

II, 11a *Letter of Thanks from Ḥalfon b. Manasseh to Abraham b. Bundār*

Fustat, early twelfth century

TS 13 J 25, f. 6

This letter of seventy long lines, introduced by a Hebrew poem of ten stanzas,¹ a Hebrew rhymed address, lines 12–18, and then continued in choice Arabic, interspersed with rare biblical quotations, is not without historical interest.

We learn that already Bundār and his wife had been renowned (in Fustat, of course) for their generosity (lines 20–23), which means that close relations between the Adenese and Fustat Jewish communities had already existed in Bundār's time, although we know nothing about his commercial activities. Both Abraham and his elder brother Ḥasan b. Bundār bore Hebrew honorific titles common in Egypt, certainly conferred upon them by Mevōrākh, the Head of the Jews of the Fatimid Empire, or his son and successor Moses.² It seems that Abraham had received an honorary title also from an Iraqi Jewish divine. His nephew Maḍmūn b. Ḥasan was later honored in the same way by the two competing Jewish authorities.³

At the writing of this letter Abraham b. Bundār was already the father of several sons (lines 16, 26, verso, line 21), of whom Joseph b. Abraham (chap. 2, sec. F) was the most prominent. It is noteworthy that Abraham is praised, not only for his generosity, but also as being adorned with three crowns: that of communal leader,⁴ calligrapher,⁵ and learned

¹ Lines 2–11. The poem has the form known by the Arabic term *muwashshah* (aaaa bbba ccca).

² Abraham bore the title *zeqan ha-qehillōt*, 'Senior of the Congregations,' line 16, which is also found in the note on the top of the reverse side: "Copy of my second letter of thanks sent to Sheikh Abraham, *Senior of the Congregations—may [the Merciful] protect him!*" The first letter was an acknowledgment of the gift, this one thanks for the learned reply of Abraham, written in his own hand. Our manuscript, as the many corrections show, was the draft of the letter, or, because of the careful script, a first attempt to write it.

³ Hebrew *rōsh ha-allūfīm*, 'Head of the Fellows' (line 16), namely of the yeshivas of Baghdad; the biblical *allūf*, 'companion, confidant,' was a common 'Babylonian' (Iraqi) title. Cf. Mann, *Jews*, 1:278. (In modern Hebrew *allūf* means brigadier general.) {Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:22, 199, renders *allūf* 'distinguished member of the Babylonian yeshiva'; cf. Gil, *Ishmael*, 1:127.}

⁴ Hebrew *zīqnā*, 'seniority'; see n. 2, above.

⁵ Hebrew *lavlar(ūt)*, the 'Babylonian' (Iraqi) form of Palestinian *livlar*, which is Latin *libellarius*, see Krauss, *Lehnwörter*, 2:303. The term comprises not only the beauty of the script, but also the refinement of the style.

man, not only in religious lore,⁶ but also in the 'preparatory sciences,' meaning arithmetic and cognate subjects, and 'philosophic topics.'⁷ We are here in Fatimid times and territory; the prosperous Adenese merchant might well have had a copy of the Ismā'īlī encyclopaedia *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, 'The Sincere Brothers,' or some volumes of it, in his library.⁸

Presents to religious scholars (and the writer of our letter, Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Manasseh, certainly was one) were common practice, as is richly attested to also in this book.⁹ Such gifts, as is emphasized here, verso, line 5, and in numerous other letters, replaced the offerings to God in the Temple of Jerusalem, obligatory for every believer. The gift referred to here was due to special circumstances. Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Manasseh was afflicted by a dangerous and protracted illness, and hopes for his recovery had already been lost. He did recover, but despite the helpfulness of the community and the devoted care of the physicians, he was forced to sell everything in the house, including his Sabbath clothing, and to incur debts to the amount of 12 dinars. Then there arrived the gift of Abraham b. Bundār and of the 'Leader of the Congregations' {*Sar ha-Qehillōt*}, which could refer to Ḥasan b. Bundār or his son Bundār II, who inherited his father's title (II, 11b) {or Maḍmūn b. Ḥasan (II, 36, lines 13–14, 21)}. Each had sent three bolts of Indian red silk (which were sold in Fustat for 6 dinars),¹⁰ on which something over

⁶ Hebrew *tōrā*, which does not mean here Pentateuch, but all aspects of Jewish law and learning.

⁷ Arabic *al-'ulūm al-riyāḍiyya wal-ma'ānī al-falsafiyya*.

⁸ The twelfth century Yemenite Jewish theologian Nethanel b. Fayyūmī (without the article, not: *al-Fayyūmī*; see page 349, n. 78), as Solomon Pines has shown, used *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (see Marquet, "Ikhwān") and cognate Ismā'īlī literature copiously; see Talmage, "Nethanel," and Goitein, *Jews and Arabs*, 145. A Geniza booklist notes *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* as present in a Jewish library. {See Allony, *Library*, 22, 353. On Ismā'īlī influence on Yemenite Jewry, see also Friedman, *Yemenite Messiah*, 94 ff., and the literature cited there.

