

II, 52 *Letter from Khalaf b. Isaac to Egypt*

Aden {ca. 1130–39}

Bodl. MS. Heb. c. 98, fol. 67

Khalaf requests the delivery of three letters and consignments to be delivered to India travelers in Cairo and expresses his loyalty to the Head of the Jews residing there.

{The three traders named in this small fragment from the end of a letter, written in Khalaf's handwriting and consisting of 12 lines, are Abū Zikrī,¹ Abraham al-'Akāwī (from Akko)² and Musallam al-Ka'kī.³ The head of the Yeshiva to whom Khalaf expresses his devotion ('love') was undoubtedly Maṣliāh, who served in that capacity until 1139. Cf. II, 54, where Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Nethanel informs Maṣliāh of Khalaf's love and devotion.}

¹ {I assume this is Abū Zikrī Kohen, the representative of the merchants in Fustat.

² Also mentioned in II, 49, line 23.

³ See on him II, 24, line 27.}

II, 53 *Letter of Thanks from Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Manasseh to Khalaf b. Isaac*

Fustat {ca. 1120's}

Bodl. MS. Heb. a. 2 (Cat. 2805), fol. 16

Huge letter of thanks to Khalaf {addressed with the Hebrew form of his name Ḥalfon} b. Isaac, Aden, by the court clerk Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Manasseh, Fustat, for sending him as a gift a satchel containing one *mann* of *jawza* (nutmeg) and green *bisbāsa* (mace). These two spices {and medicinal substances} come from one tree, the first from the fruit's pit and the second from its hard shell, and were therefore included in one shipment.¹ For some reason the original of the letter is preserved here. It is very stylish and contains much Babylonian vocalization.² Most of the letter is written in florid Hebrew, and it emphasizes that the gifts are especially valued, because of the regularity, with which they were sent. It is also noted that Khalaf b. Isaac's father, who was alive at the time of the writing³ and to whom greetings were sent, was also a regular benefactor. This letter is several years older than II, 54, because here the Adenese donor's honorary title is still 'Delight of the Congregations,' while in the letter of thanks from the Yeshiva (II, 54) and the report on the events in Aden in 1132 {ca. 1131} (IV, 5), he is already called 'Splendor of the Scholars.' The latter title was bestowed on Khalaf only after the Head of the Yeshiva learned from his agent Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Nethanel, 'Beloved of the Yeshiva,' that the donor was also learned man.⁴

{Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Manasseh thanks Khalaf (Ḥalfon) b. Isaac for the gifts delivered by the illustrious India trader and communal figure Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Nethanel, who also delivered the gifts sent by Maḏmūn b. Ḥasan

¹ {For *jawza* and *bisbāsa*, see 382, n. 25 and n. 26.

² In other words, the exquisite execution, including vocalization, of this letter, intended to be sent to Aden, proves that it is the original and not a copy or draft. As such it is odd that it was preserved in the Geniza. The notation, in another script, on verso, 'Ibn al-Qaṭā'if, Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Manasseh's family name, suggests that the letter in fact was delivered to Aden, where the notation may have been added for filing purposes or the like. (Less probable is that the letter is a draft or copy retained in Fustat and later filed by someone other than the writer.) If so, the question, which requires further investigation, seems to be how this and other letters sent from Egypt to Yemen (and elsewhere) found their way back to Egypt and to the Geniza. Cf., e.g., I, 14 and II, 68; page 522, n. 1.

³ According to II, 51, line 6, he died in 1138, the last year of Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Manasseh's activity.}

⁴ Based on the brief description in the New List and on Goitein, *Yemenites*, 27. {For the date of IV, 5, see the Introduction to chap. 4. The citation of this document, line 16, in Goitein, "Partnerships," 321, 333, n. 15, is obviously an error, and the reference is omitted in id., *Med. Soc.*, 1:173, 442, n. 16.

for Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Manasseh, II, 33–34, and the gift for the Yeshiva, for which thanks are sent in II, 54. The honorary titles, which Ḥalfon adds to the names of Khalaf and his father, Isaac b. Bundār, were noted by him in II, 11b. The letter is written in Hebrew, mainly in rhymed prose, and in Arabic, and it can be compared to Ḥalfon's even more elaborate letter of thanks to Khalaf's uncle, Abraham b. Bundār, II, 11a. As noted by Goitein this exuberant letter of thanks proves Ḥalfon to be a master of Hebrew epistolography.⁵

⁵ Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 5:626, n. 39.

II, 54 *Letters from the Yeshiva in Egypt to Khalaf b. Isaac and Joseph b. Abraham, Aden*

{Cairo, ca. 1132}

ENA 3363, fs. 1–2

Partial publication in Mann, *Jews*, 2:337.

Drafts of letters of thanks, mostly in rhymed prose, to Khalaf {addressed with the Hebrew form of his name: Ḥalfon} (almost complete) and his cousin Joseph (beginning only), from the Academy in Cairo. Mann (*Jews*, 2:337) published part of the letter to Ḥalfon b. Isaac {and part of the letter to Joseph b. Abraham, though Mann did not mention his name}. The letter is written in Hebrew in very florid style. It contains only two words in Arabic *al-mann al-'ūd*. Mann translated this: 'the usual donation,' but the words mean: a *mann*, that is two *raṭls* (pounds), of aromatic wood. As we have seen, this was a common form of a gift, because the *'ūd* was a readily marketable commodity, and as such was equivalent to cash. The letter expresses thanks not only for the contribution but also for Ḥalfon b. Isaac's loyalty to the Academy: "your love of the Yeshiva and fondness for our office," an attitude with which we are familiar from other sources.¹

{The document is a large bifolium, on which were written a draft of letters of thanks to Khalaf b. Isaac and to Joseph b. Abraham, Aden, for their gifts to the Palestinian Academy, then located in Cairo, Egypt. The letters are issued from the 'Gate of the Academy,' namely in the name of its Head, the Gaon. The style is somewhat reminiscent of the Scribe of the Academy's letter to Joseph in II, 45. But the hands are distinct.

Aromatic wood (*'ūd*) was used for fumigation after meals. This was a costly commodity imported from the Far East, and the wealthy Jewish traders of Yemen often sent some as a gift to the community leaders of Egyptian Jewry.² In II, 33, side b, lines 16–17, we read that Maḏmūn b. Japheth sent a *mann* of aromatic wood with the illustrious India trader and community leader Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Nethanel, as a gift for the Head

¹ {Based on Goitein, *Yemenites*, 27.

² Fumigation: see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:137–38. According to Ibn Mujāwir, in the Abbasid period a *mann* of *'ūd* sold in Aden for six dinars, but the customs and various port costs for importing it came to fifteen dinars! See Smith, *Studies*, chap. 11, 209. For the medicinal faculties of aromatic wood (*'ūd*), see Lev and Amar, *Medicinal Substances*, 170; Lev, *Medicinal Substances*, 208.