

Translation

[A] (1) two days [before] the ships sailed [...] (2) foreigner by him and b[y... some of it] (3) for (or belonging to) the ruler of Dahlak and some of it for Sheikh [...] (4) Bilāl Ibn Jarīr against the man w[ho sold (?)] (5) the *drky*.⁵ He bought it from him for [him]self. (6) And no one can ask for anything claimed by (7) the lord⁶ Bilāl. Were the *maṭiyya* boats⁷ of I[bn] (8) al-Sudā[n]ī⁸ to bring some of it,⁹ I would send it to him (i.e., to you). (9) You should not believe that I have neglected your need (10) and that which would produce something beneficial to you.

[B] By God, (11) this year there was in the city a great fall¹⁰ (in the market). (12) The Egyptian *mithqāls* reached [...]

⁵ For this commodity, see 331, n. 11. The *drky*, spoken of here, was probably shipped by the ruler of Dahlak, mentioned in line 3.

⁶ {Arabic *mālik*, a common term of respect in the Yemenite letters. See 362, n. 13.

⁷ Arabic *maṭāyā*. For this type of vessel, see 476, n. 18.

⁸ The reading and restoration of Ibn al-Sudānī (the Sudanese) are uncertain.

⁹ Arabic *bi-shay minhu*, presumably referring to the *drky*.

¹⁰ Arabic *labṭa* means a kick by an animal or a gallop (*ṭalabbata*, according to Dozy, *Supplément*, 2:513, means to limp). I assume this was part of the merchants' jargon ('market crash, runaway market?'), but I have not found it elsewhere in the India Book papers.}

II, 28–29 *Letter from Maḍmūn b. Ḥasan to Abraham Ben Yijū: Safe Conduct and Assistance for Brother*

{Aden, ca. 1145}

II, 28. ULC Or. 1080 J 263

II, 29. TS NS J 285

Goitein described II, 28:

Letter of Maḍmūn assuring Ben Yijū that he had obtained safe conduct for him from 'The Auspicious King'¹ (a title bestowed on Bilāl b. Jarīr by the Fatimid caliph), when Ben Yijū would come to Aden.

and II, 29:

A short note: Actions on behalf of Ben Yijū's brother Mevassēr had been delayed because of a prolonged interruption of communications with Egypt in the wake of epidemics raging there.²

{When arranging the India Book items according to the 'New List,' Goitein indicated the affinity of nos. II, 28 (245 in the 'Old List') and II, 29 (297) by placing them one after the other. A closer examination shows that they are two contiguous pieces of the same letter. No. II, 28, contains the first 22 lines of the letter. The first line of II, 29 is line 23 of the original. The top of the letter ʾ in the last word of that line, *yʾl*, is preserved in II, 28, its lower portion in II, 29. Furthermore, in the blank space at the bottom of II, 29 recto and the verso of II, 28–29, Ben Yijū copied a liturgical poem for the evening service of (Yom) Kippur, and here too there is a direct continuation between the writing on II, 29 and II, 28 (in this order).³ No. II, 29, has suffered more damage than II, 28; this makes the match between the two somewhat difficult to identify. Several lines, the extent of which cannot be ascertained, are missing at the end of II, 29, so there is no direct continuation between the text there and the margin (where as usual the writing begins at the bottom of the letter and precedes to the top). The body of the margin has also suffered damage, and some words are missing between the writing there in II, 29, and the continuation in II, 28. As a result of these lacunae, much of the details concerning

¹ {Read, 'the auspicious lord'; see below, the note to II, 28, line 19.

² Other than this description, the draft transcriptions and a few notes in his papers and publications, nothing else remains in Goitein's writings on these items.

