

II, 71 Letter from Sa'īd b. Marḥab to Hillel b. Naḥman re his Son-in-Law's Drowning

Aden {January–February 1156}

PER H 161

Ed. Ashtor, "Journey to India." Most differences in reading and translation from that edition are not noted. The following is based on a Hebrew edition prepared by Goitein.

The letter's writer has a very common Yemenite Jewish name, Sa'īd, but his father's name, Marḥab, has not been found in any documents from the Geniza period. Marḥab the Ḥimyarite (Yemenite) Jew, was one of the main figures associated with Muḥammad's siege on the city of Khaybar in 629.¹ Sa'īd b. Marḥab apparently served as the community's rabbi in Aden, since he declares that he clarified the background of the sea tragedy in the presence of the entire congregation on two Sabbaths (verso, lines 3–5). He functioned as court scribe and wrote and signed VI, 51–53. The addressee, Hillel the 'aṭṭār (perfumer or druggist) b. Naḥman, the father-in-law of the drowned man, is referred to in II, 72, line 3 by the impressive title *Sayyid al-Kull*, 'Lord of All.'² {Sa'īd b. Marḥab is one of the earliest known Yemenite Jewish poets and perhaps the first. At least eight of his poems have been preserved, among them the panegyric that opens this letter. As first recognized by Judah Ratzaby, he signs here with an acrostic: S'YD BN MRḤB ḤZQ: Sa'īd b. Marḥab ḥazaq (= may he be strong).³}

The Nagid Ḥalfon, the owner of the ship that sank (lines 29–30) was the son of Maḍmūn b. Ḥasan. Just as his father was a shipowner (*nākhudā*), Ḥalfon, already equipped a new ship for the Aden-Kūlam (Kollam) route, that is, to Quilon, the famous port-city on the Coast of India, while his father was still alive.⁴ This ship was called the 'Kūlamī' (lines 49, 53, 56, etc.), since ships were named for their destination.⁵

¹ See Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sira al-Nabawīya*, Cairo 1936, 3:347–48.

² {As Prof. Joel Kraemer calls to my attention, Ibn Sayyid al-Kull is fairly common in Arabic texts; cf. also the familiar woman's name Sitt al-Kull.

³ The poem is printed, according to Ashtor's somewhat flawed transcription, by Ratzaby, *Shirat Temān*, 105. See further Tobi, *Abraham b. Ḥalfon*, 17–18; Friedman, "Date of Harbinger."

⁴ I am unaware of any proof that Ḥalfon already equipped a ship while his father was still alive. This remark may have resulted from an error in reading the date; see verso, margin, line 1.

⁵ See page 24.}

The Kūlamī set out from Aden together with a second ship, also destined for the Malabar Coast, to the port of Barībatan, and was accordingly called the Barībatanī (lines 51, 53, 56, etc.). While the toponym Barībatan does not appear in any other document in this collection nor has it been found in this form elsewhere, the spelling can hardly be considered an error, since the writer carefully investigated the circumstances and penned the letter himself. Barībatan is to be identified with the port called Banī-Batan and elsewhere Brtqtan,⁶ which is a corrupted form of Barīfatan. According to Nainar, this is Valarapattanam or Baliapattam {Balyapattanam}, a port five miles from Cannanore, on the Malabar Coast to the north of Quilon.⁷

Though the shipowner was a Jew, only four Jews traveled on it (lines 32–33).⁸ Most of the cargo belonged to the shipowner Ḥalfon (line 30), and presumably such had been the case with his father Maḍmūn b. Ḥasan's ship (see III, 11, lines 28–29) {explicitly so in II, 21, line 8–II, 22, line 13}. Nevertheless, every Jewish trader from Aden owned some cargo on the ship (line 31). From the writer's emphasis of this fact, we infer that this may have been unusual. Perhaps investors had more faith in the chances of the new ship to survive the treacherous journey.

