

III, 12–14 *Letter from Khalaf b. Isaac to Abraham Ben Yijū, Mainly about Shipwrecked Goods*

Aden, almost certainly 1146

III, 12. TS 18J 4, f. 18

III, 13. TS NS J 21

III, 14. TS 8.19

No. 12 is written with great care and in unusually big and elaborate letters, by the same clerk {Samuel b. Moses b. Eleazar} who wrote most of III, 11. Cf. the introduction to III, 10. The verso bears only the address written in both Hebrew and Arabic (facing each other in opposite directions).

No. III, 13 (corresponding to III, 12, lines 13–36) and III, 14 (corresponding to III, 12, lines 36–49) look very different, owing to their different states of preservation. They are, however, fragments of one and the same letter, the original written by Khalaf himself, which was also sent on to Ben Yijū.¹

There are surprisingly few differences between the texts of the original and the copy, mostly errors by the boss, silently corrected by the clerk—silently, for the corrections do not appear in the original itself. See III, 12, lines 20, 26, 30, 36, 43, and 46. This letter was almost certainly written in 1146; see the note to line 35.

Ben Yijū, the addressee, used the blank verso of III, 13 for writing, in a very large and clear hand, a Hebrew liturgical poem by the Spanish Jewish poet, Isaac b. Ghiyāth (1038–89). It is a so-called *reshut* for *nishmat*, a poem recited by the cantor before the beginning of the main service on Sabbaths or festivals.² These poems did not constitute an integral part of the service, but were chosen by the cantor according to his taste. We may imagine that one of the India traders had with him a *dūwān*, or collection of poems, by that author and that Ben Yijū copied the poem for himself with the intention of using it while leading the community prayer. {See pages 67–68, on the liturgical poems copied by Ben Yijū.}

On the blank side of III, 14^v, (which appears on TS 8.19 as recto), Ben Yijū wrote the accounts that are our III, 25.

¹ {For sending multiple copies of letters or accounts, see page 9 (n. 23) and below, the note to line 18.}

² See Davidson, *Thesaurus*, 2:473. I had regarded the poem as a fragment, as it was written on a piece of paper forming the middle part of the sheet. I learned its true nature from Professor J. H. Schirmann.

Translation

[A. Acknowledgment of letter and good wishes]

(1) *In Your name, O Merciful.*

(2) The letter of his excellency, the most illustrious Sheikh, my lord, has arrived—may God protect your life (3) and make permanent your honored position, rank, pre-eminence, supremacy, superiority and ascendancy! (4) May He never deprive your dwelling place and court of any good! May He prostrate in weakness {alt. tr.: crush in disgrace} (5) those that are envious of you and humiliate your enemies! May all your affairs be completed successfully {lit., 'be joined by blessings'}!

I read it (6) and comprehended it and was happy to learn about your well-being and that your affairs are in order. I praised God for this (7) very much and asked Him to give you more of all that is good, in His mercy.

I, your servant, acknowledge, (8) my lord, your kind inquiry (about my well-being) {alt. tr.: your kind attention}³ and concern. May God concern Himself with bestowing favors upon you {alt. tr.: Himself favorably with you} (9) and may He avert from you the misfortunes of this world! May He unite us, after the completion of your affairs, soon, (10), not belatedly, in His might and His kindness, which is (a) sufficient (guarantee) {alt. tr.: and His bounteous kindness}⁴!

[B. On goods lost or salvaged last year off the coast of India]⁵

You detailed, my lord, what (11) was salvaged for me, your servant, in the *shaffāra*,⁶ namely half a *bahār* of big measure of pepper, less (12) a *farāsila*.⁷ However, you did not mention to me, your servant, anything about the ginger which had been carried in it, (13) namely, three *bahārs*

³ {Arabic *iftiqād*.

⁴ Arabic *bi-mannih wa-kafiyi lufṭih*. The expression appears regularly. Cf. II, 61, line 9: *bi-mannih wa-kafiyi sun'ih bi-karamih wa-rahmatih*.} The elaborate poem is a combination of the phrases found also in Khalaf's letters III, 10 and 16, with some variations and additions. Thus, the words 'after the completion of your affairs,' line 9, obviously indicate that Ben Yijū had mentioned in a previous letter that he could not yet leave India, because he had still urgent business there.

