

Al-Kindī (ninth century) in fact referred to a type of iron called *byd*. Al-Hassan, read *bid* (pl.) white,' but since al-Kindī wrote repeatedly *byd* and this spelling is found frequently in the Geniza documents, rather than *abyad* (sg.), 'white,' Goitein's vocalization, *bayd*, 'eggs,' is preferable. This can be substantiated by passages from al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048), who described shaping crucible steel in the form of *baydāt*, 'eggs,' and al-Jildakī (fourteenth century), who described caste steel in the shape of ostrich eggs.<sup>12</sup>

The contents of the fragment can be summarized as follows:

- [A] Conventional opening of letter (lines 1–5).  
 [B] Arrival of imports from India and jettisoning of freight when attacked by pirates (lines 5–15), hereby translated:

I, your servant, took notice (6) of what you—may God preserve your well-being!—wrote (7) concerning the shipment of 15 *bahārs* of 'standard'<sup>13</sup> iron (8) and seven bahars of belts (?) of 'eggs.'<sup>14</sup> This is to inform you that the sailors (9) jettisoned some of the 'eggs' when the pirates (*al-surrāq*) [approached] (10) the gulf Fam al-Khawr (alt. tr.: on the mouth of the gulf). But I, your servant, already distributed it (the loss) (11) according to the freight of the ship, and I collected this for you. (12) And I, your servant, already sold for you the 'standard' iron, the 'eggs' and the cardamom, (13) which arrived with Sheikh Maḥrūz.<sup>15</sup> All of this (14) is detailed in the copy of the account,<sup>16</sup> accompanying this letter, (15) that you are reading, God willing.

- [C] Arrival of copper<sup>17</sup> from 'Aydhāb in two small *maṭiyya* boats<sup>18</sup> to be followed by other commodities in four ships (lines 15–20).}

<sup>12</sup> For these sources, see Al-Hassan, "Iron."

<sup>13</sup> Arabic *rasmī*, also in III, 11, lines 36, 39. It is not certain what kind of iron the word denotes. According to Goitein's notes it is probably a mediocre type (in III, 11 Goitein translated 'ordinary'), but the word can also be translated 'legal,' 'official,' etc.

<sup>14</sup> Arabic *bayd mahājim*. According to the dictionaries, *mahājim* (sing. *mahjam*, *mihjam*) are cupping-glasses (Hava, *Dictionary*, 113) or belts (Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 85). I assume the 'eggs' (cakes of iron) were joined together in strips.

<sup>15</sup> Maḥrūz b. Jacob, for whom Maḥmūd had asked Ben Yijū's assistance in India, in II, 30, lines 22–23.

<sup>16</sup> Arabic *nuskhat al-ḥisāb*. See 362, n. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Arabic *ṣufī*. For the meaning of this term, see 555, n. 11.

<sup>18</sup> For this type of vessel, see 476, n. 18.}

II, C. *Letters and Memoranda Sent by Maḥmūd to Egypt (Cairo-Fustat)*

II, 32 *Letter from Maḥmūd b. Ḥasan to Abū Zikrī Kohēn*

Aden, ca. 1130{–40}

Bodl. MS. Heb. a. 3 (Cat. 2873), fol. 19

Ed. Goitein, *Yemenites*, 84–92. English translation in Goitein, *Letters*, 181–85, on which the following is based.

This important and large fragment (69 lines preserved) lacks both the beginning and the end, and {because the beginning is torn away} consequently the address {opposite it on verso} is also missing. But it is in the unmistakable, characteristic handwriting of Maḥmūd b. Ḥasan. The evidence from penmanship is confirmed by many details, which also indicate that the letter was addressed to Maḥmūd's counterpart as representative of the merchants in Fustat, Abū Zikrī Kohēn, who also happened to be his brother-in-law.<sup>1</sup>

This letter presents an excellent illustration of the activities of a Jewish representative of merchants in a port city. He takes care of the estate of foreign traders who perished in a shipwreck (sec. A of the letter) and collaborates closely with the most prominent Muslim merchant in town (secs. B, C). This man, Bilāl b. Jarīr, later became a general and ruler of Aden, a transition natural in medieval mercantile nations, such as the Arabs and Italians. Maḥmūd {and his partner Bilāl} constructed a ship, presumably an especially strong one, for the of 2,100 mile route to Ceylon {Sri Lanka}, the island near the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent, from which cinnamon and other Oriental products were imported.<sup>2</sup> It is remarkable and perhaps not without interest for the

