

II, 9 Letter from Khīyār b. Jacob to Nethanel b. Japheth re Abu 'l-Faraj Nissīm

{Alexandria, late eleventh century}

Mosseri II, 160 (L 161)

In a postscript to a letter addressed to his business friend Nethanel b. Japheth,¹ called here by his Arabic name Abu 'l-Mufaḍḍal [Hiba]t Allah b. Ḥusayn, Khīyār b. Jacob² writes:

My lord, kindly let me know what you have heard from Faraj ('Relief') about Sheikh Abu 'l-Faraj Nissīm; he (Faraj) is coming back after having been with him {alt. tr.:... from Faraj, //(that is) about Sheikh Abu 'l-Faraj Nissīm// he is coming back from him}³ (Nissīm) and others in India. Perhaps from him or others arriving [you might hear].⁴ Inform me about this in your letter.⁵ *And peace.*

Khīyār's quest clearly was general, and not confined to Amram b. Joseph and his camphor. No. II, 8 has shown that besides him there were others troubled by Abu 'l-Faraj Nissīm's disappearance in India.

¹ See about him 297, n. 1.

² Khīyār was Nethanel's regular correspondent in Alexandria; see II, 6.

³ Faraj was probably a freedman, cf. Goitein, *Letters*, 82–84. For a man born free with this name I have only one example: Saadya b. Isaac, known as Faraj b. Abu 'Amr, a poor man, who wished to marry an equally poor orphan, for which he needed help—hardly an India traveler. {For the alternative translation, note that the honorific Abu 'l-X is often shortened to X, e.g., Abu 'l-Surūr is called Surūr in II, 14, line 36; II, 24, line 11; II26v, line 8; III, 41, lines 23, 32.}

⁴ Here the manuscript is torn and about three words are missing. I guess: *la'alla minhu [aw min wāṣīlīn] ghayrīh.*

⁵ Unlike Amram (see II, 6, n. 8, above), Khīyār expected to receive letters from Nethanel regularly (possibly with the weekly Cairo-Alexandria mail service; see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:287).

II, 10 Memorandum to Traveler Carrying Indian Goods to Isaac b. Bundār

India, ca. 1110

TS 8.27

A piece of cloth,¹ truncated on top, bottom, and the left side. The ends of the lines are lost (approximately three words in each line), but the upper section, as the first partially visible line shows, contained only the salutation with the usual good wishes, and the last line, of which only the tops of a few letters are recognizable, introduces a topic different from the list of goods, which forms the object of this memorandum.² The script is exceptionally handsome and regular. Verso contains the address, first Arabic in Hebrew letters (only one line preserved), then in Arabic letters. Here, of course, the *beginnings* of the lines are lost.

I prefer to comment on this interesting piece after its translation.

Translation

(1) [...] {add: after your departure.}³ May God bring us together soon in well-being and h[ealth!...] (2) Take notice—may God keep you alive!—that I sent with you nine items, namely [lac, ...] (3) textiles,⁴ *fūtas*, and a bale of spikenard.⁵ Of the lac, one and a half bales are for 'Alī [and the...] (4) for Fahd.⁶ Of the textiles, one bale for Yaḥyā, and one for Ibrahīm and Ishāq⁷ [... In the bale of] (5) *fūtas* are nine *thawbs* (robes) for Fahd and 'Alī. One fourth of this is for Fahd. Of the textiles [... so-and-so

¹ {Paper was scarce in India, and sometimes cloth was used there for writing material. See above, page 61.

² Since nothing is legible from this line, I am not sure on what basis Goitein decided that it dealt with another topic.

³ Arabic *ba'da khurūjika* (not copied by Goitein). For *khurūj* (*kharaj*) for leaving India and setting out for the homeward journey to the West, see page 372, n. 4.

⁴ Arabic *bazz*.

⁵ Arabic *sunbul*.

⁶ The name Fahd (cheetah, 'hunting leopard') was not unknown among Jews. The fledgling cantor in Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:220, n. 3 (1040), was called thus (see Goitein, *Education*, 140–42), and so was a *wakāl tujār* in 1103 (id., *Med. Soc.*, 1:446, n. 14) and an emigrant from the Delta town Ṣahrajt to Byzantium in 1137 (id., Goitein, "Letter from Seleucia," 301). Several other examples could be provided. Our Fahd here (see also lines 5 and 7) is probably identical with the one found in India in VII, 56v, lines 2–4, who is described there in less than laudatory terms.

