

I, 14 *Letter from Joseph Lebdi to Ḥasan b. Bundār*

Fustat {1098}

TS 28.22

This is the original of a letter, written, as usual, on a long sheet of paper. Although the beginning of the letter is lost, the remaining part is 64 cm. long and contains 68 lines (plus two for the signature). The width comprises 18 cm., but in the first 36 lines the ends of the lines are torn away unevenly. This letter, too, was written by Hillel b. Eli, as a scribe paid for his services, not in his capacity as court clerk. In the first half of the letter the dictation went smoothly or a draft had been prepared. From line 39 on, the letter is defaced by deletions, additions, and marginal notes. No doubt another copy was made and sent to Aden, while our copy was finally disposed of in the Geniza.

This letter was written earlier. The address, which was registered on the reverse side, is lost together with the beginning of the letter. But there can be no doubt about the identity of the addressee, for this is the letter referred to in I, 13, lines 2–6. It is particularly valuable, because only here do we get a glimpse of Lebdi's dealings with his Adenese business friend and of Lebdi's misfortunes on the way to and from India. But here, too, his main purpose was settling his accounts with Abū Ya'qūb al-Ḥakīm, of whom he still speaks with greatest respect, never mentioning him without adding a blessing after his name (such as "may God preserve his honored position!", lines 37, 44, 55, 58, and certainly also in l. 30, where the relevant words were torn away).

Another, most important matter emerges from our letter. On his way back from India Lebdi stayed a considerable time in Mirbāt, then an important port on the southeastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. He corresponded from there with Ḥasan b. Bundār and sent him goods imported from India. On his way home, he did not sail to Aden (probably in order to avoid the horrendous customs dues there), but turned directly to Dahlak, where he had sojourned also on his way out. His failure to visit Aden and settle accounts there after his prolonged absence complicated his dealings with Abū Ya'qūb al-Ḥakīm. Matters finally got out of hand when aggravated by the subsequent loss of most of the pepper bought in India, a catastrophe not yet known at the writing of this letter.

Contents of I, 14:

- A. Lines x–7. List of Abū Ya'qūb al-Ḥakīm's goods delivered to Ḥasan b. Bundār in Aden and entered in the latter's account book, including the purchase of cast copper to be sent to India.¹
- B. Lines 8–24. Lebdi's travel to al-Tīz in south-east Iran, his troubles there, his safe arrival in Nahrwāra, India, and his actions there for Ḥasan b. Bundār and his brothers. His return trip, shipwreck, and final arrival in Mirbāt on the southeastern tip of Arabia.
- C. Lines 24–35. Correspondence between Lebdi and Ḥasan during his stay in Mirbāt and the loss of the steel and other Indian goods sent from Mirbāt to Aden.
- D. Lines 35–61. Request that Ḥasan list the accounts of all the transactions made for Abū Ya'qūb al-Ḥakīm, approval without reservation of all that Ḥasan had done for Lebdi personally (as communicated to him in a letter)² and order to buy goods for the payments due to Lebdi and al-Ḥakīm. The goods might be sent by land or by sea;³ their carrier should have power of attorney certified by the court in Aden and deliver them before a court in Fustat so that the two parties would receive their share without trouble.⁴
- E. Lines 62–69. Elaborate conclusion with greetings to Ḥasan's brothers and sons and "to all friends who have inquired or will inquire about me."

¹ The total weight of the silver vessels (see I, 1, lines 15–18) given as 359 dirhems is correct (70 + 21¼ + 82 + 78½ + 52¼ + 55). For the *btwāh* copper, line 6, see above, 201, n. 19. Here, lines 41–42, he writes: "The bundle of copper comprised pieces cast and hammered. We (may mean: I) sold the hammered ones and bought for them cast copper."

² "(52) As to the accounts for my own goods, (53) contained in the letter of your excellency reaching me, they are accepted and confirmed without any doubts." This letter might have reached Lebdi in Dahlak on his way back, see lines 29–39, translated below.

