

will be traveling with me. (23) I am {add: informing you of this after} kissing your hands (24) and feet.³⁹

(A P.S. of four lines, referring to several of the goods mentioned before, is too much effaced to attempt translation.)⁴⁰

³⁹ One kisses the hands of a senior relative and the feet of a judge. {This distinction was not always followed. In II, 53, margin, line 1, Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Manasseh requests that Khalaf b. Isaac kiss his father's feet for him (the father, Isaac b. Bundār was not a judge); and in VI, 54, line 3, a woman writes to her father that she kisses his hands and feet.} The writer might have been a relative of the judge Isaac b. Sāsōn, who was the Jewish chief judge of Cairo and a close associate of Maimonides, but also very active in economic fields. See II, 67. {See also 511, n. 37.

⁴⁰ A letter to a Sheikh Ḥasan seems to be mentioned there.

II, 67 *Letter from Maḏmūn b. David: Murder of the 'Caliph' and Return of Jewish Life*

Aden, July 9, 1202

TS 28.11

Ed. Baneth, "Letter from Yemen," 205–14, with an excellent introduction and most instructive notes. With one exception, deviations from Baneth's interpretation are not noted expressly. The following is based on Goitein, *Letters*, 216–20. A new edition of most of the document is found in Friedman, *Yemenite Messiah*, 167–78.

The sender of this letter, Maḏmūn b. David, was the head of the Jewish community of Aden. He is referred to in II, 75, as the Adenese counterpart of Abraham Maimonides, the head of the Jews in Egypt. Thus he is identical with the Maḏmūn of II, 66. The Hebrew equivalent of Maḏmūn, which means 'protected by God' was Shemaryā, and under this name, Shemaryā b. David, 'the Nagid (leader) of the Land of Yemen,' he appears both in Hebrew literature and in Geniza documents.¹

The aforementioned letter (II, 75) also contains the name of the recipient of our letter, *al-Muwaffaq*, 'the Successful,' a title which had become a proper name.² He had another title *Amīn (al-Dawla)*, 'Trustee (of the Government),' the like of which would be given to a Jewish representative of merchants {as well as a third title, *al-Sa'īd*, 'the Auspicious'}.³ The two {three} titles are contained in the untranslatable honorific epithets of the salutation, so characteristic for the artificial style of this late period.⁴

¹ Nos. II, 68 and II, 73. The famous Spanish Hebrew poet Judah al-Ḥarīzī dedicated to him his masterpiece *Tahkemōnī* (or, rather, a copy of it). See Mann, *Jews*, 2:338. {The text is published by Tobi, *Abraham b. Ḥalfon*, 25; cf. Schirrmann-Fleischer, *Poetry in Christian Spain*, 187, n. 177; Yahalom & Blau, *Wanderings of Alharizi*, 26. On the identity of Maḏmūn and Shemaryā, see the introduction to II, 74 (page 546). Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 5:568, n. 19, has deduced from VII, 58 that Maḏmūn b. David died 1226–28.

² *Muwaffaq* is a proper name. *Al-Muwaffaq*, remained a title. Accordingly, there is no reason to associate Sheikh *Muwaffaq* mentioned in II, 75 (see 550, n. 3) with *al-Muwaffaq* of our document. For this title, which can be an abbreviation of *Muwaffaq al-dawla*, 'the Successful of the State,' see al-Qalqashandī, *Subh*, 5:491 (cited by Baneth, "Letter from Yemen," 208).

³ The honorific *al-Amīn* was bestowed on various dignitaries; see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 6:10; Friedman, "Fragments of Maimonides' Responsa," 448–49; Cahen, "*Amīn*." *Al-Sa'īd* was often conferred on Jews. See al-Qalqashandī, *ibid.*; Friedman, *ibid.*, 449, n. 21. Compare Bilāl b. Jarīr's titles in page 362, n. 13.

⁴ For instance, instead of the title Trustee (of the Government), the salutation has what can literally be rendered approximately: 'Your Trusteeish Excellency.' {In other

As far as I am able to read between the lines, the Jews were permitted to return to their religion only after the murder of the self-styled caliph. This is clearly alluded to in the remark that the Feast of Weeks was celebrated 'in the proper way' {lines 22–23}, which makes no sense in normal times. The writer did not mention the change of religion expressly because his action of leading the community into even temporary apostasy, although eminently reasonable, was religiously not without blemish. The P.S. of the writer's namesake, perhaps a cousin, is even more outspoken.