<sup>1</sup> {They are identified as brothers-in-law in III, 29, line 9. The many details which indicate that the letter was addressed to Abū Zikrī were enumerated by Goitein in his book *Yemenites*, 85: the size of the letter and its handsome execution; the large number of business dealings imposed on the recipient; requests to handle various affairs connected with different merchants, including legal matters and charitable donations; and the information concerning other merchants, both those dealing in the India trade and others. All of these are suggestive but not conclusive. Corroborating evidence for Goitein's identification of Abū Zikrī as the recipient can be adduced from the liturgical selections written on verso of III, 32. In the same yet-unidentified handwriting and evidently from the same prayer book are the liturgical selections written on the blank spaces on verso of V, 11, a letter sent to Abū Zikrī, II, 61, whose recipient Goitein identified as Sulaymān b. Abū Zikrī, and II, 45a (presumably also sent to him); see the introductions to these documents.

<sup>2</sup> No. III, 11, lines 27–28, speaks of a partnership between Maḥmūd and Bilāl to outfit a ship—probably the same one—which belonged to them, to Ceylon. That document has been dated ca. 1140.}

history of minor arts that, besides merchants, three Jewish gold- (or silver-) smiths, one of them a Maghrebi, traveled in this new ship to Ceylon.

#### Translation

[A. About the estates of two shipwrecked traders and a large gift to the family of one of them]

(1) [...] will come with him [...] (2) My lord inquired about Zikrī b. Abu 'l-Faraj of Tripoli.<sup>3</sup> (3) He arrived in complete safety, sold, bought, finished his affairs, (4) and returned home<sup>4</sup> in the same year.

Sheikh Nahray b. 'Allān<sup>5</sup> arrived with him, carrying (5) a power of attorney from the son of Nissīm b. Benāyā.<sup>6</sup> Zikrī of Tripoli, (6) too, had a power of attorney from the families of the two Maghrebis, who perished (7) in the boat of Ja'far.<sup>7</sup> I took notice of the two writs. (8) The two dead men had deposited with me 140 Malikī dinars.<sup>8</sup> (9) With this sum they<sup>9</sup> bought two bales of lac, containing 1,000 pounds, (10) for 113 dinars, the expenses {alt. tr.: toll}<sup>10</sup> for these two bales being 13 dinars.

<sup>3</sup> One of the two traders who had a power of attorney to deal with the estates (see below). He is mentioned as being engaged in the India trade about ten years later in a letter written by Abū Zikrī Kohen, the surmised recipient of our letter (V, 5, lines 3-4).

<sup>4</sup> Arabic *kharaḡ*. Normally, merchants who made this long voyage remained on the India route for more than one year: {Goitein, *Studies*, 354, n. 4: "In the language of the India traders *kharaḡ* means 'coming out from the sea,' travelling *homewards*. The same usage prevails in the Arabic spoken in Yemen up to the present day." Cf. Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 123 ('to return to [by sea]'). See also II, 55, line 29, II, 56-57, line 21, II, 66, line 21. Goitein might have understood that Zikrī b. Abu 'l-Faraj arrived in Aden from India and returned West that same year. Perhaps the intention is that he arrived in Aden from Egypt, which was not such a long voyage, did his business, then returned to the West.}

<sup>5</sup> A seasoned India traveler repeatedly mentioned {see line 30 for his return trip and II, 56, line 7}. An interesting letter of his appears in VI, 39.

<sup>6</sup> ENA 4011, f. 57v, dated June 24, 1129, shows him still active in Egypt.

<sup>7</sup> {It would seem as though there were powers of attorney for the estates of three dead merchants, Nissīm and the two Maghrebis. More probably, Maḏmūn's description of the affair is not precise here. There were altogether two Maghrebi merchants, Nissīm and al-Nafūsī (see line 20), who had perished. The two can be assumed to have been partners, but the terms of the partnership were not known (see the continuation). Accordingly, the family of each dead man appointed an attorney, who claimed the whole deposit. The shipowner Ja'far was evidently an Arab; nothing else is known of him.}

<sup>8</sup> For the exchange rate, see 172, n. 27. The dead men's merchandise, the bulk of their possessions, was naturally with them in the shipwrecked boat.

<sup>9</sup> The attorneys.

<sup>10</sup> Customs and other dues in Aden plus freight Aden-'Aydḥāb. {Arabic *mu'na*. The term is used for tolls. See below, lines 34, 35, and 171-72, n. 23.} Our Maḏmūn was also *nāzir*, or superintendent, of the port and as such able to know such things exactly.