This letter is unique in preserving detailed testimony to a shipwreck, so many of which are reported in our documents. While the addressee had requested verification both of his son-in-law's death and the retrieval of his possessions, the writer devotes the entire letter to the former and adds only one brief sentence in the margin of verso, about the possessions, which were confiscated by the sultan. This is somewhat surprising, since in various instances Maḍmūn had been able to protect the possessions of foreign merchants, who died in Aden {cf. II, 70, line 11}.

Finally, it should be noted that while the writer politely states: "We may not make a ruling to permit or prohibit in this case before those who are greater than us, our rabbis the judges of Egypt" (verso, lines 29–31), he nevertheless emphasizes, that the ruling made in the presence

⁶ Respectively Ibn Ḥawkal, *Imaginis Terrae*, 227, note h and Dimashqī, *Nukhbat al-Dahar*, 173, in one of the variants.

⁷ Nainar, *Arab Geographers*, 26, 29–30. {Accordingly, vocalize *brybtmy*: Baryabattanī.}

⁸ {The information concerning the number of Jewish merchants who lost their lives on the shipwrecked vessel on the way to India can be complemented by data from other documents. According to III, 11, lines 4–6 (written some sixteen years before II, 71), three Jewish traders went down on a boat that sank, while sailing from Eden to India.}

of the congregation in Aden (verso, lines 4, 62) is correct and should be followed (verso, lines 22, 32, 53–55). In his assessment of the relationship between the Adenese Jewish community and the Egyptian legal authorities, Assaf may have attributed too much weight to the writer's deferential remark.⁹

{The rabbinic court in Aden made an extremely lenient ruling, since all of the evidence for the shipwreck was circumstantial and, more to the point, Talmudic law (Yevamot 121a) forbids the marriage of a woman, whose husband drowned in a 'limitless' body of water, and recognizes the validity of such a marriage only post factum, if the woman married without permission. In essence, the court ruled that because of the nature of the Indian Ocean (in this location), it should have the same status of a limited body of water. Because of the boldness of the ruling, deferring to the Egyptian rabbinic court, as far as the status of the widow, who lived there, was somewhat more than a matter of good manners.}

The letter has a lengthy panegyric opening [A] in rhymed Hebrew prose, addressed to Hillel the perfumer (*'aṭṭār*) b. Naḥman by the writer, Sa'īd b. Marḥab. See II, 72, which deals with the dead man's estate.

Translation

[B. Sorrow over the addressee's losses and those of Adenese Jewry]

(19) Your distinguished letter, my lord, arrived, and it was the most perfect thing which arrived and the most satisfying to (20) come. Learning of your well-being and the good state of your affairs, my lord, gave me pleasure.¹⁰ (21) I thanked God, the Exalted, much for this and pray that He—may His praise be glorified!—(22) increase all good for you and let me hear from you good news (23) always, perpetually, through His kindness and abundant benevolence.

I, your servant, was distressed (24) very much by the causes of your complaint, your sorrow and grief over (25) what befell the *late*¹¹ Sheikh Hiba b. Abū Sa'īd,¹² your son-in-law, my lord, (26) namely that he and

⁹ Assaf, "Contacts." [See Goitein, *Yemenites*, 55; Friedman, *Yemenite Messiah*, 47–48.

¹⁰ A stock response to what must have been the writer's standard remark that he was well, even though the bulk of the letter concerned the woes associated with his son-in-law's drowning.}

¹¹ Hebrew *ḥay* (also margin, line 5); see 394, n. 31.

