

III, 10a *Beginning of a Letter from Khalaf b. Isaac to Abraham Ben Yijū*

Aden, ca. 1138–50

ENA 2727, f. 7b

{The first (nine) lines of a letter from Khalaf b. Isaac to Abraham Ben Yijū, torn away at the fold. Lines 1–3 quote Job 22:25; 8:7; Gen. 28:14. The last two verses, quoted from memory, are written with some errors, especially the last one. Lines 4–9: salutation to Ben Yijū, in Hebrew and Arabic, and acknowledgment of receipt of his letter. Of the body of Khalaf's letter, only one line written in the margin, is preserved: "The small items (*tafāriq*, see 649, n. 5), all of them from your servant..." Verso contains three lines with the names—and the accompanying polite phrases—of the addressee and the sender. Ben Yijū's father, as in the address on III, 9v (see there, 592, n. 37) and III, 10v, is styled 'the scribe' (*sōfer*). Khalaf refers to himself as 'his servant, who counts his praise' (Heb.). Ben Yijū added, in Judeo-Arabic, a fourth line under the address: "in which is written the *intercalation* of five years." For calendars written by Ben Yijū, see the introduction to III, 1. Khalaf adds the blessing for the dead to his father's name, from which we learn that the letter was written sometime after the beginning of 1138.}¹

¹ {This document, III, 10a, was identified, copied and numbered '56a' in the 'Old List' by Prof. Goitein, but not transferred to the 'New List.' For the date of Khalaf b. Isaac's father, see II, 51, line 6.}

III, 11 *Letter from Khalaf b. Isaac to Abraham Ben Yijū*

Aden, probably 1140 {after July 29, 1139}

TS 18J 5, f. 1

The upper part, containing the polite phrases of the preamble, has been detached. On that section of the verso the address had been written, which thus also is lost. Likewise, the left lower corner, containing parts of fifteen lines (lines 39–54), has been torn away.

The identity of the letter's writer and addressee can be fixed with certainty despite the lack of the address. Lines 1–49 are written by the same clerk who wrote III, 12, while the postscripts and the remarks on the margin and between the lines are in the hand of Khalaf b. Isaac; see the introduction to III, 10. The addressee is referred to as Abū Ishāq (line 2), the honorary by-name given to Ben Yijū in the addresses of Khalaf's letters III, 10, {10a,} 12 and 16, but never, for example, by Joseph b. Abraham. In addition, there are a number of obvious references to III, 10; see here lines 11, 13, 21 and 32. This provides us also with the date of our fragment. If III, 10 was sent in {or after} 1139 {1138}, as we assumed, III, 11 must have been written in {or after} 1140 {1139} and some time after August 15 {July 29, 1139}, the last day of the month of Av of that year; see line 8.

Although the same clerk wrote III, 11 and 12, he did not use the same paper. No. III, 11 is smaller and light gray, while III, 12 is light brown. The latter is smoother, while the paper of our letter is rather woolly. The ink seeped through to the verso; and unlike III, 12, the blank space there could not be used by the recipient for making notes. Because of the narrower size of the paper, the clerk's calligraphic script is somewhat smaller than in III, 12, an aesthetic rule followed by all better scribes. {The clerk can be identified as Samuel b. Moses b. Eleazar. He signed II, 71 and penned a marriage contract preserved in ENA NS 1, f. 13 (L 49) & ENA NS 2, f. 25.}

Translation

[A. Thanks for condolence and news of other deaths]

(1) I, your servant, acknowledge your words of condolence over the death of my *late*¹ (2) father—*may he find mercy!* I never doubted your friendship, Sheikh Abū Ishāq, (3) and know well that what happened at your place {alt. tr.: with you} is like what happened (4) with us.² Those two young men, the sons of Mūsā, namely (5) Judah and Hārūn, journeyed to Broach, but the ship was struck in the Khawr (the gulf); (6) the two young men perished together with Sheikh Abu 'l-Faraj al-Maḥallī. God forbid (7) that we should be forgetful of them!³

Furthermore, the death of my mother occurred this year (8) in the month of Av; thus, even more grief⁴ befell me. However, at all times (9) everything is governed by God, the Exalted. *He can do anything He pleases; (10) and none can say to Him, "What are You doing?"*⁵ May God, the Exalted, turn all matters to a good end!⁶

¹ Hebrew *ḥay*; see page 394, n. 31. The death of Khalaf's father occurred in February 1139 {February 14–March 13, 1138}; see II, 51, line 6.