They bought Qaṣṣī<sup>11</sup> fabrics for 14 dinars (11) to cover the expenses of the customs in 'Aydḥāb<sup>12</sup> and the freight for the way through the desert. This makes a total of (12) 140 dinars.

The two attorneys agreed to put (13) this shipment into the hand of Abraham, son of the *Reliable* Claimant,<sup>13</sup> in order, (14) God willing, to carry it to Fustat together with my merchandise. (15) When all of them are in Fustat, the two attorneys will go to court, (16) and each one's right on this shipment will be established and he then will take it. {Alt. tr.: the two attorneys will litigate the case, and whoever's claim is established will take it.} (17) Here in Aden there is no one who could decide this matter or (even) who knows the situation. (18) I took a writ of release from each of them and no longer have any responsibility with regard to this.

(19) I also gave two *bahārs* (sacks) of lac (20) to Zikrī of Tripoli, as a gift to the family of al-Nafūsī<sup>14</sup> in Tripoli, (21) for I have heard that they are very poor. I believe this (22) was the right thing to do.<sup>15</sup>

[B. A partnership with the Muslim merchant prince Bilāl for trade with Ceylon]

After asking God, (23) the Exalted, for guidance,<sup>16</sup> I, your servant, constructed<sup>17</sup> a boat in Aden and sent goods in {alt. tr.: and outfitted} it (24) to Ceylon in partnership with the most illustrious Sheikh Bilāl.<sup>18</sup> Of our coreligionists these traveled in it: (25) Sālim, the son of the cantor,<sup>19</sup> Ibn Ḥidāda ('of the art of smithing'), and al-Baḏīḏī ('maker of slippers'),<sup>20</sup> and the goldsmith, (26) who had arrived here in his company, and the

<sup>11</sup> An Indian textile, which was one of the staple goods going west, mostly spelled with *ṣṣ* (not *ss*). See Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles*, {161-62; from al-Qaṣṣ on the northwest coast of India}.

<sup>12</sup> See I, 6, line 23, and the accompanying note.

<sup>13</sup> A nickname probably given because of an incident during a lawsuit. The name is found elsewhere. {It appears to be a strange combination of Hebrew or Aramaic and Arabic. Semākh al-Da'wa is mentioned below, lines 30-31 (where his father's name, Abu 'l-Ḥasan, is supplied), 44-45; II, 58, margin, lines 12-13; VI, 21v, line 8.}

<sup>14</sup> Several merchants with this family name were active in the India trade.

<sup>15</sup> Two *bahārs*, averaging 600 pounds (see the note to line 54, below) were an exceptionally great gift, the like of which would never be sent even to the highest religious dignitary. We find gifts to the bereaved families of traders elsewhere, too, a kind of mutual insurance of merchants engaged in perilous undertakings.

<sup>16</sup> {For the *istikḥāra*, see 256, n. 6.}

<sup>17</sup> Arabic *anṣa*.

<sup>18</sup> {As proven by III, 11, lines 27-28, the partnership was both for construction of the ship and for outfitting it (*jahhazahu*).}

<sup>19</sup> Back in Aden in 1134 (ca. 1131) IV, 5.

<sup>20</sup> These two merchants appear together in a letter to Judah Kohen (the surmised recipient of our letter) as commuting between al-Mahdiyya and Sicily (V, 13). See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:332, n. 27.

two goldsmiths, who came this (27) year, Abū 'Alī and the Maghrebi. All these traveled (28) in the boat. May God ordain their safe arrival!

[C. A partnership with Bilāl for trade with Egypt]

Again I, your servant, (29) asked God, the Exalted, for guidance and sent with the most illustrious Sheikh (30) Nahray b. 'Allān<sup>21</sup> and with Sheikh<sup>22</sup> Abraham b. (31) Abu 'l-Ḥasan, known as son of the *Reliable* Claimant, and through (32) both,<sup>23</sup> in partnership with the most illustrious Sheikh Bilāl b. Jarīr (33) al-Awḥadī<sup>24</sup> sixty bales of lac, weighing 100 *bahārs*, and {add: for (34) the tolls in 'Aydhāb, customs and freight},<sup>25</sup> eight bales of pepper, to be sold (35) in 'Aydhāb for customs expenses {alt. tr.: tolls} and freight, and also 100 Qaṣṣī (36) *thawabs* (robes)<sup>26</sup> for customs in Sawākin<sup>27</sup> and other places. All this (37) belongs to the partnership.

