



ABŪ SA'D TOSTARĪ

ABŪ SA'D B. SAHL TOSTARĪ, businessman and quasi-vizier in Fatimid Egypt, d. 439/1047. Sahl and two younger brothers emigrated from Ahvāz and founded one of the most prominent business firms in the Egyptian capital. The scope and high quality of their undertaking are shown in letters addressed to them from Ahvāz (11 Šafar 417/5 March 1026) and Qayrawān, Tunisia (Goitein, *Letters*, pp. 34-39, 73-79). The Egyptian Tostarīs remained in close contact with their homeland; a Jewish Persian court record from Ahvāz reveals that their sister Hannah made claims in that city in her own name and in those of her brothers (ed. D. S. Margoliouth, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 11, 1899, pp. 671-73; see also S. Shaked, "Judeo-Persian Notes," *Israel Oriental Studies* 1, 1971, pp. 180-82).

Abū Sa'd and his brothers Abū Naṣr and Abū Maṣṣūr continued their father's and uncles' commercial and banking undertakings with great success, and the Cairo Geniza (on which see *EI*² II, pp. 987-89) has preserved many references, largely unpublished, to their mercantile and philanthropic activities (see partial summary in Mann, *Texts* I, pp. 371-85). Abū Sa'd and Abū Naṣr are mentioned by Muslim historians, particularly Ebn al-Šayrafī, Ebn Moyassar, Ebn al-Zobayr, Ebn al-Aṭīr, and Maqrīzī; Nāṣer-e Kōsraw, visiting Cairo at the height of Abū Sa'd's power and witnessing his downfall, provided vivid details about Abū Sa'd in his *Safar-nāma* (see translations and discussion in Fischel, *Jews*, pp. 68-89). These sources together provide a multifaceted, although incomplete, picture of the man and his fate.

While the other Tostarī brothers, following the Iranian tradition, dealt in fine



textiles, Abū Sa'd specialized in jewels and gems. The three brothers served as trustees with whom courts and private persons deposited treasures. "Their honesty secured them a good name in every land, wherefore they became very prosperous" (Maqrīzī, *Ketāb al-keṭaṭ*, Būlāq, 1270/1853-54, I, p. 424). A purveyor of gems to the caliph Zāher (411-27/1021-36), who was an avid collector, Abū Sa'd also provided him with a slave girl who became the mother of Mostanşer. Abū Sa'd gave her as a gift, since Jews were then not engaged in the slave trade (see S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, I, 1967, pp. 130-47); and, like Christians, they were not permitted to keep a concubine. When Mostanşer ascended the throne in 427/1036 as a boy of seven, the Sudanese dowager naturally showed her gratitude to Abū Sa'd. He never became vizier officially, but he is described as *modabber al-dawla* or viceroy on the occasion of the great armistice between the Fatimids and Byzantium (Ebn al-Zobayr, *Ketāb al-ḡaḡā'er*, Kuwait, 1959, p. 74). But the official vizier Fallāḡī, "who had only the name, but not the power of his office" (Ebn Moyassar, *Annales d'Egypte*, ed. H. Masse, Cairo, 1919, p. 1), instigated against him the Turkish regiments, who felt the government neglected them in favor of the dowager's fellow Sudanese. Abū Sa'd was murdered in Jomādā I, 439/October-November, 1047, and Abū Naşr met a similar fate shortly after.

Abū Sa'd's son Ḥasan, having embraced Islam, became vizier for a short time in 456/1064. The poetical introduction to his contract of betrothal, written ca. 421/1030, tells that God appeared to Sahl before he emigrated from Iran to Egypt and told him: "Do not be afraid of going down to Egypt, for there I shall make you a great people" (Genesis 46:3; Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society* III, 1979, pp. 135-36). The Tostarīs became great in Egypt, but their eclipse was equally great.

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