

II, 74 *Letter from Joseph b. 'Iwād to Ḥananel b. Samuel*

Alexandria {probably 1214 or 1215}

TS 10 J 17, f. 4

Hebrew translation in Goitein, "R. Ḥananel," 377–78. English translation in Cohen, *Voice*, 44–46. The reference to the India Book in Reif, *Bibliography*, 141, is incorrect.

This Alexandrian, Joseph b. 'Allān {read: 'Iwād},¹ tells the addressee that his father was one of 'the India travelers' (lines 6–7). From the letter it is clear that the writer's brother Futūḥ (probably the Arabic equivalent of Hebrew Petaḥya; see II, 73) also engaged in the same trade and died on a journey in the Indian Ocean. The petitioner's family, once well-to-do thanks to the India trade (lines 6, 20), was now destitute, especially since his hope to get some of his brother's estate had been frustrated. While his brother had died on the ship and Maḍmūn II, the representative of the merchants in Aden, had gotten hold of his possessions and sent them to his heirs in Alexandria, both Jewish and Muslim law did not recognize the brother as an heir when the deceased left children, unless he was specifically named in the will as recipient of a gift. A formal will had not been executed in this case, and all the writer's approaches to the Nagid of Egyptian Jewry {Abraham Maimuni} and the latter's letters of recommendation to the Alexandrian Jewish community were of no avail. The writer now requests from the letter's recipient to give him a robe as a gift, so that he could visit the synagogue, i.e., move about in society. This short document is interesting for a number of reasons. It exemplifies how an Indian trader supported a large extended family.

{The letter's addressee, Judge Ḥananel b. Samuel, was a member of the Ibn al-Amshāṭī family and the father-in-law of the Nagid Abraham Maimuni, referred to in line 14.}²

Appeals for assistance were addressed to Ḥananel during his father's lifetime, when he himself did not yet have any sons but already served as a judge, as indicated by the opening of the letter: "I kiss the earth before the lofty seat." The thawb (robe), which the writer asked Ḥananel to give him, cost in those circles at least two dinars, though it was possible to get a thawb for one dinar. A family could live on two dinars for a month. This was, as such, a most valuable gift. The writer's only basis

¹ {See below on his father's name.

² For Ḥananel, see pages 112–17 and the literature cited there.}

for strengthening his request is the fact that his father and brother were acquaintances of Samuel, Ḥananel's father. This leads us to assume that Samuel too was involved in the India trade, and perhaps that was the source of his wealth.³

{As his working papers show, Goitein wavered over the decipherment of Joseph the petitioner's father's name, between עואד ('Iwād) and עלאן ('Allān), finally deciding on the latter.⁴ In my opinion, the correct reading is 'Iwād. As we shall see, this makes possible an interesting identification of the trader, and I beg the reader's indulgence in explaining the question concerning the decipherment. Because of a small hole and discoloration in the paper above the letter ו (w), it resembles ו (l). The letter י (final n) in the document, when joined with the preceding letter, resembles י (final d). However, when it is not connected, it does not resemble that letter. Since there is no such connection here, the letter in question is undoubtedly י, and the reading 'Iwād seems certain.

This 'Iwād the India trader from Alexandria is most probably the same as Abu 'l-Ḥasan 'Iwād *al-tājir* (= the prominent merchant) b. Abū Sa'd, who is the subject of one of Maimonides' responsa. The query, from Alexandria, 1182, states that at that time, 'Iwād was seriously ill, with half of his body paralyzed. Two daughters of an India trader from Fustat, Abū Sa'd Ibn Karnīb, sued 'Iwād for a quantity of coins from Broach, the Indian port-city north of Bombay, and corals, which their father had given to 'Iwād, when they met in Aden, to carry to Egypt for him, a claim which 'Iwād categorically denied ("It never happened!").⁵

This suggestion greatly increases the likelihood that Futūḥ, the dead man mentioned in II, 74, is the same as Petaḥyā, the dead man mentioned to II, 73. The correspondence of the Hebrew name Petaḥyā and the Arabic name Futūḥ is attested in contemporary documents.⁶ As we have seen

³ Further evidence for this is found in the manuscript from the now destroyed Geniza collection from Frankfurt, edited in Goitein, "R. Ḥananel," 378–82.