{After minor emendations of Baneth's transcription, it is clear that the letter does explicitly speak of returning to Judaism (see below, lines 18–20 and notes). Maḍmūn attributed these favorable developments to the 'blessing' (Arabic *baraka*) of Maimonides, the judge Isaac b. Sāsōn and the addressee (lines 25–27). Goitein explained (see page 518, n. 30) that they had intervened with the Muslim authorities in Egypt.⁵ As far as Maimonides was concerned, the connection with Yemenite Jewry was one of mutual support. The wealthy Jews of Yemen sent him Oriental spices valued at over 100 dinars—certainly to be used for communal needs—and 'Sheikh Maḍmūn,' presumably the writer of our letter, was associated with that contribution.⁶

Translation

[A. Introductory greetings to the addressee]

(1) *In the name of the Merciful.* (2) <<[Margin (20)] The servant Maḍmūn b. David—may the spirit of God grant him rest!⁷>> greets his high and lofty excellency...⁸

words, an artificial adjectival form is employed. Note, for example, line 2, *al-ḥadra... al-shaykhiyya al-ajalliyya*, 'the excellence... the most illustrious elder.' For the last two words, one would have expected *al-shaykh al-ajall*, but each has an artificial adjectival ending appended, to appear more magisterial. Such forms were common in late petitions. See, for example, Khan, *Arabic Documents*, 308–9. Saladin's famous private physician, Hibat Allah Ibn Jumay', bore the title 'the *shaykh al-Muwaffaq*,' and it is likely that he is intended here. *Al-Muwaffaq* is known from other Geniza documents, some published later by Goitein, and he cooperated with Maimonides for many years. See further page 519.}

⁵ Cf. Friedman, *Yemenite Messiah*, 171.

⁶ No. VII, 66; see the discussion below, page 546.}

⁷ Isa. 63:14. {Goitein correctly accepts Baneth's suggestion that this line, written in the margin, belongs here. The name appears to be written by Maḍmūn b. Jacob, who wrote the postscript in the margin. See page 520.}

⁸ Eight lines of introduction. {See the introductory lines in II, 67a, which are similar.}

[B. Losses on consignment of pepper]

(9) I received (10) your distinguished letter in which you report the trouble (11) you encountered with the pepper carried with you. God, the Exalted, knows (12) that my intention in this matter was only to be useful to you. (13) May God, the Exalted, support you and grant you success! *Amen, Amen.*

[C. Murder of the 'caliph' and return of Jewish life]

(14) I should like you to share this with your servant {lit., 'What the servant has to share with him [= you] includes the following:': The troops (15) killed al-Malik al-Mu'izz, who had claimed to be caliph. (16) He is succeeded by al-Malik al-Nāṣir Ayyūb,⁹ the son of the Sultan (17) Sayf al-Islam,¹⁰ and his *Atabeg*¹¹ is the Sultan Sayf al-Dīn Sunqur.

(18) After his government had been settled, your servants submitted your case to him.¹² (19) He referred it to the administrative court. But your servants (20) declared that this was a case belonging to the religious court.

{Alt. tr.: (18) After his government had been settled, your servants submitted their case to him. (19) He related to them with equitable justice. Your servants (20) openly proclaimed their acceptance of the religion (Judaism).}¹³

⁹ Who was still a boy.

¹⁰ 'The victorious king, Job, the son of the Sword of Islam,' a younger brother of the murdered 'caliph.' The Sword of Islam was a brother of the famous Saladin.

¹¹ Guardian and regent. {For this office, see Cahen, "Atabak" (on 732 with reference to the Ayyūbids and Yemen).}

¹² Since a reference to the poll tax follows presently, I assume the case involved goods for which foreigners, but not local people, had to pay high customs dues. By paying the poll tax, the Cairene merchant, who had just visited Aden (see sec. B, above), and probably had done so often before, became a permanent resident there.

¹³ {Baneth's incorrect reading of two words, *qaḍiyatāhā* for *qaḍiyatahum* and *ḥamalāhā* for *ḥamalahum*, obscured the meaning of the passage, which explicitly refers to the writers' return to Judaism. *Shari'a* is often used in Judeo-Arabic for the Jewish religion. For the concept of 'adl in Islam and the just ruler, see Lewis, *Language*, 143, n. 60, and the literature cited there.