I, your servant, am asking you now, relying on (38) your acts of kindness, when this shipment arrives safely, God willing, (39) to kindly take delivery of one-half of the aforementioned bales and sell them (40) for me for whatever price God apportions as livelihood.<sup>28</sup> After (41) the price is agreed upon {lit., 'it becomes a specific amount of money'}, turn everything into gold (42) and silver—nothing else<sup>29</sup>—and distribute it

<sup>21</sup> {His arrival was announced in line 4. Here he travels back to the west after what was obviously a brief stay in Yemen.}

<sup>22</sup> He is not 'illustrious.' He was one of the many minor luminaries of the India trade. See {above line 13, where his father's name was not mentioned and} also below.

<sup>23</sup> They were in charge of the actual transport [i.e., the merchandise was sent with them].

<sup>24</sup> See the introduction to this document and Strothmann, "Karam." For al-Awḥadī, Löfgren, *Aden*, passim, always has al-Muḥammadī. {Also 'Umāra (Kay, *Yaman*, 79, 80) calls Bilāl: al-Muḥammadī. Note that Bilāl governed Aden on behalf of his master Saba' b. Abū Su'ūd (see introduction to II, 51), who was called al-Awḥad, 'The Unique' (Kay, ib., 50 [Arabic Text]), and whose son and heir was named Muḥammad. The latter married Bilāl's daughter and inherited his wealth (Kay, ib., 160). Perhaps this connection led to the change in Bilāl's by-name.

<sup>25</sup> In the continuation these words are repeated, and evidently because of the redundancy, Goitein, *Letters*, 184, omitted them.

<sup>26</sup> For these robes, see above, line 10.}

<sup>27</sup> Another Sudanese port, still operating. {On Sawākin, see 258, n. 2. Robes were sold for payment of customs in Sawākin also according to I, 33v, line 4.}

<sup>28</sup> A Muslim representative of the merchants would do the same service for Bilāl's share. But the final profits would be pooled together, as proper in a partnership. {For the 'whatever... apportioned' formula, also in line 55, see the discussion in pages 63-65.}

<sup>29</sup> No merchandise, such as Lebdi carried with him on his way to Aden and India. See I, 13. {Specific, Arabic *ma'lūm*.}

among {alt. tr.: divide it between} (43) various merchants,<sup>30</sup> coreligionists, or others, if they are known (44) as reliable,<sup>31</sup> and send it on.

[D. Instructions to the recipient and an order for household goods]

Leave some money in the hand of Abraham, son of the *Reliable* Claimant, (45) and if he {add: the aforementioned Abraham} has need for it, give him a loan of (46) 100 *mūthqāls*,<sup>32</sup> from which he might derive profit. (47) Buy for him what he wishes,<sup>33</sup> and let me know (48) in your letter what you have bought for him. (49) I also ordered him to buy for me a wickerwork basket with china:<sup>34</sup> bowls, dishes, (50) and cups {alt. tr.: copper vessels for wine},<sup>35</sup> also for four *mūthqāls* good rose marmalade,<sup>36</sup> such as one prepares (51) for the household. I gave him {alt. tr.: I wrote and sent with him}<sup>37</sup> a memorandum. Please have him act (52) accordingly.

Also sent with them, exclusively for me, your servant, (53) sixty bags of Sēlī (Ceylon) cinnamon,<sup>38</sup> each bag weighing 100 pounds, which

<sup>30</sup> For risk management, money was often divided between several couriers. See 742, n. 2. This was done, for example, with the funds sent to Judah ha-Levi, according to IV, 22, line 12 (pace the published translations.)

<sup>31</sup> This does not mean that non-Jews were regarded as generally unreliable, but the Jewish merchants between Spain and India, as far as they were of consequence, formed a kind of closed club, known to each other, certainly at least to the representative of merchants. {But see II, 46, line 3: "Never trust Gentiles."}

<sup>32</sup> In partnership with me. *Mūthqāls* are Egyptian dinars.

<sup>33</sup> The Maghrebi merchant was not familiar with the Cairene market.

<sup>34</sup> Arabic *ghadār*, which could also mean fine pottery. Real china naturally came from the East and was sent by Maḍmūn to Cairo (II, 33).

<sup>35</sup> {Arabic *kizān*. Cf. 422, n. 32; 601, n. 40.}

<sup>36</sup> Arabic *ward marbā*. On the uses of rose marmalade, see Lev, *Medicinal Substances*, 136-37.

<sup>37</sup> Arabic *katābtu ma'āhu*. In our letters, *katāba ma'a fulān* means 'he wrote (something and sent) with PN.' Additional examples in II2v, lines 14, 26, III, 4v, line 1. A similar expression, where the word for sending is omitted ('buy... in one of the ships') occurs in III, 12, line 46.