⁴ {Cohen, *Voice*, 44–45, also copies 'Allān.

⁵ Maimonides, *Responsa*, 1:99–102, no. 63. For the correct meaning of this passage and its background see Goitein, "Chief Justice," 202 (cf. Goitein's note in Maimonides, *Responsa*, 3:121): "the merchant had sold part of the corals confided to him in India and received for them Indian silver-coins, which he sent back to Egypt together with the corals which he had not been able to sell." On *marjān* = 'corals,' see 170–71, n. 18, and for its meaning in this passage, see also Shy, "Terms," 222. For *al-tājir* (= the prominent merchant), see above, page 27, n. 4. Abū Sa'd Ibn Karnīb is mentioned also in IV, 60, line 4, written in 1140.

⁶ One of the investors in the Lebdi sugar factory named in I, 41 (lines 6–7), a contract from Fustat, 1239, was Joseph b. Petaḥyā al-A'sar (his father's name was misread as 'Peraḥyā' in earlier publications). The Arabic form of his name, Yūsuf b. Futūḥ al-A'sar,

(II, 73, line 7), Petahyā's son was named Abu 'l-Ḥasan; he was thus the namesake of Abu 'l-Ḥasan 'Iwād. A boy was often named for his paternal grandfather. Due to the correspondence between these two contemporary documents, Goitein's assumption that the Nagid Shemaryā b. David and the Nagid Maḍmūn b. David were one and the same is incontrovertible.

The information from the two documents concerning the transfer of assets from an estate from Yemen to Alexandria can be presented in tabular form.

	The Deceased	Estate Sent by
II, 73	Petahyā b. Abu 'l-Ḥasan	Nagid Shemaryāhū b. David
II, 74	Futūḥ b. Abu 'l-Ḥasan	Sheikh Maḍmūn b. David

Since there is no doubt that Maḍmūn b. David was the Nagid of Yemen when this letter was written, it is noteworthy that he was referred to in what might seem a relatively informal way as 'Sheikh Maḍmūn.' Similarly, II, 66, line 7, written in Aden, 1199, describes how 'Sheikh Maḍmūn' was forced to accept Islam. And II, 75, lines 7–8, refers to a legal procedure in Yemen at 'the seat (*majlis*) of Sheikh Maḍmūn b. David.' This manner of expression in referring to the leader of Yemenite Jewry occurs regularly with regard to different Nagids, beginning with the first, Maḍmūn b. Ḥasan. Maḍmūn was a fairly common name in Yemen, and, as we have seen, another Maḍmūn, Maḍmūn b. Jacob, appears together with Maḍmūn b. David in II, 67. But when in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, a letter mentions 'Sheikh Maḍmūn,' without any further qualification, it is reasonable to assume that the Nagid Maḍmūn b. David was intended. I call attention to the epistle (VII, 66) that describes valuable gifts of Indian spices, cloves and nutmeg, sent from Yemen to Jewish dignitaries in Egypt. A particularly costly gift was sent to Rabbi Moses. From the names of other Egyptians named in the letter, Goitein deduced that Maimonides was intended. To this we can add that the fragment opens with a report that 'the nutmeg and ambergris' were transferred to 'Sheikh Madmūn,' probably the same Maḍmūn b. David.⁷

appears in ULC Or. 1081 J 31, according to which he purchased a house with his brother in Cairo, 1225. See also the note to II, 73, line 7.

⁷ See the description of VII, 66 in Goitein, *Yemenites*, 32 (he refers to Maḍmūn in this document—without mentioning his name—as an India trader); cf. Friedman, "Notes by a Disciple," 527; above, page 514. For nutmeg (Arabic *jawza*), see 382, n. 26. For ambergris (Arabic *'ambar*) as an import item from India, see 298, n. 5.

