Mounting evidence indicates that the economic prosperity of medieval Egypt may have hinged on the Egyptian textile industry. This is in conflict with the traditional view which attributes that prosperity primarily to Egypt's passive role in East-West trade, i.e., transit trade. The following will briefly present the evidence from narrative and documentary sources which supports this new interpretation. Crucial pieces of the evidence herein presented were found only in the Arabic papyri. The conclusive evidence needed to fully substantiate this new interpretation will also probably only be found in the Arabic papyri. There are more than 50,000 unread, Arabic documents housed in papyrus collections scattered throughout the world 1).

The focus of this investigation will be the textile industry in Egypt at the beginning of Egypt's golden age, the Tulunid period (254-292/868-905). The economy of medieval Egypt, as all pre-industrial economies, was, in the first instance, agrarian. Because flax, the primary fiber of the Egyptian textile industry, was cultivated in Egypt the fortunes of the textile industry and of agriculture were intricately interwoven. Therefore, this investigation will begin by presenting evidence that

* The evidence on agricultural administration, only touched on in his paper, is discussed in detail in G. M. Frantz, Saving & Investment in Medieval Egypt, Ph. D. Dissertation, The University of Michigan, 1978.

1) Claude Cahen has organized the Equipe de Papyrologie, Centre Universitaire, 9 rue Mahler, 75004 Paris, to coordinate efforts in making available the Arabic documents which are scattered across four continents.
agricultural revenues were the major source of investment in the textile industry, and will then turn to the forward and backward linkages which the industry generated in agriculture, commerce and employment.

The Problem

The nature of the sources perhaps accounts for the lack of attention which the Egyptian textile industry has thus far received. Catalogues of extant, textile fragments are numerous; as yet, no firm typology has been devised for dating or even establishing provenance of uninscribed textiles 2). Information in narrative, historical sources is limited; while documentary, Arabic sources abound, an inadequate number of these has yet been published 3).

Ṭūlūnīd and Fāṭīmid Egypt are portrayed in the sources, and in the literature, as having enjoyed unparalleled economic prosperity. From the nearer end of that time spectrum, the later Fāṭīmid period, prosperity is attributed to commerce, specifically transit trade 4). Goitein’s studies based on the geniza documents revealed “A Mediterranean Society”, the existence of which we might otherwise not have known. The geniza documents, having originated primarily from Tunisian merchants living in Egypt are more informative on international trade than