³ On the liturgical poetry, which Ben Yijū copied on the reverse sides of his documents, see pages 67–68.

business dealings between Maḍmūn and Ben Yijū have been lost. As noted in II, 28, lines 14–15, a complete account accompanied the letter, but this has not been identified. The address on verso is also missing. The scribe, who penned the letter for Maḍmūn, wrote the master's name at the top of the letter. Ben Yijū's identity is a matter of certainty, both because of the contents of the letter, especially, the passage dealing with his brother Mevassēr, and the liturgical poem written in his hand on verso.

The most interesting sections of II, 28–29 are the two passages cited in Goitein's Summary, secs. C and D in our translation. First, Maḍmūn's urging Ben Yijū to leave India and return to Aden and the guarantee of protection for him, which Maḍmūn obtained from Bilāl b. Jarīr, the governor of Aden. Maḍmūn alludes to Ben Yijū's hesitation about making the trip, but the exact translation of the expression used there (lines 17–18, which I have rendered: 'fear that people would say that something had made you act in haste') and its import are not entirely clear. The second passage describes the difficulties in sending goods valued at 40 dinars to Ben Yijū's brother, Mevassēr, of whose bad reputation Maḍmūn had heard. Egypt is reported to have undergone a two-year period of epidemics and governmental instability, which prevented the travel of merchants from there to Aden and vice versa. As we know from two other letters (III, 15 and III, 29), Maḍmūn eventually succeeded in shipping the goods to Mevassēr. From III, 15, we can ascertain that this took place approximately in 1145, which in all likelihood is the year in which our letter was written (see below, the note to II, 29, line 9).⁴ The information concerning the epidemics in Egypt may suggest that it was written a year earlier, however (see the note to II, 29, line 11). Bilāl's guarantee evidently did not have the desired effect. Ben Yijū remained in India for a few more years, and only in September 1149 informed his family that he had left India for good and returned to Aden (III, 29).

⁴ Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 5:537, n. 363, notes that II, 29 was written ca. 1145.

Translation

[A. Opening remarks]

[II, 28] (1) Your servant⁵ Maḍmūn b. al-Ḥasan⁶ b. Bundār—*may he rest in Eden!*⁷

In Your name, O Merciful.

(2) Your letter has arrived, my lord, the eminent, most illustrious elder. May God lengthen your life, (3) make permanent your honored position and well-being, protect your soul from the vicissitudes of fate, (4) crush with disdainful humiliation those envious of you and your enemies! May He not deny you His superior (5) gift of success!⁸ [[May He crush with disdainful humiliation those en]] May He be (6) for you a supporter and a guardian! I read it and comprehended its contents. (7) As to the longing, which you mentioned, my lord, I (your servant) have twice (8) as much (for you). May God grant a reunion with you!

[B. Receipt and distribution of betel nuts and pepper shipped from India]

I (your servant) took note of (9) what you wrote concerning your shipment of red and white betel nuts. (10) It arrived and I (your servant)

⁵ Maḍmūn, the Nagid of the Land of Yemen, refers to himself as 'his servant' in this and other letters, even where he addresses a person of much lesser standing, like Ben Yijū. (The third person used in the letter for both the writer and addressee has been changed to first and second persons in the translation.) Goitein, *Yemenites*, 85 (in Hebrew): "The fact that Maḍmūn refers to himself always as 'your servant' is, of course, only a matter of convention. It has two explanations: (a) The Yemenites say *man qāl anā dhāq al-'anā*, 'he who says "I", tastes poverty.' (b) This ancient usage is based on the fact that a detailed letter was usually a petition to a higher authority."

⁶ Al-Ḥasan rather than Ḥasan also in II, 12v (address); II, 17v (address); II, 33, line 1.

⁷ The clerk who penned this letter used the style of a petition to a higher authority, in which the name of the petitioner is written on the upper left-hand side of the page. This style is exceptional in the letters in this collection and is found in an actual petition for assistance (II, 74), in letters in which the writer showed special deference to the addressee (IV, 62) or in other special circumstances (II, 64). Evidently, other writers used this style more liberally. See also II, 67a.