Unfortunately, the year is missing in the date formula in II, 73, and no date is supplied in II, 74. Since the writer of II, 74 mentions that his brother had 'recently traveled to Yemen' (line 8) and that the assets from his estate were forwarded to Alexandria, as attested in II, 73, the letter was obviously written shortly after that quittance. Goitein called attention to the fact that Ḥananel b. Samuel did not yet have any sons when II, 74 was addressed to him, which is proven by the good wishes extended to his father in lines 4–5, that he live: "until he sees your living male child." In his study on Ḥananel, Goitein further concluded from this remark that in 1211 when, in another letter, greetings were extended to Ḥananel and his brother Solomon "and their sons," Ḥananel's son or sons were small children.⁸

This comment is evidently based on the assumption that II, 74 was written before 1211, a logical conclusion from the comparison of the wishes in that letter with the greetings in the other one. This sequence is untenable, however. The *rāshūt* formula for Abraham Maimuni partially preserved in II, 73, line 3, does not appear before 1213.⁹ Elsewhere Goitein noted that Ḥananel b. Samuel's activity as judge, alluded to in II, 74, line 1, is datable from 1223.¹⁰

The greetings in the letter from 1211 were actually sent to Ḥananel, his brother Solomon "and their *bānīm*." Needless to say, this Hebrew word can be translated not only 'sons,' but also 'children,' including daughters. We know that Ḥananel had two daughters, one of whom became Abraham Maimuni's wife and, in 1222, bore him a son, David. This background adds a certain nuance to the wish in II, 74 that Ḥananel's father see his "living male child."¹¹

In a letter (in my opinion from the mid 1230's) that Abraham Maimuni (d. 1237) sent to his brother-in-law Ḥayyim b. Ḥananel, and in a passage from a letter someone else wrote to him, copied on the same page, Ḥayyim was addressed with much deference.¹² He must have been a respected scholar, but a rather young man. Presumably, Ḥananel began

⁸ Goitein, "R. Ḥananel," 378, n. 20, with reference to TS 24.41. The note was misinterpreted by Friedman, "Ibn al-Amshāfi," 285, n. 78.

⁹ See the note to II, 73, line 1.

¹⁰ Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:515, no. 31.

¹¹ Contrariwise, Ḥananel might have had a son in 1211, who died before the writing of II, 74, which would place the emphasis in the wish on the word 'living.' For David Maimonides's birth in 1222, see Friedman, *Polygyny*, 326, n. 1 and the literature (Goitein's researches) cited there.

¹² ENA NS 18, f. 36, ed. Fenton, "Commentary," 49–54.

his activity as judge a few years before the date previously attested. The most likely date for II, 73 that corresponds to the data preserved there, is accordingly March 13, 1214 (with the years 1218 and 1221 with rapidly decreasing likelihood).¹³ This was followed by II, 74, and Ḥayyim must have been born shortly afterwards (ca. 1215).¹⁴ He was still active in the 1290's.¹⁵ Ḥananel's father, Samuel b. Ḥananel, was alive in 1224,¹⁶ and thus had the good fortune to see Ḥayyim's birth.}

Translation

In God's name.¹⁷ His servant Joseph b. 'Allān {read: 'Twād},
the Alexandrian¹⁸

(1) kisses the earth before the lofty seat of his illustrious lordship¹⁹ (2) *R. Ḥananel, the wise and the discerning, son of his honor, great and holy master* (3) *and lord, Samuel the esteemed elder, the munificent and the noble—may his end surpass* (4) *his beginning*²⁰ *and may his days last until he sees your living male* (5) *child*²¹ And may He render your praise good in this world and the next world!

(6) This is to inform you that I am *from a well-to-do family* and that my father was one of the India (7) travelers. God had bestowed upon us

¹³ See the note to II, 73, line 1.

¹⁴ Pace Fenton, "Commentary," 30, n. 13, who assumes that Ḥayyim was about the same age as Abraham Maimuni. I intend to discuss these matters further elsewhere.

¹⁵ See above, pages 116–17, on Ḥananel's children.

¹⁶ See page 105.

¹⁷ It is not clear if the squiggle in the original is for the Arabic *basmala* or the Aramaic *b'r* ('In Your name, O Merciful,' as taken by Cohen, *Voice*, 45). It is probably not from the Hebrew *b"b*, since there is no evidence for that superscription in contemporary documents (see Spiegel, *Chapters*, 632). Goitein did not number the lines in the superscription, and I have followed accordingly.