¹² {For Abū Sa'īd (?) b. Hibat Allah (?), see 505 and n. 16.}

his partner the Kohen¹³ drowned, and that you had to undertake the support (27) of your daughter—may God protect her!—his wife, from the time he set out on his journey until now.¹⁴ (28) We have been afflicted by the same grief as you, my lord, and more so, (29) for a number of reasons: the anguish¹⁵ over the ship and its contents, since it (30) and most of its cargo belonged to our *Nagid* Ḥalfon—*may his grandeur be elevated and his honor increase!*—(31) and there was no one here who did not have some merchandise on the ship, everyone according to his amount, (32) including me, your servant, and others. Also the anguish over our two coreligionists, mentioned above, (33) and over two of our Adenese coreligionists, who were in (34) the ship and who were married in Aden.¹⁶ So there was general grief, from every aspect. (35) But there is no stratagem against what God, the Exalted, has decreed. This is what God decreed (36) for them. This was their destiny. *Let it be far from us and (37) the house of Israel! God save us from an end like this! (38) I pray to Him, blessed be His name, that He make the outcome good for my lord (39) and for us and for all of Israel, in His abundant mercy and benevolence.*

[C. Three types of explanations on the evidence to the drowning]

You requested, (40) my lord, that I, your servant, inform you how the tragedy befell (41) the two men mentioned above when they drowned and that I endeavor for your sake to secure the release of (42) the young woman¹⁷ and her share in what remains from her husband's estate,¹⁸

¹³ It was unnecessary to mention his name, as his identity was well known to the addressee. One journeyed with a traveling companion, *rafiq*, who is often referred to as such, without name; see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:347–49. Since in the current case the *rafiq* was also a business partner, the financial loss was greater.

¹⁴ {It is noteworthy that the traveling merchant relied on his father-in-law to support his wife in his absence. Travelers often left provisions for their wives. In this case, it might have been agreed that the son-in-law and father-in-law—who may have had a partnership—would settle the account for support after the former's return.}

¹⁵ Arabic *ḥunqā* (also in line 32), still used this way in Yemenite and Egyptian Arabic. See Goitein, *Jemenica*, xiv, note d; Spiro, *Dictionary*, 134. {Cf. Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 90; Hinds & Badawi, *Egyptian Arabic*, 200. Prof. Joel Kraemer calls to my attention that it is common elsewhere in Arabic, as noted in *Lisān al-'Arab*, 8:327; 10:42.}

¹⁶ The two were foreign traders, who married women from Aden and settled there. {Accordingly, the ruling of the Adenese Jewish court to permit the widows of the drowned men to remarry directly affected the situation in that community.}

¹⁷ Recognition of the woman as a widow would release her from the status of one bound to her marriage (Hebrew *'agūnā*), so that she could remarry.

¹⁸ {The widow has no share in her husband's inheritance, but she is entitled to the money and other benefits promised in her marriage settlement.}

(43) in Aden. Be informed—may I never know of any bad day for you!—that my explanation (44) to you can be divided into three categories, since they are what is called for (45) here. The three aspects are: eyewitness accounts, (46) news heard at second hand and (47) what legal pronouncements¹⁹ there might be, whether clear-cut or otherwise, based on proofs (48) found in the statements of *our sages*.

[D. The shipwreck]

These are the details of their drowning. (49) The ship they were in, that is the Kūlamī,²⁰ sailed from Aden together (50) with the other ships that set sail. This ship and the (51) Barībatanī²¹ were in the same position. The two of them traveled together for about four (52) days out of Aden. On the eve of the fifth day, the sailors of the (53) Barībatanī heard the cries of the sailors of the Kūlamī (54) and their screams and shrieks in the night as the water inundated (55) them. When morning came, the sailors of the Barībatanī (56) did not encounter any trace or evidence of the Kūlamī, because (57) from the time the two had left Aden they had kept abreast of each other. (58) The two did not separate until this tragedy befell (59) the Kūlamī. This happened before they entered the *Maṣabb*.²² (60) Afterwards there appeared a ship's wood and furnishings, (61) which were new, on the shore of Abyan²³ and Shiḥr,²⁴ and some of them were conveyed (62) to Aden. There was no new ship with new rigging other than (63) the Kūlamī among the ships of that year, the year of the sinking of (64) of the Kūlamī. //(1) This is the report of some of our coreligionists concerning this and the report of some of the

¹⁹ Or: legal opinions, *fatwas*.