⁸ The expression *wa-min ḥusni tawfiqihi lā akhlāhā* is common at the beginning of letters. Goitein, "Portrait," 457, translates "may he never leave him without full success," and in n. 28, comments "success, mainly in the fulfillment of God's commandments." Our letters do contain such blessings as *wa-yu'inuhu 'alā tā'atihi*, 'and may He assist you to obey Him' (IV, 32, line 15). But the request for success from God is not limited, in the Geniza and in Islamic sources, to religious acts. Success from God in commerce, e.g., II, 7, lines 7–8, *fa-in waffāq allāh fihī bay'*, 'if God facilitates its sale'; also cf. Ed., "Tawfiq."

took delivery of it. Similarly the pepper. (11) All that you mentioned in your letter arrived, and I (your servant) delivered to Sheikh (12) Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm and Sheikh Khalaf⁹ all that you had written (13) should be delivered to them, and they received it.¹⁰ The details of the sale of pepper (14) and what was exchanged for it, I (your servant), include in the copy of your account,¹¹ which is (15) attached to my letter. Familiarize yourself with it, your eminence, God willing.

[C. Maḍmūn urges Ben Yijū to leave India]

(16) You wrote about your decision to (17) come to Aden, and that the only thing that prevented you was your fear that people would say that (18) something had made you act in haste.¹² I (your servant) spoke with the 'auspicious (19) lord'¹³ concerning you, and I took from him a pledge of protection.¹⁴ So you should resolve to come, (20) God willing. You have nothing to fear. This is better than your staying (21) in the land of India,¹⁵ for if, God forbid, your appointed time¹⁶ overtakes you, (22) all that you

⁹ Khalaf b. Isaac.

¹⁰ Maḍmūn often mentions in his letters to Ben Yijū deliveries of goods that he made for him to Joseph b. Abraham (here referred to with the Arabic forms of these names, Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm) and Khalaf b. Isaac (Maḍmūn's cousins and Ben Yijū's business partners, concerning whom, see chap. 2, sec. F and chap. 2, sec. G respectively). Cf., e.g., II, 16, lines 29–31 (iron); II, 16v, lines 21–22 ('eggs'); II, 24, line 24 (boards); II, 30, lines 7–8 (betel nuts).

¹¹ Arabic *nuskhat ḥisāb*. The phrase is common in our papers. An account was written in two copies, one for each of the partners. But in this expression the word *nuskha* perhaps connotes not 'copy' but rather 'register.' See 460, n. 1; III, 10, line 26 ('as had been stated in your *nuskha*'); cf. Dozy, *Supplément*, 2:666b.

¹² Arabic *kharāṭ lahu shay*, the exact meaning of which is not clear. *Kharāṭ* also means cheat, lie, etc. Cf. 592, n. 32.

¹³ After the year 1139/40 Bilāl b. Jarīr was granted the honorary titles *al-shaykh al-sa'id al-muwaffiq al-sadiq*, 'the auspicious, successful, sound' (see Geddes, "Bilāl"). *Mālik*, 'lord,' is a common term of deference in addressing or referring to honored people in the Yemenite letters, e.g., II, 33, side b, line 14 (where Maḍmūn refers to Maṣliḥ the Head of the Academy as *mālikī*, 'my lord'); II, 75, line 4, referring to Abraham Maimuni. It is also used in referring to people of lesser stature, as in II, 43v, line 8, addressing the merchant Abū Naṣr.

¹⁴ Cf. I, 25v, l. 10 (239, n. 6), *wa-akhadhū sijillāt al-sultān*.

¹⁵ Arabic *bilād al-Hind*. For the geographical area that this term designates, see pages 6–7.

¹⁶ Arabic *ajal*, a euphemism for death in Judeo-Arabic literature. See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 5:130–31; Friedman, "Notes by a Disciple," 538 ff.

have will be lost, and your children will join¹⁷ [II, 29] (1) the wards of the state. This is my advice to you. Do not offer justifications (2) of any sort.

