

II, I. *Maḍmūn b. Ḥasan's Descendents**

II, 61 *Letter from Ḥalfon and Bundār b. Maḍmūn to Sulaymān b. Abū Zikrī Kohen*

Aden {ca. 1150}

TS 28.20

Maḍmūn's two sons write from Aden to express their sympathy on the death of Abū Zikrī Kohen to his son Sulaymān, Fustat ([A] 27 lines). They discuss unfinished business of the dead merchant ([B] 30 lines) and report briefly about the grave illness of their own father and the well-being of the widow of Sulaymān's maternal uncle, the shipowner Maḥrūz b. Jacob, and his children [C].¹

Section B can be subdivided into three portions {selections of which are given in translation below}.

(B1) Thanks to Sulaymān for honoring the writers by sending a power of attorney to collect a debt from a Jewish merchant.

{(27) Your two servants took note of (28) what you had described in your distinguished letter about sending a power of attorney against that Jew.² (29) By Great God and *the covenant of the living God*, your two servants were overwhelmed (30) with boundless joy by your having kindly honored (31) them with filling your need. We were prepared to perform this act of respect for you (32) and apply ourselves to realize your right and collect your due, in the most complete (33) and proper fashion possible. The two of us inquired about that Jew with our coreligionists, the Jews who have arrived (from Egypt). (34) They said that he had returned to Egypt (or Fustat: Miṣr) from 'Aydḥāb. Certainly our bad luck caused (35) this³ [...] (36) We hope that your excellency will find a substitute, God willing, and God return to you your belongings.}

(B2) Profuse thanks for sending three wraps and a scarf of mediocre quality (!) and a request to send other goods to settle a minor account.

* {On Maḍmūn's descendents, see further pages 42–43 and the documents in sec. J below.

¹ The unbracketed descriptions of the contents of the document are culled from Goitein's papers. He wrote some notes on the margins of the photostat, but did not transcribe or translate the document.

² To collect a debt from a certain Jewish merchant.

³ Our being unable to fulfill your request is due to our bad luck. On blaming undesirable developments on one's poor fate, cf. 467, n. 26.

{(37) Your eminent excellency mentioned sending three wraps⁴ and a scarf. May God reward you well [for] (38) this and undertake to give you recompense! [...] (40) Your two servants thanked you for [your k]ind[ness] (41) and your effort over this. May we never want for you, God willing! Your excellency—(42) may God make <your honored position>⁵ permanent!—mentioned that we had had a credit for the proceeds from all the small items we had sent—(43) after the expenditures for customs, tolls⁶ and the like—of 11% Egyptian dinars. There is nothing to say⁷ (44) concerning this, except that the wraps were not commensurate with what your two servants had suggested (ordered), (45) nor were they appropriate⁸ for them. Your two servants had rather ordered something more delicate (or: exquisite) (46) and beautiful than that. There are plenty like that brought by the travelers who arrive (from Egypt). We hope that your excellency will kindly find (47) a substitute. As to the balance of the account, of which your eminent excellency wrote that (48) you had sent them in payment, there is nothing to say.⁹ If there is still some (balance) left, kindly send (49) for it to your two servants fine yellow and red strings (wires),¹⁰ Egyptian handicraft, fine, (50) good work, if you will be so kind. Some time ago your *late*¹¹ father—(51) God's mercy be on him!—had sent to us what was most exquisite, fine and superb. Be so kind as to do this. May we never want for you!}

(B3) Gifts the writers had sent to the late Abū Zikrī.

{(52) But as for us,¹² your two servants had sent with the most eminent (53) Sheikh Abū 'Alī b. Wahab the *Fellow* (of the Yeshiva) something for your father, namely a piece (54) of delicate Indian red silk (*lānas*) and a head cover

⁴ Arabic *talāthim*. For *talḥim* (sg.), see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:337, 462, n. 214, 5:545, n. 75 (where our document is cited).

⁵ The writer mistakenly omitted the word *'izzahā*.

⁶ Arabic *mu'an*. See I, 1v, line 2, and 171–72, n. 23.

⁷ Arabic *walā qawl*, that is, no argument. The same expression appears in line 48.

⁸ Arabic *ṣulḥ* = *ṣulḥā*, plural of *ṣalīḥ* or *ṣāliḥ*. See *Lisān al-'Arab*, 2:516; Lane, *Dictionary*, 1715 (where he says that the plural is used only in reference to people; our document clearly uses it for inanimate objects).

⁹ While the writers say they have no quarrel with the recipient's accounting, they immediately proceed to suggest that there might be more credit due them.

¹⁰ Arabic *awṭār*, also mentioned in VII, 36, line 25. The primary use of *awṭār* was as strings for musical instruments (cf., e.g., Maimonides, *Responsa*, 2:398, no. 224, *tanghim al-awṭār*), and perhaps this was the intention here. For red copper wires (*khayṭ*) shipped from Egypt to Aden, see II, 56, line 30.

¹¹ Hebrew *hay* (also verso, line 2); see 394, n. 31.