We obfuscated the matter before the divines {alt. tr.: put on the badge}¹⁴ (21) and paid the poll tax.¹⁵

All this happened in the month of (22) Sivan, one day before the eve of *Pentecost*.¹⁶ We celebrated the feast (23) in the proper way, in *happiness and joy*. Some *Jew-baiters*¹⁷ (24) formed menacing groups, but could not do a thing, thank God, (25) the Exalted. All that happened to us¹⁸ has come through the blessings¹⁹ of (26) our lord, the *Rayyis* Moses—*may memory of the righteous be for a blessing!*²⁰—and the blessings of our lord, (27) *the pious man, our master Isaac*,²¹ and through your blessings. May God, the Exalted, (28) grant you good reward for your munificence {alt. tr.: courage, virtue}²²

¹⁴ Arabic: *labbasnā al-ulamā*. But there is an extra *b* at the end of the last word. Prof. Haggai Ben-Shammai suggests (in a private communication) reading-restoring *labisnā al-alamāt* (I prefer *al-alamā*, which is represented in the alternative translation above). This would refer to the distinctive clothing worn by Jews. See the discussion in *Stillman, Dress*, 101 ff. (110 for *alamā*); 114: "Already in late Almohad Morocco, Jewish forced converts to Islam were allowed to return to the open practice of Judaism as long [as] they adhered to the Pact of 'Umar and wore the requisite distinguishing clothing," etc.)

¹⁵ The Muslim divines, like their Jewish colleagues, were local and merchants. The administrative court was in the hand of officers from the foreign mercenary troops, with whom little contact existed. Matters affecting non-Muslims were indeed the domain of the religious court. Baneth, to my mind, misinterpreted this passage by taking *al-mamālīk*, which simply means 'your servant,' as 'Mamluks.' [As noted above, the passage refers to a proclamation of loyalty to the Torah, *sharī'a*, not the religious courts. The payment of the poll tax retroactively for the period, during which they had feigned to accept Islam, was intended to reinstate the Jews to an uninterrupted status of protected minority, so that they could not be accused of apostasy from Islam, for which one was liable for the death penalty.]

¹⁶ Corresponding to May 27, 1202. The Hebrew word used here is not 'Feast of Weeks' (Shavuoth), as common today, but *ʿašereth*, as in the Talmud, which is identical with the Christian word for Pentecost, *anšara*, used all over the Middle East.

¹⁷ [Hebrew *sōne'im*, sg. *sōnē* being a regular term in the Geniza for anti-Semite; see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:278, 586, n. 14.

¹⁸ That is, the salvation from the forced conversion and from the devices of the Jew-baiters, who evidently accused the Jews of apostasy from Islam.

¹⁹ Arabic *bi-baraka*, i.e., thanks to the divine blessing bestowed on him (similarly in the next two lines); see Colin, "Baraka."

²⁰ Moses Maimonides the *Rayyis*, or head of the Jewish community in Egypt. The blessing following his name was normally said over a dead person, but in Yemen occasionally also over one alive, especially an eminent divine. [See above, II, 13, line 2, and 312, n. 4.]

²¹ The chief Jewish judge of Cairo. See 512, n. 39. {R. Isaac b. Sāsōn was referred to as *he-hāsīd*, 'the pietist,' in other sources. See Friedman, *Yemenite Messiah*, 171. To the references there, add *Tahkemōnī*, 348, sec. 46, where he is called 'the pietist R. Isaac, the pillar of the pietists' (cf. Yahalom & Blau, *Wanderings of Alharizi*, 54). This makes the identification almost a certainty.]

²² See 518, n. 30. {Arabic *murūwā*. For the various meaning of this term (Goitein actually translated here 'liberality'), see 467, n. 32.

[D. Mutual orders, including copies of Maimonides' writings.]

Your distinguished (29) letter, containing several orders {lit., 'instructions to your servant for many things'} has arrived. (30) Your servant hopes to be able to carry them out. (31) I do not doubt that you—may God make your honored position eternal!—(32) love me and are concerned with my well-being.²³ May God, the Exalted, help me (33) to satisfy your wishes, as is my duty, God willing!