²⁰ See the introduction to the document.

²¹ See the introduction to the document.

²² 'Funnel,' the name, which this document gives to the sea near the shore of Shiḥr. {Also cf. Margariti, "Aden," 276–77.}

²³ A place on the southern coast of Yemen, one night's journey east of Aden; see margin, line 15, verso, lines 17, 36–37, 46, esp. 36–37; Yāqūt, *Geographical Dictionary*, 1:110. {Löfgren, *Aden*, 2:88; id., "Abyan." For a ship that sank off the coast of Abyan, see III, 9, line 13.}

²⁴ A city and region on the southern coast of Arabia, about eight days journey east of Aden; see margin, line 15, verso, lines 17, 38, 46. The region is also called Ashḥār; see verso, line 4. A plural form is also used today, Sheḥērāt. In antiquity this was frankincense country, from which frankincense was exported via Ḥadramawt, Yemen and from there to the Mediterranean. See Smith, "Al-Shiḥr." A photograph of the city is printed in Ingrams, *Arabia*, opp. 217.

Barībatanī's men concerning (2) the Kūlamī as well, made in the presence of the signatories to this letter.//

[E. Return to Aden of all ships except the Kūlamī]

Also there arrived travelers in ships (65) from the year in which the Kūlamī sank and the next year as well. [Margin] (1) Travelers arrived in these two years in (2) ships from every sea: from all the lands of Hind and its provinces, (3) from the land of the Zanj²⁵ and its provinces, from the inland region of Berbera²⁶ and Abyssinia and their provinces (4) and from Ashḥār²⁷ and Qamar²⁸ and their provinces. All (5) the travelers came to Aden in those two years. (6) And no news came to light of the Kūlamī or whoever was in it. (7) Not even one man, at all, (8) no trace, no report, not anyone, who could tell an (9) eyewitness account from someone who had been in it, not anyone who (10) could tell a report in his name, he or anyone who was (11) in it, except the story of the sailors of the Barībatanī (12), which was sailing with it. (13) Nothing else.

[F. Uncertain source of wreckage; certainty that the Kūlamī sank]

Some say also that the new furnishings (14) of the ship, which were found (15) on the shore of Abyan and Shiḥr, could (16) have been from one of the ships of the land of (17) the Zanj or from some other ship, which was not (18) from the ships of Aden.²⁹ *No one disagrees*, (19) rather all concur, that any (20) ship that sinks in the environs of Aden, (21) between the *Maṣabb* and Aden, never (22) surfaces, nor does anyone who (23) was in it survive at all, (24) because of the turbulence of the sea and the f[orce of its waves]³⁰ (25) at {alt. tr.: . . . and the distance from} the beach and the abundance of (26) fish (sharks).³¹

²⁵ East Africa, Madagascar, etc. {See pages 453–54.}

²⁶ See Lewis, "Berberā." Here Somalia is intended, since the 'inland of B.' is spoken of. There were close contacts between Aden and Somalia in those days, as there are now; see III, 10, line 28; VII, 23, line 7. Cf. II, 14, lines 11–12; II, 23, line 46. {Also see Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, 423.}

²⁷ See above recto, line 61.

²⁸ A mountainous region and city near Ashḥār, between Ḥadramawt and Oman. See Grohmann, *Südarabien*, 1:139. {Jabal Qamar is today part of Oman.}

²⁹ Ships that sailed in the Indian Ocean from Africa without docking in Aden.

³⁰ Arabic *du[f'a]*. See Dozy, *Supplément*, 1:449b: "la force de l'eau"; Wharmund, *Wörterbuch*, 670b: "Anprall des Wassers." {I suggest reading *bu[d]*.}

³¹ Sharks are common in the Indian Ocean. Cf. below, verso, line 43. {Cf. above, pages 160–61.}

(27) This [Verso] (1) is what we heard and what we verified from the sea travelers, (2) from men of experience and from captains.³² And I have written this.