¹² Arabic *wa-yā min naḥnā*. *Wa-yā min* is an interjection and connotes surprise; see Wright, *Grammar*, 2:153. It could also express woe; see Piamonta, *Dictionary*, 534. The writers, having sent gifts of the best possible quality for Sulaymān's father, evidently wanted to contrast their actions with Sulaymān's halfhearted efforts described in the preceding paragraph. For *naḥnā*, see Blau, *Grammar*, 293 (perhaps *ā* is a dual morpheme here).

(*ardi*) of delicate Indian red silk and, I think,¹³ one or two pairs of 'Aththari (55) shoes made of unscraped skins.¹⁴ The details are in our letter there; please look for it. [Margin] (1) [...] If he delivered it, God is praised! That was the intention. If he did not deliver it, since at the time of his arrival your father had already died, and he (Abū 'Alī) is still there, ask him for it...}

C. Personal news, including the well-being of Maḥrūz's widow and children, about whom Sulaymān had clearly inquired.

{(2) Your servant my father sends profuse greetings for your well-being and best personal regards.¹⁵ Do not ask how upset he was by the grief, sorrow, regret and distress over the death of your father—may God sanctify his soul!¹⁶ However, there is no avoiding what God, the Exalted, has decreed.¹⁷ Do not ask how he (my father) is suffering from [Verso] (1) the strain of illnesses and constant pain. We pray that God in His mercy grant him health, God willing.¹⁸ (2) The wife¹⁹ of the *late* shipowner (*nākhudā*)²⁰ Maḥrūz and his children are all well. They all send your eminence profuse (3) excellent greetings for your well-being. And they greet the entire family, young and old, with the most excellent (4) wishes for their well-being. His (Maḥrūz's) young daughter passed away two years ago. May your eminence have (5) good health and long life!²¹ Your two servants have informed you of this...

The top few lines of the letter, which contained the address on verso, are torn away, and no names, except Maḥrūz and the otherwise unknown traveling merchant mentioned in line 53, appear in the document. Goitein succeeded in identifying the writers, the two sons of an ailing Yemenite

¹³ Here and in the continuation, the actual writer (or dictator) of the letter, undoubtedly Ḥalfon b. Maḍmūn, presumably the older of the two brothers, lapses into first person singular.

¹⁴ 'Aththar and 'Athr are toponyms in Yemen (Goitein cites Yāqūt, *Geographical Dictionary*, 3:615). Shoes: *aqdām* (see Friedman, *Polygyny*, 262–63, line 5). Unscraped skins, *mushā'ar*; see Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 258.

¹⁵ Arabic *ilmām* (cf., e.g., II, 65, line 7; II, 67, line 7; III, 10, margin, line 12) means an act of personal recognition; see Dozy, *Supplément*, 2:549 (where he translates '*rendre une courte visite*').

¹⁶ Arabic *qaddasa 'llāhu laṭīfahu*. Thanks to Prof. Werner Diem for his comments (in a private communication) on the proper reading and meaning of this eulogy. Cf. III, 38, line 25.

¹⁷ The same adage appears in the condolences expressed in II, 71, line 35 and III, 1, lines 10–11, where Goitein comments that this is an Arabic version of Prov. 21:30.

¹⁸ The writers' father Maḍmūn died not long after this letter was sent. See II, 38 and III, 62.

¹⁹ Arabic *manzil*, lit., 'house.' Etiquette demanded using such expressions when referring to a man's wife. See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 3:461, n. 2, where this document is cited. Cf. above, 235, n. 10.

²⁰ Maḥrūz was a family member, and there was no need to identify him as a shipowner. *Nākhudā* was clearly used as a title of respect. See above, Introduction IIIA.

²¹ Etiquette required adding such a wish for the recipient after news of a death.

merchant, and the recipient, by the letter's contents and in particular by the regards sent by the widow of Maḥrūz, which intimate a close connection between Maḥrūz's family and the correspondents. Maḍmūn b. Japheth had three sons: Ḥalfon, Bundār and Japheth (see II, 37, lines 49–52). Ḥalfon and Bundār are obviously intended here, as the two of them are mentioned as active together at the time of Maḍmūn's death (III, 38, lines 20–21; Ḥalfon alone appears in several documents, see below). As far as I know, Japheth does not appear again in the India book letters; perhaps he died at a young age. As already noted, Abū Zikrī Kohen, Sulaymān's father, had been married to Maḥrūz's sister (and Maḥrūz may have been married to Abū Zikrī's sister). Maḥrūz's mother had been associated with Maḍmūn's family and probably was his aunt. And Maḍmūn may have been married to a second sister of Abū Zikrī. Subsequent to Goitein's identification of the writers and recipient of II, 61, we find in this document further evidence for the ties between the families concerned.²²

Support for the identification of the recipient as Sulaymān b. Abū Zikrī Kohen can be adduced from the liturgical passages written on verso of the letter. As already noted above, other liturgical passages written in the same yet-unidentified handwriting and apparently from the same prayer book are found on the blank spaces of verso of the letters II, 32 and V, 11, both sent to Abū Zikrī Kohen (the first as identified by Goitein and the second explicitly) and II, 45a, sent to an anonymous recipient, presumably Sulaymān as well. The copyist evidently had access to Sulaymān's archive and made use of his and his father's letters; see further the introductions to these documents.}

²² For the familial ties alluded to here, see pages 48–49.}