² In his letter of condolence, Ben Yijū obviously had mentioned cases of young people who had perished while setting out from India {see the continuation}. This implied that Khalaf should bear the death of his old father with equanimity. {Khalaf compares the personal grief of the addressee of his letter in II, 48v, lines 41–42, to his own grief over the death of his father. Perhaps Khalaf alluded to a personal tragedy of Ben Yijū here as well.}

³ Here, Khalaf quotes cases of other young men who died on the high seas in the prime of their lives, merchants who had set out from Aden to Broach on the northern part of the west coast of India. For our knowledge of the traffic on the Indian Ocean, this passage is most revealing. Khalaf reports from Aden about a case of shipwreck on the Indian coast to a merchant living on the same coast, but further south. Thus, Aden at that time was in closer contact with those Indian ports than they were among themselves. {On the other hand, Broach might have been the destination, rather than the vicinity where the ship foundered. If so, the gulf referred to here could be the gulf of Aden; see the introductions to II, 31 and III, 22.}

⁴ Arabic *krb 'alā krb*, presumably *karb*, 'grief' (intending the writer's grief over the earlier death of his father), rather than *kharb* 'destruction'; in any event this might be a double entendre, referring also to the mourning over the destruction of the Temple on 9 Av.

⁵ Eccles. 8:3, 4, quoted in a Jewish prayer of mourning.

⁶ After everybody mentioned in the previous lines was dead, it is difficult to see how everything could end well. However, up to the present day in the Near East, when one discusses a hopeless situation he concludes with similar phrases. After all, man expects a better life in the world to come. {Cf. II, 20, lines 6–7; II, 51, lines 11–12; II, 56, lines 22–23; II, 58, lines 11–12; IV, 15–II, 42, lines 22–23; Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 5:51, 519–20, n. 31.}

[B. Receipt of Consignments.]

There (11) arrived the 'eggs'⁷ and the 'refurbished' iron,⁸ which were sent in the ship of Ibn Abu (12) 'l-Katā'ib. Many thanks for your kindness.

There arrived also four (13) copper lids,⁹ they are very heavy. I had wanted (14) lighter ones.

The betel nuts, which you, my lord, kindly sent with Sheikh (15) Abu 'l-Surūr¹⁰ and Muwaffāq al-'Ashā'irī,¹¹ arrived. May God reward you well, (16) my lord, and undertake to give you recompense and never let me want for you life!

[C. On the delay in receipt of cardamom]

As to the cardamom, (17) which you, my lord, mentioned had been delayed this year, do not worry about it, my lord. (18) I talked with my lord, the most illustrious Sheikh Maḍmūn¹² and suggested (19) to him to write about it to Ibn al-Marīḍa¹³ and to the Fidyār.¹⁴ (20) But he said

⁷ Most probably, a kind of cardamom {a form of iron; see pages 369–70.}

⁸ For the various types of iron here and in lines 36–40, see 315, n. 17.}

⁹ For the meaning of *ṣufī* ('copper'), see 555, n. 11. For the lids, see III, 10, line 20.