⁷ Abraham and Isaac, the brothers of Ḥasan b. Bundār; see line 7 and the address on verso.

many] (6) *thawbs* (robes) are for Yaḥyā, out of the *thawbs* (robes) {alt. tr.: of average apparel}.⁸ There are five *kawrajas* (twenties) and two *dasts* (dozens)⁹ of *fūtas*. [Of these such-and-such are] (7) for you, one *kawraja* for Fahd, and two *kawrajas* and two *dasts* for Iṣḥāq and Ibrāhīm [and one-half of . . .] (8) too. The other half is for you and Yaḥyā, namely // for Yaḥyā// one-sixth. I sent with you also [. . .] (9) 3/4, *kawrajas* of shoes, one *kawraja* and three pairs [for . . . and . . .] (10) for Ya'qūb,¹⁰ one-quarter *kawraja* for the boy of Ib[rāhīm]¹¹ and one pair¹² for Abū [. . .] (11) and of the two pairs of small size one is for Abu 'l-Faḥ and the other for [. . .]

[Address]

[In Hebrew letters] (1) (To) [. . . May God lengthen] his life! To Aden, God willing.

[In Arabic letters] (1) [(To) . . . Mub]ārak b. Sahl, the Israelite. (2) [May God lengthen his life] and make his honored position permanent!

⁸ {Arabic *thawb* can designate, among other things, the standard 'robe' or one of twenty *fūtas*. Here the latter is intended; see above, 170, n. 13; 179, n. 30. 'Out of the *thawbs* (robes)' translates *min wasaṭ al-thiyāb*. *Wasaṭ* can mean here 'average'; cf., e.g., II, 46, line 41; II, 48v, line 9. The documents in this book suggest that the two plurals of *thawb* were not used interchangeably. *Athwāb* refers to specific items, and *thiyāb* is more a general term for clothing or apparel (but see 422, n. 28); cf. Wehr, *Dictionary*, 108. I have attempted to indicate this in the translation.}

⁹ Arabic *dast* designates a number of objects of the same description. The word is once specified in these papers, II, 34, side c, line 6 (in connection with Chinese cups), as a set of six, and once, III, 9, line 24 (referring to paper) as a set of twelve. Paper was also sent in single sheets, as in III, 5, line 15, where fifteen sheets of large Ṭalḥī paper are mentioned. In contemporary Egyptian and Yemenite Arabic, *dasta* is 'a dozen,' which in Yemen, when connected to a following word, is shortened to *dast*, e.g., *dast shama*, 'a dozen candles.' The same word in Modern Egyptian designates 'a quire of paper'; cf. Spiro, *Dictionary*, 173a, and Dozy, *Supplément*, 1:441a; according to Barthélemy, *Dialectes*, 239, *dast* is "a set of 400 leaves of paper," which does not, of course, apply here. {*Dast* is derived from Persian; cf. Steingass-Johnson, *Dictionary*, 519: "anything complete; (in India) the actual collections (as opposed to *sist*, the assessment)." The wording in II, 34 and III, 9, 'numbering . . .,' suggests that the quantity that made up a *dast* of particular items was not always fixed or universally known. The Yemenite usage is not listed in Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 150.}

¹⁰ Although the name Ya'qūb (Jacob) is, of course, common, it is very likely that here the brother-in-law of Abraham and Isaac b. Bundār, the father of Maḥrūz b. Jacob (see page 48) is meant.

¹¹ This is Joseph b. Abraham (II, sec. F), who, as a teenager, was initiated into business by handling {the sale of} five pairs of shoes.

¹² This and the following were gifts or special orders.

(1) (From) His friend Yūsuf (Joseph) b. Mas'ūd, the Israelite. (2) To be delivered to Aden—may God keep it prosperous!—to the store of Sheikh Iṣḥāq b. Bundār.

Comments

In addition to the memorandum given to the carrier of the goods himself, as a matter of precaution, one or more lists of the goods were sent from India to Aden, his destination. Ḥasan b. Bundār probably was dead at the writing of this letter, which was therefore addressed to the store of his brother Isaac. Ḥasan's sons, Bundār and Maḥmūn, must have been too young at that time for the role of a representative of the merchants. The memorandum was sent around 1110.

It is remarkable that in the body of the memorandum all persons are mentioned by their first name only. This seems to have been an Iraqi custom, and the writer might well have originated in the Land of the Two Rivers.¹³ The very detailed assignment of the goods to eight different persons is also somewhat uncommon. Usually, because of the fluctuation of the prices and other circumstances, the overseas traders were granted more latitude. Specified orders must have been sent to Ibn Mas'ūd while already in India (and reporting from there prices, etc.), similar to those received by Joseph Lebdi from the Ibn Bundār brothers, while in Gujarāt (I, 14, lines 12–21). Since besides spikenard and shoes, lac and textiles formed the bulk of the shipments, this letter, too, probably was sent from that Indian country.

¹³ See VI, 48 {a letter by Iraqis in which first names only are used}. Since the name Mas'ūd was not common, the sender Joseph b. Mas'ūd might be identical with Ibn Mas'ūd, mentioned as traveling from Fustat to *diyār al-Yemen* in VII, 12, line 7, and decried as a hard customer in a letter from Alexandria, Bodl. MS. Heb. a. 3 (Cat. 2873), fol. 23, line 13. The name of the recipient, [Mub]ārak b. Sahl—if the reading is correct—has not yet been found elsewhere.