

Abraham's Luggage

From a single merchant's list of baggage begins a history that explores the dynamic world of medieval Indian Ocean exchanges. This fresh and innovative perspective on Jewish merchant activity shows how this list was a component of broader trade connections that developed between the Islamic Mediterranean and South Asia in the Middle Ages. Drawing on a close reading of this unique twelfth-century document, found in the Cairo Genizah and written in India by north African merchant Abraham Ben Yiju, Lambourn focuses on the domestic material culture and foods that structured the daily life of such India traders, on land and at sea. This is an exploration of the motivations and difficulties of maintaining homes away from home, and the compromises that inevitably ensued. *Abraham's Luggage* demonstrates the potential for writing challenging new histories from the accidental survival of apparently ordinary ephemera.

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*A Social Life of Things in the Medieval Indian
Ocean World*

Elizabeth A. Lambourn
De Montfort University, Leicester



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For Archibald Petty – “Uncle Archie” to me – who first showed me the world of things.

And for my husband Dominic who, having already shared me with Abraham Ben Yiju these past six years, will hopefully not begrudge me this dual dedication.

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Acknowledgments

Beginnings are often difficult to pinpoint retrospectively, but the idea of writing about some aspect of what I now think of as the “Material Worlds of the India Book” goes back to a review I wrote in 2009 of *India Traders of the Middle Ages* for the British journal *South Asian Studies*. More than any other previous publication of India Book material it began to open up the material complexity and distinctiveness of the western Indian Ocean; I could not but be seduced. The idea for *Abraham's Luggage* took more concrete form during the summer of 2011. The credit here goes to the Leverhulme Trust, whose award of a Major Research Fellowship spurred a fertile and exciting period of research even before the award formally began in October 2011. This book is one of many outputs generated during the two years of that fellowship but this is the first monograph to emerge from it and I cannot thank the Trustees of the Leverhulme Trust enough, nor the anonymous reviewers who supported my application, for giving me these years to think. They were blissful and busy.

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Working on the India Book material in depth has brought new challenges, particularly with regard to the Judaeo-Arabic in which the majority of documents are written. With no published coursebook for the study of medieval Judaeo-Arabic, its apprenticeship depends on the willingness of specialist scholars to share their knowledge. I have benefited during this time from long exchanges with Amir Ashur, whose intellectual generosity and huge patience in answering my many questions have made this book possible. The final edition of the Judaeo-Arabic and its Arabic transliteration presented in the Appendix are his work. Mordechai Akiva Friedman has been similarly encouraging and ever willing to answer questions and queries. It goes without saying that this book could not have been written without all his work organizing, and so often completing, the edition and translation of the India Book documents begun by S.D. Goitein. Working on T-S NS 324.114 has given me a small insight into the huge scale and complexity of that task and any expression of gratitude and admiration is bound to feel inadequate.

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clarify different approaches but also spurred me not to give up on what sometimes felt like an unmanageably broad-ranging project.

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Notes on Style and Transliteration

I have kept diacriticals to a minimum, reserving them for transliterated passages and specialist terms. This book broadly follows the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* guidelines on translation and transliteration, though with a British twist. As *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* is not widely available in the UK I have substituted the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Non-English words that have now entered common British English (e.g. genizah, Torah, halaka, zakat) are spelled according to the *OED* and will not be singled out by either italics or diacriticals. As recommended by *IJMES* all placenames follow the modern English or most commonly used Romanized spelling. Although not geographical terms in current usage, for convenience I use Romanized Ifriqiya for the central North African area that includes Tunisia, and Malibarat, rather than *malībārāt*, to refer to the Malabar coast as this was the appellation used by the India traders. Personal names, titles, the names of organizations and titles of books and articles will not use diacritics but will otherwise follow *IJMES* transliteration and capitalization rules; they also preserve ^ʿayn and hamza. In a departure from *IJMES* guidelines, for convenience all specialist terms are made plural through the addition of “s.”

All transliterated passages or titles are indicated in italics. Transliterated Arabic and Persian follow *IJMES* guidelines, Hebrew the guidelines of the Library of Congress (as recommended by *IJMES*), and Aramaic (extensively used in Jewish legal documents) likewise. A huge variety of transliteration systems exist for Indic languages and to simplify the matter in all cases here – principally for Sanskrit – I adopt the appropriate Library of Congress system while carrying across *IJMES*'s broader guidelines on what to transliterate and when. Chinese follows the Pinyin system. Regarding transliterations of the Judaeo-Arabic, there is no consensus on this and transliteration often involves correcting colloquial usage to more normative Arabic forms as well as a substantial amount of guesswork about the vowelings of the Middle Arabic. Wherever possible I have followed the spellings used in S.D. Goitein and Mordechai

A. Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza* (“*India Book*”) (Leiden: Brill, 2008) or in other publications. I have relied for the main part on existing editions and translations but where I, or a research assistant, have translated a passage or revised an existing translation, this is indicated in the associated footnote.

With the exception of T-S NS 324.114, the piece of paper at the heart of this book, the different genizah documents I rely on are cited not by their collection accession number but by the India Book number assigned by S.D. Goitein. The “New List” of India Book documents is published on pages 826–30 of *India Traders of the Middle Ages*. This system helps to differentiate different texts found on a single fragment, as is the case with T-S NS 324.114, and also simplifies the many instances in which documents have been reconstituted from multiple fragmentary copies, often held across different collections.

Referencing follows Chicago Style as set out in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). In accordance with Chicago Style recommendations, scriptural and classical references are cited in text or in footnotes, not in the final bibliography. As is current practice in Jewish Studies, I include among these classic texts the corpus of rabbinic literature (the Talmud, for example). Likewise, dictionary and encyclopedia entries are not listed individually in the bibliography but indicated in the footnotes with facts of publication omitted.

Due to length restrictions, the final bibliography is a Select Bibliography only including those sources explicitly cited in the discussion. However, footnotes throughout the book gather wider background reading around different subjects.

All dates are CE unless otherwise indicated.

Abbreviations

AH	Anno Hegiræ, the Islamic calendrical system
AM	Anno Mundi, Jewish calendar era based on the year of creation
BCE	Before Common Era
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
CE	Common Era
<i>EALL</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics</i>
ED	Era of Documents, the Seleucid calendar used by medieval Jews
<i>EI²</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , 2nd edn
<i>EIr</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i>
<i>EJ</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>
<i>EJW</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Jews in the Islamic World</i>
IB	India Book
<i>JESHO</i>	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
NS	New Series
<i>OED Online</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary Online</i>