(34) I renew my reliance on you for having the (35) two pieces {alt. tr.: items} sent with you co[l]lated (36) and {add: please have} a third copy made (37) in good script and on fine paper.²⁴ And have copied (38) for me the medical writings of my lord the *Rayyis*.²⁵ [Margin] (1) And buy for me any fine copies of (2) useful books you can lay your hands on and kindly send them to me.²⁶ {Add: May God make your honored position eternal!} (3) May I never be deprived of you and never miss you!

[E. Postscript by a bystander on the deliverance from the forced conversion.]

(4) The servant Maḍmūn b. Jacob—*may the spirit of God grant him rest!*²⁷—(5) present at the writing of this letter,²⁸ sends his (6) best regards to his excellency, my master. Thanks to [God...], (7) the affair with all *those Arabs*, ended happily (8) in this *salvation*. {read: The affair ended happily.

²³ As proved by your honoring me with your orders.]

²⁴ Most probably a reference to parts of Maimonides' legal code. The writer, like some other readers, had doubts with regard to many passages and wished his copies to be collated with a reliable text {undoubtedly Maimonides' original}. The other members of the rabbinical court needed a copy as well.

²⁵ Maḍmūn ordered all the medical writings of Maimonides (Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 5:625, n. 25).

²⁶ The writer may, among many other things, have dealt in books, as did the great trader and community leader Nahrāy b. Nissīm before him. But since this letter, certainly purposely, does not mention any business detail, I prefer to think that the head of the Yemenite Jews simply was a lover of books—as Yemenites are now. [On Nahrāy's trading in books, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:154. I assume that the Nagid Maḍmūn b. David participated in the India trade. This is implied in the above passage concerning the shipment of pepper and the reference in this paragraph to the addressee's orders. Also note the involvement of Sheikh Maḍmūn in a quantity of nutmeg and ambergris according to VII, 66; see page 546.]

²⁷ Isa. 63:14.

²⁸ [Similar wording is found in postscripts to other letters, such as II, 55v, line 11, or one written from Aden to a distinguished judge in Egypt, which includes an appeal for a ruling from Maimonides. The writer of the postscript in that document, Yahyā b. Muqbil, penned the body of the letter as well (TS 12.825; see page 540, n. 56).

May all (8) *Israel* be blessed with the sudden appearance of *salvation!*²⁹ We were not worthy of this, (9) but the *Holy One*—*may He be blessed!*—did what He is worthy of, *for the sake of* (10) *His great name*, and brought relief to the Jews in (11) the entire country of Yemen. Relief was brought first, slightly before us, (12) to the people of the mountains. Finally the Sultan came to us, (13) and the relief became complete, *by the help of God* {read: *the Creator*} and through your (14) success.³⁰ *Let them praise the Lord for His steadfast love.*³¹

(15) Kindest regards to his excellency my lord (= to you) and to all under his care (16) the kindest regards, *and to all connected with him and* (17) *subordinated to him a million greetings of peace.*

(18) Written *Tammuz 17*³² *1513 E.D.*³³ (19) *Salvation is near!*³⁴ (21) Two copies were made and sent by way of the *Hijāz*.³⁵

²⁹ Baneth mistakenly read *fī hānē yishmā'el* (a combination of Arabic, Aramaic and misspelled Hebrew!), instead of *fayahni yisrā'el*. 'The sudden appearance,' *badh* (Baneth took *bdh* as equivalent to *bi-badhihi*). Goitein's erroneous translation followed accordingly. For the prayer, "May He let Salvation sprout as quickly as the blinking of any eye" in context of the Geniza documents, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 5:395.

³⁰ Again a reference showing that the recipient had a significant role in the turn of the fate of the Jews in Yemen (see lines 25 ff.). He, together with Maimonides and the Jewish judge of Cairo, had intervened with the Muslim authorities in that city. The allusion to his munificence means that the arguments based on Islamic law had to be fortified by 'presents' to the proper persons. {'Through success' translates *bi-sa'ada*. In this period *sa'ada* could mean the happiness associated with the closeness to God (see Daiber, "Sa'ada"), accordingly perhaps translate approximately: thanks to your closeness to God. On the 'munificence,' see 516, n. 22.}

³¹ Ps. 107:8, recited when saved from a danger.