[G. Public enquiry]

Afterwards (3) I investigated the details³³ of the matter for two Sabbaths *in the synagogue, in the presence of* (4) *our Nagid Halfon—may his grandeur be elevated and his honor increase!*—and *in the presence of the congregation* (5) *and in the presence of our coreligionists*³⁴ *who had arrived from Egypt.* And we affixed (6) our signatures to what we had heard, the report of the sailors of the (7) Barībatanī, a report related one from another, and to what we heard (8) from experienced and knowledgeable men³⁵ about the drowning of (9) a ship and its contents between the *Maṣabb* and Aden, namely that it does not survive (10) nor does whoever was in it. People verified that the water inundated the (11) Kūlamī, in this dangerous place, between (12) the *Maṣabb* and Aden, and it went down with whoever was in it. There did not surface from them (13) any man at all. Not only this ship, but also every ship (14) that sinks in this dangerous place and in the *Maṣabb*, never surfaces, (15) nor does what was in it. Should we suppose—and this is something that will never be—that someone surfaced (16) from the Kūlamī, which sank in the place mentioned above, he would not (17) emerge anywhere but at Abyan, Shiḥr or the city of Qamar. (18) Travelers journey back and forth from these places to Aden and vice versa. (19) There is no one there who says anything about the Kūlamī,

³² Arabic *rayasā* [sg. *rayyis* = *ra'īs*]. *Rayyis* can mean ship captain, though in the sources dealing with the Indian Ocean a captain is usually called *rubbān*. {This remark corrects Goitein, *Studies*, 350, n. 1, according to which the captain is called *rayyis* in the papers dealing with the India trade. He does not cite any other example of *rayyis* for captain in the Indian Ocean. Concerning the terms used in reference to captains, see above, pages 126, 152–53.} Perhaps the writer intentionally used the term common in the Mediterranean, since he was writing to Egypt.

³³ Arabic *fataḥtu fī sharḥ*. In the Yemenite dialect, *fataḥa* can mean 'examine, investigate.' {See Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 364. In context, since the writer talks of the events in synagogue on Sabbath, perhaps translate 'lectured about.' Piamenta gives this meaning for *fataḥa 'alā*.

³⁴ Hebrew *havērenū*. This is not derived from PT *Ḥagigā* 3:6 (69d) and parallels, *kol yisrā'el havērim*, but is rather a calque of Arabic *aṣḥābunā*. For the use of that term, see above, 202, n. 25.

³⁵ Arabic *ahl al-khibra wal-ma'rifa*, also below, lines 33, 50, 57. In Islamic law, experts in maritime affairs are called *ahl al-ma'rifa*; see Khalilich, *Islamic Maritime Law*, 40.

nothing (20) about its survival or that of whoever was in it, only its total loss. (21) This is all that we have clarified concerning (22) *this in the presence of the congregation.* One should take action accordingly.³⁶

[H. Egyptian rabbis will make their own ruling in this matter; for the Adenese it has been resolved]

As to (23) proof texts from the teachings of *our sages*, which are written concerning this. This is (24) what they of *blessed memory* stated in the *chapter 'A woman whose husband and co-wife went* (25) *abroad' in the Mishna: 'If he sank in water, whether in* (26) *a finite or infinite expanse,'*³⁷ and what was written by the *Geonim* and the (27) writers in their compositions concerning this, whether a leniency or stringency, (28) and if a woman contravened the rule and married, "*in the case of a bound woman the sages were lenient.*"³⁸ This (29) and the like. *We may not make a ruling to permit or prohibit in this* (30) *case before those who are greater than us, our rabbis* (31) *the judges of Egypt—may they be mentioned for a blessing!*—because our responsum (32) will arrive there.³⁹