[D. On Ben Yijū's request to send 40 Malikī dinars to his brother Mevassēr; epidemics in Egypt]

You wrote about shipping (3) goods, purchased with forty Malikī dinars of (4) your money, to Egypt, to your brother Mevassēr. I (your servant) (5) had decided not to burden anyone with the shipment, (6) because of the talk that had reached me, namely that he was a good-for-nothing. [However,] (7) because of the high regard in which I (your servant) hold your eminence, I shall undertake to send [it]. (8) [I shall take care of] sending it, if someone departs this [year for] (9) Egypt,¹⁸ since no one arrived last year or [so far this year] (10) from Egypt, because of the [death (?) (11) and epidemic¹⁹ prevailing there, for two years in a row.²⁰ Recently [of the] (12) people,²¹ a small boat²² arrived with four merchants on board

¹⁷ Much of this section [C] of II, 28, is translated in Ghosh, *Antique*, 160, but with many errors, e.g., for lines 20 ff. ("this is better," etc.) Ghosh renders: "[the king] will resolve everything in his court in the country of India. And if, God forbid, he were to lose... what he has and his children were part of that [loss]..."

¹⁸ Mevassēr's travels and irresponsible behavior are mentioned in a number of documents; see page 73. Eventually, Maḍmūn was able to send Mevassēr the 40 dinars. In July 30–August 27, 1147 (III, 15, lines 31–32), Khalaf b. Isaac wrote from Aden to Ben Yijū in India, that he did not have information as to whether that sum, sent to Egypt with Abū Naṣr b. Elisha, had been delivered to Mevassēr. This statement evidently was in response to Ben Yijū's inquiry concerning the success of Abū Naṣr's mission. It follows that Maḍmūn sent the merchandise approximately in 1145, which would probably be the time our letter was written. In September 1149 (III, 29, lines 7–11), Ben Yijū wrote from Aden to Mevassēr in Sicily and informed him that the civet perfume worth 40 dinars, which had been sent with Abū Naṣr had not been delivered to Mevassēr, since he had returned to Sicily, where the perfume was then forwarded. I assume that all three documents refer to the same 40-dinar shipment. However, II, 29, line 3, speaks of Malikī dinars, III, 15, line 31, of dinars without specification, as does III, 29, line 8. But in the latter text, Goitein notes that the quantity of civet perfume shipped indicates that Egyptian dinars were intended; and the matter requires further investigation.

¹⁹ Arabic *wabā'*. See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 5:113; Dols, *The Black Death*, 315–16. There was a 'tremendous epidemic' (*wabā' 'aḡīm*) in Egypt in 1142–43 (Dols, *ibid.*, 32–33).

²⁰ Cf. II, 30, lines 18–21, where Maḍmūn writes Ben Yijū that he was unable to fulfill the latter's request to forward 20 dinars to his other brother, Joseph, since no Jews had arrived that year from Egypt.

²¹ Arabic [*al-*]nās. This term is used regularly in the documents of this book for 'merchants' or 'traveling merchants.' See 239, n. 4. The restoration at the end of line 11 is uncertain.

²² Arabic *jalaba*. For the type of boat represented by this word (plural *jilāb*), which appears several times in the India Book, see Serjeant, *Portuguese*, 134, 137.

who reported (13) that the situation in the country (Egypt) had improved. Prices had fallen, and the government [was in control].²³ (14) May God—may He be praised and exalted!—grant relief (15) to all people!²⁴

[E. Various business affairs and closing account]