³ We are here in pre-Crusader times, when much commercial traffic went with the pilgrim caravans from Yemen to Mecca and from there to Cairo. See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:55, 200, 281. This trade route was revived after Saladin's victories; see II, 67, end.

⁴ This was the regular procedure. When a traveler took with him goods from one business friend to another, he simply received a memorandum, *tadhkira*, containing a list of the goods carried. When the relations between sender and recipient were more formal, as here between Ḥasan b. Bundār of Aden and al-Ḥakīm of Fustat, the carrier acted as the sender's official representative. He was appointed before a court at the place of dispatch and, at the place of destination, both he and the sender were formally absolved of their responsibilities before a court.

F. Lines 69–70. Signature. Letters are never signed. The sender would write his name or its equivalent (such as ‘your grateful servant’) on the verso in the left section of the address. But Lebdi’s signature, known also from other documents, was so untrained and childish that he certainly was reluctant to mar ‘the face’ of the letter. He signed, therefore, inside.⁵

Because of their importance, sections B and C are translated here despite their fragmentary state.

[B] (8) I asked my lord to grant me an advance on fifty *bahārs* pepper; you agr[eed and divided the amount] (9) between the boat of al-Qummī and the boat of Bihzāt.⁶ We all went out in [...] (10) and you most kindly came down (to the port) and bade me farewell in the boat,⁷ you and my lords, your brothers.⁸ [...] I entered] (11) the land of al-Tīz,⁹ and you have heard what happened to me in al-Tīz and what led [to my arrival in Nahr] (12) wāra in safety, thank God, the Exalted. I received your letter, which was sent to [Nahrwāra together with] (13) an amount

⁵ {When someone who was untrained in writing had a letter penned for him by a scribe, the scribe also wrote the name of the sender on the left side of the address on verso; see, for example, II, 55. Accordingly, Lebdi could hardly have signed the recto in order to avoid exhibiting his script on the address on verso, which was exposed. Since I, 14, was the draft or copy retained in Egypt, Hillel b. Eli, who also served as the court scribe for the case, may have wanted Lebdi’s signature on this paper as proof of his consent to the letter’s contents. On Lebdi’s signature, see further above, 28, n. 8. An expression such as ‘your grateful servant’ often accompanied the sender’s name in the address, but I do not recall seeing any letter where the phrase replaces the name.}

⁶ Two Persian shipowners: al-Qummī, from Qumm, a town south of Tehran, whose name is now familiar to everyone, and Bihzād, ‘of noble origin,’ spelled here with *t*; voiced sounds at the end of the word (*d*) become occasionally unvoiced (*ṭ*), when taken over from a foreign language. {Prof. Shaul Shaked informs me that he would similarly translate Bihzād ‘born well’ or ‘having a good parentage’ and that the final -t is an old (pre-Islamic) pronunciation.}

⁷ Lit., ‘the sea.’ Passengers usually boarded a ship a day or more before sails were set. Friends visited them on board ship to bid them farewell. {We have, for example, information (see IV, 66) about visits with Judah ha-Levi on board a ship in the port of Alexandria, where in May, 1141 he waited a whole week until there was an eastward wind for sailing to Eretz Israel.} Lebdi gratefully remembers this act of courtesy by the members of the leading family in Aden.

⁸ Abraham and Isaac, the fathers of Joseph and Khalaf respectively, so frequently mentioned in this book; see the Index.

⁹ This place was an important international trade center already in antiquity. {Al-Tīz is also mentioned in VI, 28, lines 24, 25; see also Maqbul Ahmad, *India*, 180 (index).}

of dinars. You asked me to buy for you two *faylams*¹⁰ and *bd*[...] (14) of silk, red and black wrappers, Ṭabarī cloth, and pillow cases,¹² and if the dinars sent were not [sufficient, I should] (15) advance the funds needed. I bought all you ordered with my own money. [Your dinars] (16) I gave to Dādā, the salesman,¹³ for an additional quarter per dinar¹⁴ [...] He got them back,] (17) after he had sued the vizier,¹⁵ and they are still with him [...] I dispatched] (18) the goods for you and your brothers and put into them [bags with beads¹⁶(?). I wrote to you,] (19) saying:

May every one of you take what he desires, and the rest will remain for me [...] To me belong] (20) also two bundles of wrappers, which I sent together with [your goods. I hope they arrive] (21) safely.

