطوبة تحت راسي جائع بيوت
خلق فلحمد لله فلو كا نت روي بيدي سيبتها

*I purchased the requisite provisions for travel; then the Guzz swept down and plundered Minya. We departed naked, without a covering. I remained with a brick under my head, hungry, passing the night in grief, worn out. Thank God, had my life been in my hands, I would have given it up.*²²

The writer clearly lost all that he had, but what became of the goods taken from the mer-

¹⁶ al-Duri, *Society and Economy of Iraq under the Seljuqs (1055 – 1160 A.D.) with Special Reference to Baghdad*, PhD Dissertation (University of Pennsylvania, 1970), p. 304. For the use of *saqat* in this sense see Lane, *Lexicon*, vol. 4 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1872), p. 1381.

¹⁷ Ibn al-Jawzī. *al-Muntaẓam fī Ta'rīkh al-Mulūk wa-l-Umam*, vol. 16 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiya, 1992), p. 259. Nahar al-Dajāj was a quarter in the western part of Baghdad; see Yāqūt al-Hamawī. *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1977), p. 320.

¹⁸ This practice of selling plundered goods in the markets was not limited to the middle ages. A British naval officer who traveled through the Middle East in the first half of the 19th century, James Raymond Wellsted, noted in his description of Sook Sheikh that “No inconsiderable portion of their gains is derived from the purchase of plundered goods brought in from the desert by the Bedowins.” Wellsted, J.R. *Travels to the City of the Caliphs, Along the Shores of the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean*, vol 1 (London: Henry Colburn, 1840), p. 162. Wellsted's “Sook Sheikh” is the town of Sūq al-Šuyūkh (سوق الناصرية), approximately 25 km southeast of al-Nāṣiriya (الناصرية).

¹⁹ T-S 20.122, verso, lines 28-29; T-S AS 147.28, recto, line 4.

²⁰ OR 5566B.20, recto, line 10.

²¹ T-S Ar.40.56, recto, lines 18-21.

²² Translation from Goitein, S.D and Friedman, M.A. *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 501.

chant is unknown. Nevertheless, it is likely that the Türkmen would have followed practice of the Bedouin (and others) and sold their excess plunder to merchants in second-hand goods, or any merchant willing to purchase such goods.

If T-S K2.4 is indeed a record of a direct purchase of plundered textiles from the Türkmen by a Jewish merchant, it raises a number of interesting points. First, it would indicate that the Türkmen may have become rivals of the Bedouin in a profitable sector of the economy in the lands that the Seljuqs had conquered, something that has not previously been documented. This passage also raises the question of whether this was an anomalous transaction, or whether the purchase of Türkmen loot was an established practice of the Geniza merchants, albeit one that was not recorded in their correspondence. Other questions that come to mind are, were the Geniza merchants the first to recognize the potential value of establishing a business relationship with the recently-arrived Türkmen before anyone else in the region? Did the Geniza traders establish any other commercial relations with the Türkmen?

In a larger context, in combination with the other manuscript showing the Turks in a commercial context, T-S 8J18.5, these two Geniza texts hint that the Seljuqs and Türkmen may have been much more active in the economy and society of the Mediterranean basin earlier and in more varied roles than has generally been accepted. While these two manuscripts provide only a tantalizing glimpse into a potentially new perspective on Seljuq history, they do indicate the possibility that the Cairo Geniza may yet hold more information related to the Seljuqs in the 11th and 12th centuries. In addition, they demonstrate the value of scholarly examination of sources that previously may have been regarded as irrelevant or peripheral to the study of Seljuq history.

Declaration of competing interest

The author of this article declares that he has no financial, professional or personal conflicts of interest that could have inappropriately influenced this work.

Authorship contribution statement (CRediT)

Richard Dietrich: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Writing—original draft and Writing—review & editing.

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