As far as we in our country are concerned, we have already verified (33) from the words of experienced and knowledgeable people *from earlier generations* (34) *until the present*, that whatever sinks in the aforementioned locality cannot (35) surface, neither it nor whoever was in it, other than wood and furnishings, which might (36) or might not happen.⁴⁰ The waves cast them only on the shore of Abyan, (37) a distance of one night from Aden, or at Aḥwar,⁴¹ a distance of about (38) three days, or at Shiḥr and the city of Qamar, a distance of about eight (39) days at most or even less. From al-Sif⁴² to these (40) places, there being one beach to

³⁶ The missing travelers on the Kūlamī should be considered dead and their wives widows, permitted to remarry.

³⁷ M. Yevamot 16:4. BT Yevamot 121a.

³⁸ BT Yevamot 88a. The rabbis were lenient concerning the testimony to a man's death, and recognized his widow's remarriage.

³⁹ Polite rhetoric; see the introduction to the document. {The responsum also deals with the status of a married woman in Egypt. Accordingly, the Egyptian rabbis must rule in her case.}

⁴⁰ Sometimes wood and furnishings from a shipwreck there surface, see above, recto, lines 60–64; sometimes they do not, see *ib.*, margin, lines 13–18.

⁴¹ A known city in the lower 'Awlaqī region, to the east of the former protectorate of Aden [today in Yemen; see Löfgren, "'Awlaqī'"]. As we learn from VII, 58v, line 13, in this period Jews lived there.

⁴² A known city in western Ḥadramawt {Yemen} on the way between Ḥurayḍa and Mukalla, some eighty miles from the coast. See Ingrams, *Arabia*, 178–80 and the map in

the *Maṣabb*, it is seven days. The sinking of (41) the *Kūlamī* took place near the *Maṣabb* on the eve of the fourth day or the fifth,⁴³ after it had set sail (42) from Aden. In this situation one cannot say “*The waves submerged him*,”⁴⁴ because of the turbulence (43) of the sea in that place and the abundance of the fish (sharks). And were *the waves to submerge him* (44) and carry him to another place, there are there no waves (45) which could submerge him (and carry him) to another place other than to those places mentioned above, (46) Abyan, Aḥwar, Shiḥr and the city of Qamar, because the wind blows (47) towards them. But when the ships sail, the *kaws* wind⁴⁵ carries the ships (48) away from Aden and from those places towards the *Maṣabb* and India. And whatever sinks at the *Maṣabb* (49) and nearby does not surface, ever, at any place whatsoever. This is (49) *what any non-Jew says en passant*⁴⁶ and what experienced and knowledgeable people say about (51) the sea in those places mentioned above.

I have gone into detail at length concerning (52) this after investigations in public gatherings, so that (53) *our rabbis the judges* in Fustat—*may they be remembered for a blessing!*—might grant permission to you, my lord,⁴⁷ accordingly. As to us in our place, (54) we will act according to what is clarified and apparent to us, for permitting this or forbidding it. (55) This is for your knowledge.

[I. Conclusion and signatures]

This exposition has been written in two copies, this letter and a second (56) letter, *because of the safe journey*.⁴⁸ To what we have verified and heard from (57) experienced and knowledgeable people, as detailed above, we

that book as well as the map in van der Meulen, *Aden. Von Wrede, Reise*, 231, 254–56, calls it al-Sayf. He estimates that in 1843 it had 2,000–3,600 inhabitants. The distance between it and Shiḥr is actually some seven days. But it is strange that al-Sif is mentioned here, and the only logical explanation is that it was then a large trade center, with which the addressee was assumed to have been familiar.

⁴³ Arabic *laylat rābi' ḥamis*, see recto, lines 51–52 [perhaps the night between the fourth and fifth days].

⁴⁴ And carried him to a distant place, where he surfaced. BT Yevamot 121a.