¹⁸ For the style in which the petitioner's name, written in the upper left-hand corner, served as the predicate of the following text, see 520–21.}

¹⁹ The unusual form of address in the Arabic, *al-majlis... al-mawlawī*, lit., 'the lordly... seat,' rather than simply 'my lord,' is found in contemporary letters. {In the Arabic phrase, *al-majlis al-sāmīy al-ajallī al-mawlawī*, 'the lofty, most illustrious, lordly seat,' the adjectives and noun following *al-majlis* are given superfluous adjectival endings. Such forms were considered in this period to be of higher distinction than the simple ones. See Bosworth, "*Alqāb*," 627b (who cites the example *al-majlis al-sāmīy*). Cf., e.g., above, page 513.}

²⁰ Samuel, who apparently amassed his fortune on his own and did not inherit it from his father, is wished more success in the future.

²¹ {The phrase is taken from 1 Sam. 1:11. See the introductory remarks.

{alt. tr.: them}²² His grace.²³ My lord your father is acquainted with (8) my father and my brother Futūḥ,²⁴ who recently traveled to Yemen (9) and died on the ship.²⁵ Sheikh Maḍmūn²⁶ took his possessions (10) and sent them to his heirs in Alexandria. He (Futūḥ) had previously willed me something, (11) when he set out on his journey. That is, should his appointed time²⁷ overtake him, something would be given to me (12) from his estate. But the document was not written according to legal procedure, (13) because the two of us were in a wine party.²⁸

I, your servant, went up²⁹ (14) to his excellency our lord³⁰—*may his grandeur increase!*—and complained to him. (15) He wrote a number of letters to the congregation about me, in order that I might (16) get something to support my family, which has in it nine (17) people.³¹

In short, I am now in a state of *hunger and thirst* (18) *and naked and lacking everything*³² I ask God and you (19) to give me a *thawb* (robe), with which I can enter the synagogue and hear 'Holy' (20) and 'Blessed,'³³ for the sake of Dear God, after (I had) *niṣāfi* and *sāburī* [Margin] and *mutakhhhat*.³⁴ May you be saved from a *reverse of fate!* *May your well-being increase!*

²² Refers to his family.

²³ Made them prosperous.

²⁴ Goitein, *Letters*, 68, n. 10: "'Openings' or 'Conquests, Victories,' a very common Jewish name at this time."

²⁵ Since the writer says nothing about a shipwreck, it is likely that his brother took ill and died on board. For cases of death on board ships, see Khalilieh, *Islamic Maritime Law*, 175–76.}

²⁶ Not Maḍmūn I, as I thought in my early days of Geniza research (see Shaked, *Bibliography*, 106), but Maḍmūn II b. David, who was a contemporary of Moses Maimonides and Abraham Maimuni.

²⁷ {Arabic *ajal*. See 362, n. 16.}

²⁸ It is strange that the writer mentions this detail, which weakens his claim. But when troubled, one is not always careful with his words. For promises made at wine parties, see Goitein, *Letters*, 255–56. {Cf. id., *Med. Soc.*, 5:39, 516, n. 47; Friedman, "New Fragments," 117, 119–220.

²⁹ Traveled from Alexandria to Fustat.

³⁰ Abraham Maimuni.}

³¹ Here we see that even at the beginning of his term as Nagid, Abraham Maimuni took the time to assist needy people. Since the law did not allow giving Joseph part of the estate, the Nagid wrote the community leaders to assist him, rather than the judges.

³² {Cf. Deut. 28:48.

³³ These portions of the liturgy can be recited only in public prayer. The expression became an idiom for attending the synagogue service.}

³⁴ Expensive textiles, I had worn. These terms are known and found in the Geniza, and there is no need to give elaborate explanations here. {For *niṣāfi*, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:415, n. 294, 5:547, n. 138 ("silk and cotton woven together"). For *sāburī*, see Jāhiz, *al-Ṭabaṣṣur*, 19: "the best of many-colored (clothing) is *sāburī*," etc.; Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles*, 56–57; al-Qaddūmī, *Gifts*, 358: "a very sheer cloth." Stillman, *Arab Dress*, 60, n. 80, explains *mutakhhhat* 'checkered.' Perhaps 'pressed,' Blau, *Dictionary*, 62.}