

The Role of Egyptian Jews in Commercial Activity during the 4 th Century AH/ 10 AD

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Abstract

He was The Jews of Egypt played an important role in the traffic trade between the East and the West , as they contributed their capital in the Mediterranean trade to global trade , which made the Jews reap huge wealth from trade , and they traded in many important and luxurious goods in that era. Despite the scarcity of information regarding the nature of the work of these merchants, there are some details through which we were able to identify some of the prominent features that Egyptian Jewish merchants adopted during this era in their commercial dealings.

Keywords: Jew, trade, Egypt.

Introduction

Since ancient times, Egypt has played an important role in trade because its geographical location made it an intermediary between the East and the West. Jewish merchants in Egypt had an effective role and position before and after the Islamic conquest of Egypt. A large number of them practiced trade on a large scale, which indicates the amount of freedom available to them. Under the Arab Islamic state, which focused on trade in terms of services, reducing taxes, and providing security, they established agencies, brokers, and hotels in important commercial cities, including Alexandria, Fustat, and Cairo in Egypt.

First: Jewish merchants in Islamic Egypt:

Jewish merchants found fertile land in Egypt to practice their commercial activity, and many Jews immigrated to it and settled on its land. What encouraged them to do so was the interest of Muslims in Islamic Egypt in trade in terms of services, reducing duties, providing security, and interest in markets in important commercial cities in Egypt such as Alexandria. Fustat and Cairo, and they established agencies, palaces, and hotels in these cities , and non-Muslims participated in commercial work alongside Muslims, and some commercial activities were limited to them

The influx of Jewish merchants to Egypt was not limited to the 4th century AH / 10 AD. Rather, their influx to Egypt occurred since the Tulunid era (254-292 AH / 868-905 AD) , when a group of Jewish merchants came to it from Persia, and they were working in eastern trade across the Gulf. During that period, Egypt gained huge profits in the Red Sea trade, and during the Ikhshidid era (323-358 AH/935-969 AD), a number of Jewish merchants

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from the Levant flocked to Egypt and had an effective role in the traffic trade between Egypt and the Levant.

As for the Fatimid era, the influx of Jewish merchants was more active, as was characterized by the Fatimid state's policy of religious tolerance, and that policy followed by the caliphs of the Fatimid state contributed greatly to the prosperity of commercial activity in Egypt in the 4th century AH/10AD. What helped this prosperity was that the conditions surrounding the Arab Islamic state at that time were suitable for revitalizing the trade movement in Egypt across the Mediterranean in general, and the Red Sea trade in particular, in addition to the efforts made by the Fatimid Caliphate to revive the economy and control Mediterranean trade, including paying attention to ports and markets, providing security, and other measures that contributed to the prosperity of trade.

Second: The role of the Jews in trade:

She was commerce In the cities overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, it is free And competitive, and this reflects position The Arab Islamic state towards commerce International in the Middle Ages And tolerance that She was characterized with it That Period, where He sought Governors and rulers Muslims in Egypt through all historical stages, to Activate trade And why Be there Restrictions Official Restrict Immigration or Transfer Material Primary or Goods His factory or cash via the sea The Mediterranean, and the authorities' interest in securing navigation in the Red Sea, protecting merchant ships and ships from criminals, and eliminating the Crusader danger that threatened commercial traffic, so that commercial ports would be safe from dangers.

Trade activity demonstrates the freedom of movement between the countries bordering the Mediterranean and all parts of the world, including the lands that were under the rule of the Arab Islamic state. It explains the freedom that the Jews enjoyed under Islam, as well as their independence on the one hand and their harmony with Islamic society on the other hand. It explains the ties that brought together Jews in various places.