<sup>38</sup> Arabic *qirfa sili*. Cf. VII, 36v, addition, line 2, *al-'ūd al-sili*, Sili aromatic wood VII, 70 (TS AS 156, f. 238v, line 12): *qilāda kharaz sili*, 'a necklace made of Sili (Ceylon?) beads' (Goitein, "Portrait," 462). According to Watt, *Commercial Products*, 313-14, "it is in comparatively modern times only that Ceylon cinnamon appeared in the markets of the world." In his Hebrew edition of II, 32, Goitein noted that even though according to al-Sam'āni, *Kitāb al-Ansāb*, 324, the adjectival form of Silān (Ceylon) is Silāni, not Sili, in all likelihood the intention here is to Ceylon, since that island is known for its cinnamon. Attention should be called, however, to another toponym in southern India, Sael; see Barbosa, *Description*, 173. For *qirfa*, see Lev & Amar, *Medicinal Substances*, 206 (note there the scientific name: *cinnamomum zelanicum*).}

makes a total of (54) twenty *bahārs*.<sup>39</sup> Kindly take delivery of one-half of this, too, (55) and sell it for your servant for whatever price God, the Exalted, apportions. (56) Please keep the account for this apart,<sup>40</sup> since it is exclusively for me, your servant.<sup>41</sup>

(Here the manuscript breaks off. A short marginal note is incomplete and not connected with the text translated above.)<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Here the *bahār* is taken as weighing 300 pounds, which was indeed the standard at that time and place. But see 597, n. 13.

<sup>40</sup> {Arabic *nāhiya*. Cf. Dozy, *Supplément*, 2:647, *min/ft nāhiya*, 'à quelque distance.'}

<sup>41</sup> And not in partnership with Bilāl. The other half of the cinnamon probably went farther west, e.g., to Palermo or al-Mahdiyya.

<sup>42</sup> {In it Maḍmūn expressed his hope that Abu 'l-Khayr al-Barqī, who was delayed somewhere in the Far East, would return that year and that they would meet in 'Aydhab. This is the only evidence we have for Maḍmūn's traveling away from Aden.}

II, 33–34 *Memorandum from Maḍmūn b. Ḥasan to Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Nethanel*

Aden {ca. 1135}

II, 33. TS 8 J 37, f. 1

II, 34. TS Arabic 5, f. 2

Two bifolia, each containing two leaves or four pages, sown together to form a booklet, so that II, 33 contains sides a, b, g, h, and II, 34 sides c, d, e, f. Since the two bifolia were in different collections {i.e., in different locations in the Taylor-Schechter Collection at Cambridge}, their real nature was totally unknown and they were wrongly folded. However, the page order as presented below is undoubtedly correct, as is borne out by the content.

Each page is 15 cm long and 10.5 cm wide. Tiny holes for a cord are discernible at the fifth and tenth centimeter from the top. The paper, once light brown in color, is now mostly dark brown, even gray. The paper is torn in several places, especially on sides g–h.

The memorandum is written in the hand of Maḍmūn b. Ḥasan of Aden. Side a contains the heading only, in the form of a book's title page. Side h is empty.

Unlike a letter, in which the text is usually continuous and uninterrupted in any way from beginning to end, this list is divided into paragraphs, sometimes with headings (e.g., side b, lines 3, 15), and quite far apart, sometimes by several empty lines (side c, line 7; side d, line 3).

This document is a typical memorandum. The famed Old Cairo India merchant, Abū Sa'īd Ḥalfon b. Nethanel al-Dimyāṭī, while in Aden, received detailed instructions from the local representative of the merchants, requiring him to take various actions upon returning to Old Cairo. The purpose of the present list was to remind him of the details. We have already seen (II, 32, line 51) how Maḍmūn gave a similar memorandum to another merchant traveling from Aden to Cairo. Other merchants also refer to such memoranda, e.g., in V, 6, line 7; and VII, 50 is a document of the same type, although the word *tadhkira* ('memorandum') does not appear at the top as it does here {similarly, for example, III, 2}.

Maḍmūn calls his memorandum *mubāraka*, 'blessed,' both on the title page and in the opening line of the text; cf. below, 385, n. 45. Perhaps this was because its first concern is with gifts sent to various religious functionaries in Old Cairo. Alternatively, the appellation might have been considered auspicious, like Maḍmūn's 'blessed' ship {al-Mubāarak}, see above, II, 20, line 31; the 'blessing' in question would then be that the