I informed you, my lord, that I willingly¹⁷ [...] On sea] (22) I experienced horrors,¹⁸ as you know, but you have also heard [that I arrived] (23) in Mirbāt safely together with what of my goods was salvaged.¹⁹ I [bought you steel²⁰ and] (24) sent it to you (pl.) from Mirbāt, as a replacement for your (pl.) goods [lost on my voyage.

[C] I wrote] (25) to you (s.), explaining my situation, and asking you to verify // the price of all// goods [...] (26) previously mentioned, also what had been obtained for the copper in Ma’.[... and the cost of the 50] (27)

¹⁰ Defined in Steingass-Johnson, *Dictionary*, 945, as “a sheet of dressed leather used as a table cloth,” mentioned in an inventory from Aden, VII, 12, line 21, between a carpet and a divan or couch. {Cf. Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 368.}

¹¹ These two letters can be complemented in many different ways.

¹² Common articles of export from Nahrwāra (also in line 20). {*Mihbas*, pl. *mahābis*, ‘wrapper,’ was a robe or material for a robe or for covering pillows; see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:171. In III, 54, line 8, it designates a piece of jewelry, which Goitein defined ‘a collar necklace’; I assume that is a separate term.}

¹³ Arabic *bayyā*; see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:152, 424, n. 100, 438, n. 14; {439, n. 43; 4:296, and IV, 59, line 12}.

¹⁴ Arabic ‘*alā ziyādat rub’ fi ṭ-ḍīnār*. The dinars sent by Ḥasan were of a lower value than the local ones, and Lebdi had to pay an additional quarter for each dinar.

¹⁵ The vizier—whatever that title meant at that time in Nahrwāra—had laid his hand on the much needed foreign money, but the courts or the local ruler had returned them to the *bayyā*.

¹⁶ Cf. I, 7, lines 8–9.

¹⁷ {Perhaps read *סאָרע* (*sā’ib*) for *סאָרע* (*tā’i’*), and translate: ‘hurry,’ etc.

¹⁸ Arabic *ahwāl*. On the horrors of travel, see Introduction IIIB.}

¹⁹ Part of the goods carried with him, including those bought for Ḥasan b. Bundār and his brothers were lost, probably by jettisoning.

²⁰ See line 34, below. The sieves, also mentioned there, were probably regarded as a minor item.

bahārs and requested you to send the 50 *bahārs* of [pepper... together] (28) with all the goods I had left with you²¹ [in your warehouse...] (29) to Dahlak, if you could do so;²² and if this is not possible, you should let [me know...] (30) whereupon I would come and carry with me my own goods and those belonging to Sheikh Abū Ya'qūb al-Ḥakīm, [may God preserve his honored position!]. (31) Your precious letters with messages befitting you, reached me, saying: [When your pepper will arrive] (32) *in safety*, then your merchandise will get to Dahlak even before your arrival there. I put my trust in [—God, may His name be exalted!—] (33) and in my lord,²³ and sent with //the son of// the *nākhudā*²⁴ and the first mate²⁵ [Ibn al-Dabbāgh²⁶...] (34) and 60 pieces of steel and less than 70 sieves to my lord, but lea[rned that...] (35) Ibn al-Dabbāgh... as my lord also knows, and the shipment perished.

²¹ During his stay in Aden, Lebdi had made many purchases since he had already planned not to return to that port on his way home.

²² That is, if travelers were found willing to transport those goods. Line 32 shows that such persons were indeed available in Aden at that time.

²³ {The space of ca. three letters in the manuscript at this point suggests that the writer may have intended to finish a paragraph here.