The freedom of economic activities in general, and commercial activities in particular, that prevailed in Egypt in Cannes was due to the influx of Jewish merchants to Egypt from different countries, to have great importance in Egypt, including, but not limited to, the Jewish minister Yaqoub Ibn Killis, who was distinguished by his administrative leadership talents. Which brought him to the forefront of the political, administrative, and cultural scene of the Fatimid state in Egypt, contrary to what it was life Economic In the Byzantine Empire, it is Under supervision And organization governmental strict Extremely, Despite that She was Their trade Active with Rest the world Christian, And also with the world Islamic, in reality Grant Emperors Byzantines Advantages especially to Merchants Jews from Countries Muslims While Regard Exporting silk Byzantine The famous.

Egypt was a destination for many Jewish merchants from various Islamic countries, including the Jewish merchants of the Levant since the Ikhshidid era (323-358 AH / 935-96 AD), who played a role in the traffic trade between the East and the West. The markets were full of Far Eastern goods in During that period, not all of it was for local consumption, but most of it was for export to Morocco and Europe. In this era, Jewish merchants in Egypt had a large commercial activity and possessed great wealth.

The influx of Jewish Moroccan merchants to Egypt also increased during the Fatimid era, and some of them settled there after many of them came with the Fatimids. Then many Jewish merchants took They move Back And back between The two capitals In a way Frequently (Fustat and Kairouan), in the spring And autumn By ships And in winter And summer on text caravans, It was how long it took the journey via the sea And the river A month One Just, while It takes the journey Wild Time Longer Much.

1- Internal trade:

Most Egyptian cities were distinguished by their diversified agricultural production, and each production city distinguished itself. For example, the city of Aswan was distinguished by its cultivation of palm trees , and its dates were distinguished by their ripeness in the winter , and the city of Assiut was distinguished by the quality of its wool, and the best types of sugar cane in Egypt were grown there. And in the city of Belbeis , wheat is grown , and most of the wealth of the people of Hijaz is from its wheat , Fayoum also excelled in the cultivation of rice and wheat , and clothes were made in Damietta and from tennis fish and various types of birds

Internal trade was based on the exchange of surplus agricultural and industrial production from the cities. Internal trade in Egypt had many routes, including river navigation routes, which were active, as commercial boats anchored in the Nile River in large numbers , and land routes, and both routes were not specific or fixed. Rather, there were many of them, and the merchants chose the route according to their destination and the type of goods they carried, for example the roads linking Fustat and Alexandria (13 railways), and those railways were used differently in the summer than in the winter, as is the case on the road between Al-Farma and Fustat. And some cities, including Tennis and Damietta, which are Like Algeria It is surrounded by the waters of the Nile, and if it is less surrounded by sea water, it can only be reached by boats or ships.

The Jews of Egypt had an active role in internal trade, which relied on local products, such as sugar and flax. Their markets were also full of goods coming from the East and the West passing through Egypt. They entered its markets and were traded inside Egypt before leaving it.

The freedom of trade that the Jews enjoyed was not limited to the 4th century AH/10AD only, but extended to subsequent periods. The Jews played a major role in internal trade, thanks to the policy of tolerance that they also enjoyed during the time of the Ayyubid state. They practiced their trade in complete freedom, just like Muslim and Christian merchants, and commercial cooperation between Muslims and Jews in the field of trade was common in the Ayyubid era.

2- Foreign trade:

had extensive trade relations, and it became a center of attraction for Jewish merchants since the century (4 AH / 10 AD) and the subsequent period, when large numbers of Moroccan Jews came to Egypt , and many merchants bore the title (Fasi, Andalusian, Taherti , Tripoli, and others). The motivation for this migration was the economic and commercial activity that Egypt enjoyed, and the freedom of movement. Merchants and the transfer of capital to and from Egypt in that period. The other reason for attracting the Jews was the Jews of Egypt themselves. They had a distinguished position in the financial and administrative aspects, and this was a reason for attracting large numbers of Jews from Baghdad, Damascus, Tyre, Acre, Aleppo, Constantinople, and Andalusia, in addition to The countries of Europe, India and China. The trade of India and China crossed Egyptian lands through two routes, one of which was: the Cairo route to Al-Qalzam, then Suez, Al-Tur and to the Red Sea, and the other: from Cairo to Qus and from there it headed east to Aydhab on the Red Sea.