¹⁰ Too common a name to lend itself to identification. {Perhaps Abu 'l-Surūr b. Khallūf al-Ṭalhī, mentioned in III, 6v, line 5, after Muwaffāq al-'Ashā'irī, who follows here.}

¹¹ Mentioned also in III, 6v, line 4.} Muwaffāq was a name common among Jews; cf. II, 75 passim (thirteenth century); Mann, *Texts*, 1:449 (twelfth century); Strauss, "Vermutung" (thirteenth century). 'Ashā'ir was a great confederation of Arab tribes in southwest Yemen around Zabīd; cf. Löfgren, *Aden*, 216, lines 6–12. It was common for Jews to bear as a family name the name of a tribe under whose protection they lived; cf. the name Ben Yijū (Ishū being a big Berber tribe living around Meknes in Morocco) {see page 53 and n. 11}. Muwaffāq could hardly have been a Muslim, since were that the case, the request to assist him and his companion in line 54, would not have been necessary. Again, we see that two traders carried merchandise in joint responsibility. {Only II, 75 has Muwaffāq without *al-*. The other two sources concern al-Muwaffāq (or Abu 'l-Muwaffāq), a common honorific; cf. introduction to II, 67. Mann, *Texts*, 1:449, does actually speak of one al-Sa'id Muwaffāq, but the citation is from GW II, where both the manuscript and the printed edition read al-Muwaffāq (see Friedman, *Yemenite Messiah*, 172, n. 146).}

¹² Sheikh Maḍmūn is, of course, Maḍmūn b. Ḥasan, the representative of the merchants.}

¹³ 'The son of the sick woman,' certainly identical with Abu 'l-Ḥasan Ibn al-Marīḍa al-Qarawī, a Tunisian Jewish merchant mentioned in III, 18, sec. d, line 1.

¹⁴ {See page 147.}

that you had already made the same suggestion {lit., 'mentioned this'} in your letter to him.¹⁵

[D. Apology for not having sent a frying pan]

You (21) inquired in your letter, my lord, about the iron pan.¹⁶ (As a matter of fact) I (22) had forgotten it in my house on that day and did not send it.

[E. Gifts sent to the addressee]

God, the Exalted, made it possible for me to forward (23) to you for your household two bottles of raisins, a sieve,¹⁷ and two stone pans, (24) both in one case,¹⁸ and a pound of Maghrebi kohl.¹⁹ Please, my master, take delivery (25) and forgive me (for not sending more).

[F. Problems in filling Ben Yijū's order]

You ordered twenty bowls {alt. tr.: cups} and four lamps.²⁰ (26) *By my faith*,²¹ I paid for this in advance two months before the sailing of the

¹⁵ The import of this passage seems to be the following: Cardamom did not grow in the vicinity of the port where Ben Yijū lived. He used to order it from such places as Fanarayna (see III, 18, lines 3-4). At the time of the departure of the ships from India that year, it was not available to him. Thus, the suggestion is made that the representative of the Adenese merchants should apply to other merchants in India for that commodity.

¹⁶ See III, 10, lines 39-41, and here, line 23.

¹⁷ In I, 14, line 34, we find seventy sieves exported from Mirbāt in southeast Arabia to Aden. A sieve of fine quality is a very important implement in a household where grain is always ground.

¹⁸ {Arabic *ghilāf*: Maimonides in his commentary to Shabbat 16:1, translates 'case' (*tiq*): *ghilāf*. Also see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:394, n. 79; Sadan, *Mobilier*, 142; and 600, n. 35, 601, n. 37.}

¹⁹ Cf. III, 1v, line 11.

²⁰ Certainly made of glass. Glass was manufactured in Aden; see III, 10, line 42. {I am not sure why Goitein translated *ka's* here and in line 50, 'bowl,' rather than 'cup,' 'drinking glass'; see 601, n. 40. The lamps are designated *qindil*, pl. *qanādil*, here and in line 50. Goitein, *Med. Soc.* 4:136, comments that *qindil* is common in Arabic for a lighting appliance in the house but is not used as such in the Geniza, where it appears only as silver lamp suspended by silver chains before the Holy Ark in the synagogue. I see no reason to assume that the *qindils* in this document were intended for anything other than household use. The word is registered in Goitein's card index for the India Book, and his failure to take note of it in writing *Med. Soc.* vol. 4 is probably the result of a curiosity in connection with the history of his Geniza research: the indexes for these two books were never entirely integrated.