⁴⁵ The *kaws* is the southwest monsoon wind. See Hess, “Himmels-gegenen,” 589; Tallqvist, “Himmelsgegenen,” 142–65; Löfgren, *Aden*, 1:29, line 6; “Glossary,” 56. This term is still used; cf. Hirsch, *Reisen*, 38 (cited by Ashtor, “Journey to India,” 226, n. 32). {Cf. Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, glossary, 540; id., “*Milāḥa*,” 51b.}

⁴⁶ Such remarks by non-Jews are considered reliable testimony for releasing a widow for remarriage: BT Yevamot 121b; Gitin 28b.

⁴⁷ For your daughter, the widow, to remarry.

⁴⁸ {A common euphemism for the danger of the journey. For sending multiple copies of letters or accounts, see page 9 and n. 23.

have affixed (58) our signatures, so that action can be taken accordingly. *May the well-being of all our rabbis and your well-being*, (59) *my lord, increase and never decrease! Much peace! May salvation be near! Adar I, [Margin] (1) (1)467,⁴⁹ *in the city of Aden. Salvation!**

- (2) All of the estate was taken by the king.⁵⁰
- (3) *The court appointed by order of (4) our prince (nāsī) the Exilarch,*⁵¹ (5) *and by order of our late Nagid*⁵²—*may he rest in Eden!*—(6) *and by order of our Nagid Ḥalfon (7) his son—may his (8) esteem increase forever!*
- (9) Sa'īd b. Marḥab—*may the memory of the pious be for a blessing!*
- (10) Solomon b. Nathan—*may he rest in Eden!*
- (11) Samuel b. Moses—*may the spirit of the Lord give him rest!*⁵³—b. Eleazar—*may he find mercy! May he live forever and merit life!*⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Ashtor published 𐤀𐤁𐤍 (*tsd*), i.e., (1)464, and Goitein copied this as well. The original clearly reads 𐤀𐤁𐤍 (*tsz*), i.e., (1)467. Adar I, 1467 E.D. = January 25–February 23, 1156.

⁵⁰ For the original here, read by Goitein *wal-makblaf qabaḍa 'alayhi al-malik jami'ahu*, Margariti (“Aden,” 334) suggests reading, with the next two words: *wal-makblaf qabaḍa minhu al-mulk jami'ahu bet din*, which she translates: “as for (his) estate, the court has taken possession of the entirety of his property.” This rendering is not tenable paleographically (*minh* for *'lyh*), linguistically, as a translation of the Arabic (for one, *minhu* would be superfluous), or contextually (her reading severs the last two words from the continuation of the text). She considered it preferable, however, “because there is no evidence that in the Zuray'id period salvaged goods were ever confiscated by the local rulers.” That evidence is now provided by II, 70, line 11, as I have deciphered the text (see 527, n. 13), where it is stated that the government seized salvaged goods.}

⁵¹ This could refer to the Exilarch in Baghdad, whose sphere of influence extended to Yemen. More likely a descendant of the Davidic line settled in Yemen, and the Yemenite Jews recognized him as Exilarch. Nos. IV, 4, 5, from 1134 {ca. 1131}, speak of a member of the family of the Exilarch, who came to Aden and was accorded recognition. The same individual could be intended here {also suggested in Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:523, n. 46}. Benjamin of Tudela (ed. Adler, 47, cited by Ashtor, “Journey to India,” 230) mentions two Davidic brothers, Salmon and Ḥanan, between whom the office of *nāsī* was divided in Yemen, and these may have been the sons of the Davidite, who appeared there in 1134. {In my opinion, that event was ca. 1131. Goitein, *Yemenites*, 208, rejects the possibility that the Exilarch in Baghdad is referred to here, since here we read that the man's title was *nāsī*, and concludes that in the twelfth century there was a *nāsī* called ‘exilarch’ in inner Yemen, whose authority extended over much of the land; *ibid.*, 56, n. 14, Goitein rejects this conclusion. In my note to IV, 5, line 2, I suggest that the Davidite referred to there might have been one of the two brothers and not their father.}

⁵² Maḍmūn b. Ḥasan.