As to the dinar, which you mentioned, which was yours (16) for the piece of copper,²⁵ I (your servant) added it to your account. (17) Sheikh A... b. 'Abd al-Rahmān²⁶ was delayed (18) [...] looking for [...] (19) [...] finding [...] [Margin, II, 29] [...] and seven [...] and three quarters [...] which you wrote to send to [your] br[other] Mevassēr, forty dinars.²⁷ I sent to you²⁸ in the ship of //al-Muqaddam²⁹// with the *nākhudā* [Ja]whar al-Muqaddam³⁰—may God decree its safe arrival!—a purse, in which were [...] less [...] [Margin, II, 28] [...] the price [...] and thirty dinars. And in the purse, were fifteen Malikī dinars. The total that you owe is 260¾ dinars. The balance of your debt is three quarters, hereby waived. It will be collected from you when you arrive, God willing.³¹ [II, 29v] (1) [...] ninety

²³ I believe a more literal translation (see the next note) of the preceding sentence would be: 'Prices and the government have been stabilized and (14) well-being [restored (?)].' (Arabic *wa-tabbā al-si'r wa-ṣulṭān* [...] *al-salāma*. I read *tb* as *tabbā*, a dual, with the first form, *tabba*, being equivalent here to the tenth, *istatabba*.) For the political instability in Egypt in the late 1140's, see Lane-Poole, *History of Egypt*, 169; Lev, *State and Society*, 61. On political upheavals in Egypt preceding and during the Nagidate of Samuel b. Ḥananya (1140–59), see Friedman, "Maimonides and Zūṭā", 475 ff., and literature cited there.

²⁴ The translation of the last lines (10–15) is based on Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 5:50, with slight changes (see the preceding note).

²⁵ Arabic *ṣufr*. For the meaning of this term, see 555, n. 11. For this piece, see below II, 29v, line 10.

²⁶ Evidently, a Muslim merchant. A Sheikh 'Abd al-Wahhāb b. 'Abd al-Rahmān is mentioned in VII, 47, line 4.

²⁷ The forty dinars to be sent to Mevassēr are added to Ben Yijū's debit.

²⁸ Arabic *lahu* in the original literally means 'to him,' but Maḍmūn uses the third person in addressing Ben Yijū throughout most of the letter. I initially assumed that the pronoun refers to Mevassēr. That understanding is untenable for a number of reasons. The ship and what was sent in it (coins) obviously point to India as the destination. See the following note.

²⁹ The continuation, II, 29v, line 5, refers to the ship of Ibn al-Muqaddam. Since in both instances Jawhar carried goods, obviously the same ship was intended, and al-Muqaddam and Ibn al-Muqaddam were one and the same. On (Ibn) al-Muqaddam and his ships, which traveled between Yemen and India, see II, 16, line 48 and 324, n. 18.

³⁰ Jawhar Al-Muqaddamī was the slave or freedman of al-Muqaddam. See page 151.

³¹ I assume there was a credit of 260 dinars mentioned in the missing portion of the document (and the accompanying account), so that only three-quarters of a dinar remained in his debt. There appears to be a contradiction between the last two sentences. Perhaps Maḍmūn wrote that he waived the three-quarters of a dinar owed by Ben Yijū but then added that after his arrival in Aden he could pay it.

[...] they took it [...] (2) [...] there was no opportunity for unpacking and repacking.³² Its total weight is (3) one *bahār* and ninety pounds. The price is one hundred and (4) twenty-six dinars and one dinar exit tolls from the port (of Aden).³³ It was transported in the ship of Ibn al-Muqaddam (6) with Jawhar. With him there is also a purse [in which are] (7) eighteen Malikī dinars [and another in which are (?)] (8) one hundred and forty-five [Malikī] dinars. (9) [And no]thing remains in your credit. I did not pay³⁴ the *nākhudā* [of the ship] (10) freightage for the piece of copper.³⁵ This is for your information. [Peace.]}

³² Cf. Margariti, "Aden," 314.

³³ The *furda*.

³⁴ Arabic *wa-lam yazin*, lit., 'he did not pay.' The writer seems to be referring to himself.

³⁵ See recto, line 16.}