Contents

List of figures page viii
List of maps ix
List of tables x
Acknowledgments xi
Technical notes xv
List of abbreviations xxi

1 Introduction: two tales 1
1.1. A medieval story: the bale on the beach 1
1.2. A modern story: three scholars and a piece of paper 5
1.3. The problem of the sources 8
1.4. Medieval and modern stories: a scholarly conversation 11

Part I Institutions 31

2 Merchants in their community 33
2.1. Writing the lives of merchants: Nahray b. Nissim 33
2.2. Merchants as a group: identification and self-definition 38
2.3. The geography of settlement: homes, origins, and migrations 39
2.4. Class and social position in Jewish community 45
2.5. Position in the Islamic community 50

3 The uses of commercial correspondence 56
3.1. Nahray b. Nissim receives a letter 56
3.2. The shape of commercial correspondence 64
3.3. Content analysis 77
3.4. Conclusion: the place of letters in commerce and in research 91

4 The nature of merchants’ trade 93
4.1. The bundle and the skins 93
4.2. The mix of commodities 95
4.3. Commercial transactions and the work of merchants 99
4.4. Conclusion: economic organization, risk, and labor 115
5 The human landscape: business relationships, institutions of law and government 120
5.1. Yeshuʿa b. Ismaʿil: the difficult man 120
5.2. The organization of commercial services: principals, agents, and the group 123
5.3. Choosing agency: a question of management 144
5.4. Business and the legal system: theory and practice 150
5.5. The state and the merchants 164
5.6. Conclusion 177

6 Conclusion to part I 180

Part II Geographies 185

7 The geography of information 187
7.1. Efrayim sends four copies, then five copies 187
7.2. The postal infrastructure and the movement of letters 189
7.3. Letters, information, and the boundaries of trade 193
7.4. The geography of information: connectivity and change in the eleventh century 199
7.5. The boundaries of information: using letters to retrace geography 206
7.6. Conclusions 209

8 Commodities in a regional market 211
8.1. Israel’s eye medicine 211
8.2. The nature of regions in al-Shām: central markets, emporia, and hinterlands 213
8.3. What it meant to be a hinterland: Fustat as a distributor and consumer of goods 229
8.4. Conclusion: regions and market hierarchies, cities and metropolises 240

9 Individual geographies of trade 247
9.2. Connectivity: routes and central places 253
9.3. Individual itineraries 261
9.4. A Geniza business model 276
9.5. Conclusions 288

10 The contracting geography of the eleventh-century merchant network 296
10.1. Salaṭa b. Mūsā’s disastrous year 296
10.2. Two maps: comparing the Nahray generation with other generations of Geniza merchants 300
10.3. Edges 305
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.4. Centers: intensification</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5. Putting together the pieces: explaining network contraction and</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intensification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.6. Conclusions</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Conclusion: The Mediterranean through the eyes of Geniza merchants</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.1. Putting the Islamic world back into the Mediterranean economy</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.2. Institutions, merchants, and the medieval Mediterranean</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Glossary of terms**  
**Bibliography**  
**Manuscript sources**  
**Printed sources**  
**Index**  

362  
366  
366  
396  
416
Figures

Figure 3.3: Translation of TS 13 J 13.11 r 60
Figure 3.4: Translation of TS 13 J 13.11 v 61
Figure 3.5: Content of exposition 78
Figure 3.6: Behavior material by person 79
Figure 3.7: Behavior by subject 81
Figure 4.1: Proportional division of transaction content 100
Figure 7.1: Destinations of eleventh-century mercantile letters 200
Figure 7.2: Origin of eleventh-century letters by small region 202
Figure 7.3: Origin of eleventh-century letters by large region 203
Figure 7.4: Connections through correspondence 204
Figure 7.5: Connections in the two generations 205
Maps

Map 1.1: The commercial Mediterranean in the eleventh century
Map 1.2: Egypt and al-Shām
Map 7.1: Commercial and private postal service
Map 8.1: Itineraries in al-Shām
Map 9.1: Mūsā b. Abī 'l-Ḥayy: lifetime travels
Map 9.2: Mūsā: early career
Map 9.3: Mūsā: middle career
Map 9.4: Mūsā: late career
Map 9.5: Mediterranean trunk routes
Map 9.6: Fustat and regional routes
Map 9.7: Isma‘īl b. Barhūn al-Tāḥirtī
Map 9.8: Ṣāliḥ b. Barhūn al-Tāḥirtī
Map 9.9: Barhūn b. Mūsā al-Tāḥirtī
Map 9.10: Nahray b. Nissīm
Map 9.11: Mūsā b. Ya‘qūb al-Miṣrī
Map 9.12: Nissīm b. Khalafūn
Map 9.15: Salāma b. Nissīm al-Barqī
Map 9.16: Farah b. Isma‘īl al-Qābisī
Map 10.2: The later eleventh century: travels in the Nahray group
Tables

7.1: Destinations of eleventh-century mercantile letters  page 201
7.2: Origins of eleventh-century mercantile letters  202