²¹ Hebrew *we-emūnā* (or Arabic and Hebrew *wa-emūnā*). Cf. I, 25, line, 13, *wal-emūnā*; IV, 10v, line 29: *we-emūnā*. For this oath, see Ben Yehuda, *Dictionary*, 275; Ratzaby,

ships. (27-28) However, it happened that my lord,²² Sheikh Maḍmūn, and Sheikh Bilāl²³ were outfitting a boat {add: that belonged to them} for Ceylon in partnership and sent the attendants²⁴ to set aside all that (29) was being manufactured, so that they could take whatever they needed.²⁵ Until the moment I wrote this letter, they (30) were promising some of it. If I get some, I, your servant, shall send it and add a note about it at (31) the end of the letter.²⁶

[G. Orders for Indian Commodities]

Making a bold demand²⁷ on your kindness, I sent (32) five *manns* of silk—of that silk.²⁸ I was forced to do so, because of (33) the devaluation²⁹ of the Malikī (dinar); and by chance I had no {alt. tr.: and I did not succeed in acquiring}³⁰ *mithqāls*, the price of which is here (34) higher even than last year.³¹ Please, my master, just sell it for whatever God, (35) the Exalted, apportions³² and with its proceeds buy for me, your servant,

Dictionary, 15, where the form with *welwa-* (or *wal-*) is not documented. It is not clear whether the spelling *w'ymunh* (also in IV, 10v, line 29), with *y*, indicates the pronunciation of *hataf-segol* as *e*, rather than *a*, as common in Yemenite Hebrew (Morag, *The Hebrew of Yemenites*, 119 or if *ə* → *i* (see Morag, 181, and the sources cited in Friedman, *Yemenite Messiah*, 154, n. 22).}

²² One expects 'lords,' Arabic *mawāliya*.

²³ Bilāl was at that time already vizier and actual ruler of Aden and the whole of southern Yemen; cf. II, 32, line 24. This did not hinder him from forming a partnership with the representative of the Jewish merchants in Aden.

²⁴ {Arabic *khadam*, which can also be translated 'servants' (as did Goitein). The writer refers to himself as the addressee's 'servant,' Arabic '*abd*.}

²⁵ In the same high-handed way in which the two partners acted here, we see Bilāl act against all the other merchants; see II, 27, lines 4 and 7. {According to Maimonides' comment cited above page 357, n. 4, merchants regularly granted such privileges to an important trader. Cf. page 357, for bitter criticism of Maḍmūn's behavior towards the Jewish merchants of Aden. No. II, 32, line 24, also speaks of Maḍmūn and Bilāl outfitting a boat to Ceylon; that document has been dated ca. 1130.}

²⁶ See line 50.

²⁷ Arabic *dalāla*. The usual form is *dalāl*, while *dalāla* or *dilāla* means brokerage. {For *dilāla*, *dalāla*, 'brokerage,' cf. Goitein, *Med. Soc.* 1:185; 4:289 et passim. I have not seen *dalāl* for 'bold demand.' For the variants of this expression, see 447, n. 49.}

²⁸ Certainly a reference to III, 10, line 48, where, a year before, also the same quantity was sent.

²⁹ Arabic *fasād*, 'damage.'

³⁰ {Arabic *wa-lam yattaḥḥiq li*. On the shortage of ready cash among merchants, see page 20, n. 43.}

³¹ Reference to the high price of the Egyptian *mithqāl* in Aden also in II, 27, line 12.