⁵ This section is explained in detail in III, 22.

⁶ A small ship accompanying a larger one; see 341, n. 26.

⁷ For the *farāsila*, see 559, n. 30.

of ginger, less one quarter, for you, my lord, had mentioned it to me in your letter of (14) last year, and (wrote) that the *nākhudā* had insisted on collecting the freight only {alt. tr.: refused⁸ to collect the freight except} from it. (15) This is what it says in your letter of last year, my lord, which is in my—your servant's—possession, and that the (loss incurred by) (16) jettisoning (part of the cargo) from the *shaffāra* had been distributed over the (whole) cargo.⁹ Now I do not know whether you, my lord, forgot (17) to mention this in your letters or what the matter is {alt. tr.: what (else) happened}.¹⁰ For in your letters from (18) last year, which I, your servant, have kept,¹¹ you explained that the proceeds from the silk, after (19) expenses {alt. tr.: tolls},¹² were 17½ *mithqāls*. You had bought me, your servant, three *bahārs* less one quarter of ginger (20) for 11 *mithqāls*, the price being four *mithqāls* per *bahār*. The balance in my, your servant's, favor: six (21) and a half *mithqāls*. From this, there had been deducted one *mithqāl*, the balance (due from the purchase) of {lit., 'the difference from'} the iron last year. (22) There had remained a balance in my, your servant's, favor of five and a half *mithqāls*. For this you had bought for me, your servant, pepper, half a *bahār* (23) of big measure, less one *qirāt*.¹³ This is what you had written to me, your servant, about the *shaffāra* last (24) year. Your letter concerning this, my lord, is still with me.

Furthermore, my lord, please check what is due to me {alt. tr.: is my loss}¹⁴ from the distribution.¹⁵ (25) From the total proceeds for me, your servant, buy whatever God, the Exalted, apportions: (26) pepper or something else, and forward it with one of the first ships coming out {lit., 'one of the ships coming out at the beginning of the season'}.¹⁶

⁸ {Arabic *ghalab*; also in III, 22, line 9. See Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 358.

⁹ For this practice, see page 163.

¹⁰ Arabic *am kayfa al-khabr*.

¹¹ Khalaf refers to one letter. But it had been sent to him in various copies, all of which he kept.

¹² {Arabic *mu'na*. See 171–72, n. 23.}

¹³ A *qirāt* usually designates 1/24. Line 12 uses *farāsila* in the same connection. The large *bahār* must have been composed of 24 *farāsila*, as opposed to the small one, which held 20. The same ratio of 1.2:1 for the large and small *bahārs* is found in Aden; see the introduction to II, 16 and 322, n. 4. {Since the *bahār* contained some 300 pounds, the *farāsila* would have accordingly weighed 12.5 pounds or approximately 5.7 kg.; this does not agree with the values listed in 559, n. 30; see 641, n. 31.

¹⁴ Arabic *lahiqanī*.

¹⁵ See lines 15–16.

¹⁶ Arabic *al-mutakhalliṣa awwal al-zamān*. For *takhallaṣa*, see Dozy, *Supplément*, 1:392a. {For the whole phrase, see 316, n. 23. Correct accordingly Margariti, "Aden," 282: "that have been proven safe in the past."}

[C. Losses from the *kārdār*'s defaulting on cardamom]

Concerning (27) the cardamom owed by the *kārdār*—may God curse him!¹⁷—I spoke with someone (28) about this, and he told me that the cardamom actually was on your account, and we had nothing to do with it {lit., 'was exclusively for you and we have no share in it'}.¹⁸ You had (29) made a transaction with the *kārdār* in which your share was lost {alt. tr.: and he defaulted on it},¹⁹ whereupon you charged it to us.²⁰ (30) However, as do others, your servant sends you consignments, relying on you to buy merchandise that needs no (31) bartering²¹ or advance, but an available commodity,²² which, if its purchase is convenient, fine, and if not, it should be abandoned; (32) for whoever sends you a consignment, does not write: "advance me money for certain merchandise," but: (33) "purchase for whatever price God apportions as livelihood, and send it."²³ However, my lord, the decision lies with you²⁴ (34) in all matters.