Egypt was in commercial contact with Nubia to the south, as merchants carried Sudanese goods such as ivory, ebony, ostrich feathers, and elephant tooth, which were sold especially in the markets of Fustat. Most of the merchants in Tulunid Egypt were Jews, whose proficiency in foreign languages helped them flourish their trade.

Alexandrian Jewish merchants were moving Between the Levant and the Maghreb they traded in flax and pepper, and some of them participated in the Indian trade, which they sold to European merchants , because these commodities were very popular in the markets, in addition to being expensive, and because pepper was one of the most important and expensive commodities in European markets during the Middle Ages, and it was In some

European countries, Jews were imposed a tax consisting of pepper, ginger, and wax in exchange for allowing them to own cemeteries for their dead and schools for their children. It was also considered a purchasing power like currency in England, and due to its scarcity and extreme expensiveness, it was paid in exchange for marriage dowries and the rent of agricultural lands.

Third: Types of Jewish merchants:

Trade had its own system and the merchants were in categories. To know the position and category of the Jewish merchants, one must know the types of merchants in that period. The merchants were of three main types. The first was the first (the tank). He buys when He is the offer Big And it is the demand Low then He waits Circumstances To reflect, as for the second type (running), which Takes His goods With him to city foreign, He should Firstly that Pay attention well when He buys it And it must that He is on ready prior For all Species Obstacles And setbacks in road to Destination that He wants the In it. Bonus on that, He should that He is Interested With prices The current one from place to last, and fees, gesticulate to that, And the third type (The equipped) remains Steady in status, And it ships His goods To be done Receive it in Her destination from before actor worthy of With confidence Known mechanism I sell the goods And buy Goods Other in Outside, Jewish merchants such as Ibn Ukal and Nahrai ibn Nassim are the latter type of merchants.

Added to the main intermediate partition (The auctioneer or Broker), which is the person who has to understand deep For the market Local, saves time And the effort Extra from side Merchants Through the knowledge it provides them to choose investment Money in Type specific from He usually does not have his own store, but he has a specific and well-known place. A document dated in the year (621 AH / 1225 AD) indicates that two people went to a clothing store, where there were some clothes through a large broker.

We also have merchant agents, and the merchant's agent is called in Hebrew (Pekid Ha-Sedharim). Agents are people who act on behalf of the merchant to complete the buying or selling process in exchange for a certain percentage credited to him. It is clear to us that there were agents for Jewish merchants, as we have an undated Geniz document that indicates that one of the merchants' agents completed two transactions in linen at the same time and took a percentage (2%) of the price of the goods on that. This agent was a Jew.

Merchants of all categories were equal. There was no distinction between major merchants and other merchants of lower status. For example, Shipping Available to all merchants, It can Merchant Little Rent space storage on text Merchant cargo ship, like any major merchant, And trade inside all Cities and ports Commercial in Egypt Free And competitive for all traders, as it is She excelled Active buying and selling activity in markets and storing goods in warehouses. where The merchants or their agents were negotiating And they compete on Prices directly.

The process of selling goods was carried out in several ways To the merchant sell the goods wholesale directly from Warehouses Ports And cities Main, For merchants others, And it can also sale the goods In quantities big in the cities small, if He rose Merchant With a trip marketing, or in Markets Certain in the cities grand, maybe that Complete sale Retail by merchant sitting in His store in city Great, in waiting Access Customers mechanism, Or he sells his goods on road Merchant The wanderer, and there she was conditions To facilitate the selling process Between merchants, including failure to pay the price of the goods directly upon completion of the sale process between the two parties, And it was from the usual Allow For buyers With delay two months between the purchase And selling, Which practice I helped In a way big in Preservation on activity Commercial Business between Merchants, but it was not without problems and sometimes caused trouble for merchants It was completed Consecration Saucepan big from time Merchant To visit Debtors Latecomers, And writing Messages for them, And recruiting Merchants others To press on Debtors To pay their debts in full.