⁹ See the discussion in pages 43–46.

¹⁰ Arabic *shuqaq lānas*. The words here placed in parenthesis are crossed out (line 39). Ḥalfon deleted them because he was sure that Abraham knew at which price those textiles were sold in Fustat at that time. The silk was brought to Fustat by Abu 'l-Surūr b. Binyām, the co-proprietor of the Lebdi house (see 271, n. 2) {and Sitt al-Ahl d. Joseph Lebdi's betrothed (I, 34b)}. The bearer of Abraham's letter was one Abū 'Amr, verso, line 6. The abbreviated way in which this man is mentioned indicates that he was a regular traveler on the Aden-Fustat route. This silk material is also sent from Aden to Egyptian Jewish religious dignitaries in II, 34, side c, lines 4 {there 'made in Kūlam' India}, 9, side d, line 6, where it is called *lālas*, a spelling found in other documents. The form *lānas* occurs here and in II, 56, line 16 {and II, 61, line 54}. The original is undoubtedly *lālas*, since *lāl* means 'red' in Sanskrit, and *lālas* is defined by Steingass-Johnson, *Dictionary*, 1113: 'a kind of red silken stuff of a delicate texture.' {These remarks are taken from the

1 dinar *wājib*, or customs duties, had to be paid. This enabled Ḥalfon to pay off his most pressing debts. Naturally, he refrained from making any requests. But when, before the next holidays, Abraham b. Bundār would draw up his list of beneficiaries, he would certainly pay attention to the circumstances to which Ḥalfon had alluded.

At the end of his long letter Ḥalfon apologizes for writing so little. As one of his excuses he notes that in view of "the incessant flood"¹¹ of letters reaching the Adenese notables from Fustat he refrained from imposing on Abraham.¹²

Hebrew edition of the India Book. For *lālas lānas* silk, see further Goitein, *Letters*, 68–70; id., *Med. Soc.*, 1:454, n. 53. Diem, *Dictionary*, 194, n. 208, wonders whether *lālas* and *lānas* might be variants of the same word, as noted by Goitein here.

¹¹ Arabic *al-lajaj al-mutawātir*. Verso, lines 16–17.

¹² {A gift to Ḥalfon is mentioned in II, 43, line 17, and II, 53 is a letter of thanks by him for another gift. I have translated a large section of II, 11a above, pages 44–45.}

II, 11b *The Honorary Titles in the Bundār Family of Aden*

Fustat, ca. 1120

ENA 2728, f. 2

This is the second item on verso. Recto is a fragment of an agreement between a Rabbanite man and his Karaite wife.

In the left upper corner of an only partially preserved piece of waste paper (12 × 16 cm.), Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Manasseh jotted down the titles of the members of the Bundār family in Aden (ca. 1120). VIPs were much offended when they were not addressed by their proper titles.¹

Translation

- (1) Bundār [II], Leader of the Congregations, son of Japheth,² L[eader, etc. . . .]
- (2) and [[his father-in-law {alt. tr.: sons}]] //his uncles, // Abraham, Leader of the Congregations [. . .]
- (3) and his brother Isaac, Benefactor of the Congregations, [. . .]
- (4) and his son Khalaf, Delight of the Congrega[tions. . . .]

Bundār II, as occurred elsewhere, was honored with his father's title. He was married, as was usual practice, to a cousin, the daughter of his uncle Abraham b. Bundār. But Ḥalfon deleted this detail, since there was no need for such an intimate matter to be referred or alluded to in his correspondence.³

In II, 11a, Abraham is called twice Senior. He advanced to the title *sar*, Leader, Prince, on a special occasion (e.g., when his daughter married his nephew who bore that title).⁴ For Isaac's son Khalaf, see chap. 2, sec. G. In the space lost in line 2, probably Joseph b. Abraham (chap. 2, sec. F) was noted.

¹ See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:623, s.v. Honorific titles. {Jewish authorities awarded the titles listed here. The Jews followed the practice common among the Arabs concerning honorific titles. For these, see Bosworth, "Alqāb."}

² = Ḥasan.

³ This case should have been noted in Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 3:27–29. {In my opinion, the last sentence and accompanying note result from an erroneous reading. For *חמאוו* (*ḥamāhū*, an irregular form for *ḥamūhu*), 'his father-in-law,' the deleted word in line 2, reads *חמורדי* (*ḥamūdāw*), 'his sons,' which usually appears in genealogies, but was an error here. It was crossed out and corrected with the supralinear addition of 'his paternal uncles,' in both Arabic and Hebrew.

⁴ See the clarification added to the previous note.}