¹⁷ Cf. III, 1, line 13 and III, 18, sec. a, line 2. No. III, 9v, lines 3–6, clearly refers to the same incident. {May God curse him, in Arabic *la'anahu 'llāhu*. He is cursed with the same language by Ben Yijū in III, 18 sec. a, line 2. As evidence for her assumption that the *kārdār* was not Jewish, Margariti, "Aden," 340–41 (see 556, n. 17), cites Khalaf's cursing him. An example of vilifications showered on Jewish malefactors can be cited from VI, 31, lines 4, 6, 'may they be remembered with a ban (*shamattā*) . . . evil will never depart from the homes of those who repay good with evil' (the original is a combination of Prov. 17:13 and Ps. 38:21). For additional examples (in reference to a freed slave), see Gil, "Merchants," 307–8.

¹⁸ Arabic *li-khāṣṣatik wa-mā lanā fibī shay*. For *li-khāṣṣa*, see 285, n. 9.

¹⁹ Arabic *inkhasara 'alayhi hādha 'l-shay*. Cf. Dozy, *Supplément*, 1:371a, *istakhsara 'alayhi al-shay*. For this use of the seventh form of the verb, see Blau, *Grammar*, 78.

²⁰ Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, 276: "deal with this thing individually with him, separately from us." This translation, apparently accepted by Margariti, "Aden," 340, is untenable.

²¹ Arabic *mu'ārada*. See n. 23.

²² Goitein transcribed ʔḥḥ ʔ (shay khāṣṣ) and translated 'a definite article.' But the text—both in III, 13 (in Khalaf's hand) and III, 12 (the clerk's copy)—clearly reads ʔḥḥ ʔ (shay nādḍ); for the translation, cf. Lane, *Dictionary*, 2804–5. The same expression is found, for example, in TS 16.339 (ed. Ben-Sasson, *Sicily*, 489, no. 101; Gil, *Ishmael*, 3:145, no. 348), line 22: *jami' mā yanidḍ lanā 'indah* (translate: 'whatever he has on hand that belongs to us'), line 23: *wa-jami' mā nādḍa li 'indak* ('and whatever you have on hand that belongs to me'), lines 25–26 *wahuwa shay 'ayn nādḍ mā huwa shay yat'abuk* ('it is something readily available, on hand; it is not something which would trouble you,' etc.).

²³ This highly interesting passage contains important information about the business practices of the India trade. A merchant in Egypt or South Arabia might ask his correspondent in India (a) to barter for him certain merchandise against some sent to India (cf. I, 2, line 5; I, 7, line 8; I, 9, line 14 and here lines 30–31). This was called *mu'ārada*, a term not found by me so far elsewhere. {The verb *ārada* is used for barter in the passages cited; in light of its frequent use the correction suggested by Diem, *Dictionary*, 142, n. 146, is to be rejected.} He might ask him also (b) to advance him money and buy for it

[D. Arrival of Ben Yijū's brother in Egypt]

Sheikh Abū Iṣḥāq b. Joseph²⁵ arrived this year and reported (35) that your brother Mevassēr had arrived in Egypt and wishes to go to your place.²⁶ Please take note of (36) this.

a specific commodity; cf. I, 2, line 10. In these two cases, as we learn here, the merchant who gave the order had to bear the losses incurred in the course of the transaction. However, when a merchant sent wares or money to India and asked his correspondent to buy him any merchandise which he deemed fit, the latter could not charge the former for losses incurred, when for example, his customer proved unreliable. {Goitein's reading of the passage was influenced by the mistaken reading *khāṣṣ* in line 31; see n. 22. In line 32, I suggest a slightly different translation: 'does not write to you that you should advance for him money on a commodity.' In any case, I believe that Khalaf intended to contrast a request to advance money against a commodity not yet available, in which case loss incurred by the supplier's default would be borne by the orderer, with a request to purchase something readily available (*nādd*), whether a specified commodity (as suggested here in line 26) or not. In the latter case, if Ben Yijū deviated from his instructions and put money down against a future delivery of merchandise—probably at below the market value, he did so at his own risk and was expected to bear losses for failure to deliver. For the 'whatever... apportions' formula, here also in lines 25–26, see the discussion in pages 63–65. Here, in line 33, Khalaf writes the formula *rashiṭarī bi-mā qasama 'llābu wa-razaq*. The prefix *bi-* conveys 'for whatever price,' namely for the best price then on the market, and was intended to emphasize the availability of the commodity in contrast to paying an advance for future delivery at a lower price. Similarly, he wrote in III, 10, lines 54–55: 'If the commodities purchased include betel nut or cardamom, kindly purchase for whatever price (*bi-mā*) is available.' Elsewhere 'purchase whatever (*mā*) God apportions' (here, line 25; III, 10, lines 51–53, 60, 69, also written by Khalaf). The phrase *wa-tunfidh bihi* (with *bi-*, rather than the direct object also in other documents), 'and send it,' was also intended here to emphasize that the commodity was available. For examples of this phrase see, III, 1v, lines 5–7; III, 5, lines 2–4; III, 9v, line 5 (all concerning cardamom, the last connected with the dispute in question); III, 10, lines 52–53. Examples of orders for only available merchandise, without the 'whatever... apportions' formula, other than those cited here, can be found in III, 2, lines 14–15; III, 3, lines 13–14.}