²⁴ For the meaning of this term, see Introduction IIIA.}

²⁵ Arabic *ashtiyām*. {Probably vocalize *ishtiyām*. In his Hebrew edition, Goitein translated: officer of passangers. See *Lisān al-'Arab*, 12:319; Lane, *Dictionary*, 1503. The word *ishtiyām* appears in the Talmud, 'Avoda Zara 41a, and is mentioned in Gaonic literature. See Sokoloff, *Dictionary JBA*, 126. When studying this word, attention should be called to its use in both Arabic and Jewish sources. TS AS 146, f. 26, a narrow strip from a letter, which may deal with the India trade, has on the margin one word: *al-ishūm*, which is perhaps another form of *ishtiyām*.}

²⁶ Ibn al-Dabbāgh ("Tanner") is mentioned in line 35.

I, 15 *Statements about Collateral Given by and Returned to Lebdi*

Fustat, after February 22, 1098

ULC Add. 3420, f. 2

This is recto (!) of the second leaf of what was evidently a bifolium that ULC Add. 3420 comprises. Goitein has cited this side as ULC Add. 3420c. Verso (!) contains the text of I, 15. ULC Add. 3420, f. 1 contains the text of I, 3.

The first and last of these three entries are written and signed by Nethanel b. Japheth, who had also written I, 3. Omissions and other irregularities¹ prove that the busy merchant had become impatient with this new complication of Lebdi's affairs.

In I, 3v, lines 3 and 10, Lebdi, who owed Jekuthiel 40 (= 4 + 36) dinars from a deal in indigo, promised to pay him partly in cash, and mainly by redeeming a promissory note signed by the latter. Until these payments were made, Lebdi had to provide collateral, probably because he was a foreigner, who was expected to leave the town; see I, 16v, lines 4–5. He delivered a silver tray to Eli the *Parnās* (social welfare official), one of the two standing 'trustees of the court' at that time.² When another merchant³ laid a claim on that tray, Lebdi deposited,⁴ with the approval of the court, 44 pieces of gold jewelry, large and small, weighing a total of 50 *mithqāls*, with Abū 'Amr⁵ Shela b. Japheth, not known otherwise as a trustee (lines 1–9).⁶

¹ {In association with irregularities in the writing, I call attention to use in lines 4, 6, of *dbal*, a vulgar Egyptian form for *dhālīka*; see Blau, *Grammar*, 63.}

² His full name, with which he signed entry one, was Eli ha-Kohen b. Yaḥyā. About him, the other trustee, 'Ulla ha-Levi (n. 7, below), and the offices of *parnās* and trustee in general see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:78–81. {For the *ṣiniyya*, tray, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:144–45; cf. Sadan, *Mobilier*, 94; id., "Clerks," 43, n. 63.}

³ Abū Sahl Manasseh b. Judah, known from contemporary documents, e.g., TS 10 J 5, f. 6 (written by Hillel b. Eli), TS NS 150, f. 155v (in the hand of Hillel's son-in-law Ḥalfon b. Manasseh). The tray probably formed part of the price owed by Lebdi to Manasseh for half of the house purchased for him. See I, 23. {Also see the next note.

⁴ As the text stands, it would seem that Abū Sahl Manasseh made the alternate deposit. If so, we can assume that for some reason he had deposited the tray with Lebdi but did not want it transferred to others.

⁵ The name could be read 'Umar as well.}

⁶ Shela b. Japheth might have been identical with a merchant of that same name who farmed out the taxes on silk in the Delta town of Sammanūd (TS AS 149, f. 14). {Perhaps he is the late Shela, whose son Japheth and widow Amat al-Qādir invest in the India trade (VI, 5).} He had been asked to act as trustee, probably because Eli was about to leave the city, while the other trustee was momentarily absent. Only two objects, a tiara, *ṣāba*, and a wristband, spelled here *tasdaynaq* (usually *dastaynaq*, from Persian