³² A day on which fasting is obligatory. I have found many letters written on that fast in July: perhaps the merchants were too exhausted to do much business and passed the time in letter writing. {Abraham Ben Yijū listed the 17th of Tammuz and similar days as fasts in the calendars he wrote in India and Yemen for 1146–50, on II, 16v and in III, 26. Some Babylonian Geonim did not recognize the 17th of Tammuz as an obligatory fast day; see *Otzar ha-Geonim* (*Rosh ha-Shana*), 5:32, no. 34. As Prof. Shulamit Elizur has informed me, there is evidence in the Geniza that this and similar fast days were observed according to the rites of Eretz Israel. See, for example, Fleischer, "Additional Remnants," 17, 33.}

³³ July 9, 1202.

³⁴ {Cf. margin, line 8 and 484, n. 30.}

³⁵ Over land, and not, as usual, by sea, probably because all the ships of the season had already sailed. This note makes sense only if we assume that what we have is the original draft, which was destined to be retained in Maḍmūn's office. The manuscript gives the definite impression that this is indeed the case. It is written with utmost carelessness and the main letter lacks any conclusion. This draft found its way to Fustat as scrap paper: on the reverse side the Jewish calendar for the years 1207–12 is jotted down. Someone who used that calendar took the paper with him to Egypt. After it had lost its practical value, he threw it away into the Geniza. {For sending multiple copies of letters or accounts, see page 9, n. 23. The note could have been intended to indicate that this was one of the two copies. 'Two copies,' Arabic *nuskhatayn*, accordingly, is to be understood as duplicate originals of the letter. This is expressed explicitly, for example, in II, 71v, lines 55–56. The remark concerning sending the letters overland contrasts with the writer's comment in II, 67a, that his letters had been sent in the Kārim; see pages 519–20.}

{II, 67a *Letter from Shemaryā b. David to a Prominent Egyptian Jew*

Aden, Late twelfth century

ULC Or. 1081 J 6

While this fragment from the top of a letter preserves no details as to its main contents, I have added it to Goitein's 'India Book' corpus, since the sender's identity, the presumed identity of the recipient, the style and format as well as the information concerning sending letters in the Kārim, all illuminate data preserved in other documents in this chapter.

The sender, Shemaryā b. David, is undoubtedly the same Maḍmūn/Shemaryāhū b. David, the Nagid of Yemenite Jewry, in whose name II, 67 was sent in 1202.¹ The handwriting of his signature, affixed at the top of II, 67a (see below), appears to be identical to the handwriting of the text of II, 67; and both were almost certainly written by the same person. The text of II, 67a, on the other hand, seems to have been written by a professional scribe. This letter contains the same Hebrew invocation, *be-shēm raḥmān*, 'In the Name of the Merciful,' as II, 67, and the salutation used in addressing the recipient is almost identical.

The polite and artificial phrases used in the salutation, *al-ḥaḍra... al-shaykhiyya... al-muwwafaqa al-sa'ida*, 'his excellency... *shaykh*... the successful, the auspicious,' clearly mark the recipient as an important personage. In the introduction to II, 67, we suggested that the phrases that appear in the salutation there, *al-ḥaḍra... al-shaykhiyya... al-muwwafaqa al-sa'ida al-amīna*, 'his excellency... *shaykh*... the successful, the auspicious, the trusted,' refer to an notable who bore the titles the *shaykh... al-Muwwafaq al-Sa'id al-Amīn*, and that this was likely to have been Maimonides' associate, the famous Jewish physician Hibat Allah Ibn Jumay', known as the *shaykh al-Muwaffaq*. Our letter was probably sent to the same individual before he was granted the additional title *al-Amīn*, found in II, 67, and accordingly I suggest dating II, 67a to the late 12th century.

In any event, it is reasonable to conclude that the addressee resided in Egypt. The only information from the body of the letter preserved in this fragment is that the writer had already sent to the addressee other letters 'in the Kārim.' The Kārim was a convoy of ships in which merchants traveled and transported goods to and from India.² Since presumably all letters sent to India arrived in the Kārim, it stands to reason that this notation indicates that those letters were sent not there but to the west, to Egypt.

¹ {On the identicalness of Maḍmūn and Shemaryā/Shemaryāhū, see the introduction to II, 74.

² See 483, n. 28.