The Jewish merchant also held the position or leadership of the merchants, so to speak, so he was known as (the chief merchant). In the year (607 AH/1210 AD) in Cairo, the chief merchant was a Jewish merchant called Moses Ha-Ko H- Yin, and this is what became clear from a letter sent to him from Alexandria at approximately the same time, The Jews also worked as itinerant traders, and the Egyptian market was also open to Jewish merchants coming from other countries to Egypt to sell their products in the Egyptian markets.

Fourth: Features of the commercial activity of Egyptian Jews and the obstacles to that activity:

- 1- Medieval society was characterized by the fact that commercial work was often carried out on the basis of reputation rather than guarantees. Several letters show that Jewish merchants appreciated each other in the field of work, on the basis of the trust and honesty that the merchants enjoyed, which they excelled as a result of their diligence in Work, their position and their reputation in the market.
- 2- The commercial activity of Jewish merchants was extensive, and commercial agreements were concluded between Egyptian Jewish merchants and other merchants from different countries. These agreements linked merchants from Egypt with merchants from Morocco, Andalusia, India, Europe, and others.
- 3- The Jewish merchants had friendship and lineage ties with each other, not only within one country, but on a large scale. We find Jewish merchants in Egypt having friendships with Jewish merchants in the Maghreb or the East, and these friendships were sometimes strengthened by lineage so that the family bond between the two families Stronger, for common interest, and to facilitate business.
- 4- Jewish merchants did not travel individually, and they considered an individual traveling alone something disgraceful and unacceptable. It was necessary to have a travel companion, even if it was one person and not a group. However, it was common for a group of merchants to agree to travel in the form of a group and choose a person to be their leader or chief. In this case, the group members share any loss of goods or money that may occur to them on that trip, as is the case in organized groups
- 5- Jewish merchants relied on each other to facilitate their affairs during their trade travel through recommendations that were carried by Jewish merchants to each other in different countries.
- 6- Jewish merchants were keen to be aware of the latest news and developments on an ongoing basis, regarding goods in general, whether they traded in them or not, to know the conditions of the markets and the process of supply and demand.
- 7- Use Jewish merchants in Egypt Messages continuously Let's say information a task around Walking range Business and the extent of its activity in their areas, And it was that It includes the prices current commodity And prices Exchange or activity market As a whole or How popular commerce commodity certain or Low demand for it, as well a movement Shipping And activities Merchants The important ones in market, whether They were working fine groups or Individuals, And attention With events Political or Epidemics.
- 8- The Jewish merchants suffered from many difficulties and made many profits, and among those difficulties was their exposure to captivity by pirates, or the damage of some of the goods carried by the merchants, due to weather conditions or poor transportation service.
- 10- Merchants considered the lack of messages sent by their agents in different countries, aiming to convey commodity and market news, to be negligent, and continuing messages reassured the merchant that things were going well by his agent.

11 - Jewish merchants rely on signs to know their horoscope or the future of the next step , and they ask God to choose for them whether they will undertake this journey or not? It is similar to Istikhara or a type of divination that was famous in the Middle Ages. In their letters, the phrase “I asked God to choose for me” would appear. This was done in several ways, the most famous of which was researching the Holy Bible, and in order to obtain a guarantee of return, making a safe and profitable journey. A person may resort to performing magical acts, and this was found written in some documents in the handwriting of scholars, but it was not mentioned in large quantities, which indicates that they are individual practices. The most famous method of protecting merchants was to rely on prayer performed by the mother of the traveling merchant, an elderly woman, or a cleric. They also used to warn the merchants themselves or their families to seek safe and profitable travel from God.

12- One of the methods of selling goods among Jewish merchants was the method of selling on credit, in which the merchant sells the commodity and receives its price after a specified period agreed upon between the seller and the buyer. However, many merchants preferred a small profit or even a loss in some cases with immediate payment over profit. Much in advance.

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