⁵³ Isa. 63:14.

⁵⁴ I.e., merit long life and life in the world to come. {Here Goitein took this as a blessing for the writer himself. Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 5:182, 557, n. 305, suggested that the miniature letters comprising the latter part of the formula actually abbreviated the words meaning ‘and merit life in the world to come’ and saw the whole phrase as a blessing for the writer's father; but as we see here, the latter's name is followed by the blessing for the dead.

- (12) Maḍmūn b. Sālim!—*may he rest in Eden!*⁵⁵
 (13) Yaḥyā b. Muqbil⁵⁶—*may his end be good, his Rock protect him!*
 (14–25) The witnesses mentioned above testified in our presence, the signatories at the end of this letter.⁵⁷

Solomon ha-Levi b. Judah⁵⁸—*may he rest in Eden!* Moses b. Japheth—*may his end be good!*

[J. Address]

(1) *To his honor, the great and holy* (2) *respected elder, our master and lord Hillel*
 (3) *son of our master and lord Naḥman the pious—[may his memory be] for a blessing!*

(1) *From the court established in the city of* (2) *Aden.* Saʿīd b. Marḥab—(3) *may the memory of the pious be for a blessing!*

This scribe wrote and signed (with the same miniature letters accompanying his signature) a handsome marriage contract, ENA NS 2, f. 25 + NS 1, f. 13 (L49), which I hope to publish elsewhere.

⁵⁵ A veteran India traveler. See III, 12, line 36, III, 22, lines 1, 3, 22, III, 23v, line 1.

⁵⁶ Muqbil was a rare name, even among Muslims during that period (mentioned only once in Löfgren, *Aden*: 136, line 16). The name means 'Successful.' The Hebrew equivalent Maṣṭah was very common then. {In TS 12.825, written a few years later, the same Yaḥyā b. Muqbil, whose father was no longer alive, expressed his devotion to Maimonides; on that document, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:470, n. 16. The name appears with the definite article, al-Muqbil, a few years earlier in Alexandria in IV, 68v, line 6 and IV, 69v, line 4. According to Ibn al-Zubayr, *Asmā'*, 2432, Muqbil means 'the coming'; for 'Successful' see Hava, *Dictionary*, 585 (*aqbala*).}

⁵⁷ This verification of the witnesses is written by the first of the two following signatories.

⁵⁸ Perhaps identical with his namesake, who composed a *maqāma* (VII, 61), in which he tells that his father had traveled from Spain to Yemen, married a woman there, then returned to Egypt. Our signatory may have followed in his father's path, traveling to Yemen on trade and was here about to undertake his return journey from Aden to Egypt. {Lines 14–25 contain a verification (often made in the Geniza papers by two rather than three signatories) of the preceding witnesses' signatures, and Solomon need not have been journeying to Egypt with the letter.}

II, 72 *Testimony of Sitt al-Ahl d. Sayyid al-Kull, Widow of Hiba the Drowned Merchant*

Fustat {ca. 1156}

TS 12.527

Fragment from a draft of a declaration by Sitt al-Ahl d. Sayyid al-Kull, widow of Hiba, who had drowned near Aden (see II, 71), that she received from Abu 'l-Surūr Peraḥyā ha-Levi b. Tiqwā a certain sum from the estate of her late husband. (Ḥalfon b. Maḍmūn probably obtained a partial release of the confiscated goods.)¹

¹ {The sum collected from Abu 'l-Surūr could have been part of a debt owed Hiba separate from his assets seized by the sultan in Aden. Peraḥyā ha-Levi b. Tiqwā is the groom in a marriage contract from Fustat 1155: TS 12.552+20.8.}