³² {For the 'whatever...apportions' formula, also in line 44, see the discussion in pages 63-65.

a little pepper or 'eggs'³³ and betel nuts (36) and cardamom. However, do not buy for me 'standard,' //shiny//³⁴ or refurbished iron, (37) even for one dinar or one dirhem.³⁵ But, if you happen {alt. tr.: are able} to get smooth iron, packed (38) in *bārbazās* {alt. tr.: in containers with ventilation},³⁶ it will be all right. For when there are vapors, the iron becomes (39) rusty. Thus, please do not buy me, your servant, standard, <<shiny (40) or>> refurbished iron, but only smooth, long (bars) or pepper and 'eggs,' (41) betel nuts and cardamom.

Please hire for these wares some space³⁷ (in a ship), even if it is expensive, (42) either from a shipowner or a captain³⁸ or if you happen to find [merchants, who are], (43) trustworthy, even if the rental is expensive. Do not cause me a delay [...] (44) whatever God, the Exalted, apporitions; do not delay selling it [...] as soon as] (45) you, my lord, have taken delivery, and when you buy, [my] lo[rd...] (46) even if it is expensive. There is no need, my master, [to give you advice. *A hint is sufficient to a*] (47) *wise man.*³⁹

[H. Greetings]

Accept, my lord, for your es[teemed self the best greetings]. (48) And best regards to my lord, your son, and Sheikh [Bama and those embraced] (49) by your care.⁴⁰ *And peace.*

³³ See above, line 11.

³⁴ Here and in line 39, added between the lines by Khalaf.

³⁵ See above, the note to line 11, for the various kinds of iron.

³⁶ For *bārbazā* (or *bārbuza*) perhaps Persian *bārbūga*, 'a load, a baggage' or 'small wares' (Steingass-Johnson, *Dictionary*, 141) is to be compared. {The Arabic reads here *mu'abba' b'rbz't*. The *b* in the second word could be taken as a prefix and *arbaza* or *arbuza* compared to *rābūz*, for which see Dozy, *Supplément*, 1:500, 'soufflet.' *Bārbazā*, however, appears in III, 21, sec b, lines 23 (with def. art., *al-*), 27.}

³⁷ Arabic *taktarī*. Khalaf prefers the renting of a definite space in a ship to the payment of the *nawā* or freight. {See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:341-44, and for *taktarī*, Dozy, *Supplément*, 2:461-62.

³⁸ Arabic *nākhudā aw rubbān*. For these terms, see Introduction IIIA.}

³⁹ The preceding phrases were restored by comparison with III, 10, line 72 and III, 12, line 46.

⁴⁰ The restoration of the greetings follows III, 10, lines 73-74 and other letters of Khalaf to Ben Yijū.

[I. Postscripts, in Khalaf's hand, (a) concerning items sent and not sent]

(50) I acquired thirteen bowls and two lamps and th[ey are in such or such a package.⁴¹ I sent] (51) the silk, the sieve and the [Maghrebi] kohl [with Muwaffaq al-] (52) 'Ashā'irī; and the two bottles [of raisins and the two stone pots] (53) in the ship of Ibn al-Muqaddam [with...]⁴² (54) Please assist them, [my] lo[rd... [Margin]...] Excuse me, your servant, for not sending sugar. There is none to be had this year; and you, my master, are disposed to forgiving.

[J. (b) Request to forward letters]

Together with this letter is a letter for Sheikh Isaac Tilimsānī.⁴³ Please deliver it to him without delay. [Verso] (1) And another letter to [...] Please deliver it] (2) to him, for I have heard th[at he is in... *And Peace.*]

⁴¹ See above, lines 25 ff.

⁴² Most probably Abu 'l-Surūr was mentioned here; see line 15. He and Muwaffaq certainly were Yemenites; this explains Khalaf's special interest in them. {For the ship of Ibn al-Muqaddam, see page 147.}

⁴³ One of the two merchants to whom Ben Yijū is requested to deliver letters was a North African like himself; most probably this was the case also with the second, whose name is lost. To his Muslim and Indian correspondents, Khalaf perhaps sent letters and consignments through their respective compatriots and coreligionists. See about this matter II, 24v, lines 1 ff.