²⁴ In the original, the word *bi-ra'yihī* is understood; cf. 592, n. 36.

²⁵ 'Father of Isaac' is a *kunya* for a man called Abraham. Our Abū Iṣḥāq almost certainly is identical with Abraham b. Joseph Ibn al-Baqqāl from al-Mahdiyya, a friend of the Ben Yijū family mentioned in III, 29v, line 1. {He is also mentioned in II, 70, line 22, as he was departing Egypt for Yemen.}

²⁶ This is the first intimation of the arrival in Egypt of Ben Yijū's brother from Sicily, whereto the family had fled or had been brought as prisoners from Tunisia. Ben Yijū responds to this information in 1147 (III, 15, line 29); accordingly, our letter must have been written one year earlier, in 1146.

[E. Receipt of consignment from India via Zabīd, northwest of Aden]

As to 'the salted foods'²⁷ and the *qaṣ'a*-bowls,²⁸ which you had sent with Maḍmūn b. Sālim: (37) While at sea, he boarded a ship of Fidyār, but left everything in the ship (which had transported him from India).²⁹ So far, (38) there arrived from Zabīd only three *qaṣ'a*-bowls, one for Sheikh Maḍmūn, one for Sheikh (39) Joseph,³⁰ and one for me, and the *mōja* wood³¹ destined for me, nothing else.

[F. Gifts and orders for Ben Yijū's household]

I, your servant, sent you (40) what has no importance, namely a bottle of sugar and a bottle of raisins for the children—may God, the Exalted, (41) keep them with {alt. tr.: for} you!³²

²⁷ Arabic *māliḥ*; cf. Dozy, *Supplément*, 2:611a 'des choses confites au sel'; Steingass-Johnson, *Dictionary* [see 1370], salted fish. Cf. III, 3, line 4 (and 569, n. 70) [and III, 8, line 4].

²⁸ About these bowls, see 326, n. 33.

²⁹ Maḍmūn b. Sālim, an Adenese merchant (see about him the introduction to III, 22), traveled from India on a ship, which was going to Ghulayfiqa, the seaport of Zabīd in southwest Yemen. On the high seas, which must have been very calm at the time, he boarded another ship, which was heading for Aden, while the merchandise (and presents) carried by him continued on to the port of Zabīd.

³⁰ {Maḍmūn b. Ḥasan and Joseph b. Abraham.}

³¹ Perhaps artemisia moxa or common mugwort, one of the chief specialties of Chinese medicine; cf. Wong and Teh, *Chinese Medicine*, 45. I learn from Dr. Derk Bodde of the University of Pennsylvania that moxa is a Japanese word. The combustible cones {formed from the down of the leaves} of this plant are applied to the skin at certain spots and ignited. As the smoldering fire burns into the skin, a blister is raised. Its effect is similar to the counterirritant or cauterization, but more painful. Early Portuguese navigators carried it to the West. The treatment with moxa was as common in China as cauterization with iron in the Middle East. {Mōja also appears in III, 24, line 32. Besides various medicinal actions, the plant was believed to protect against misfortunes and was valued for its flavor and aroma. According to Isaacs, *Medical Manuscripts*, 18, no. 230, the actions and uses of artemesia are defined in TS Ar. 39, f. 381.}

³² Owing to high child mortality, such wishes were common. As a matter of fact, they were not fulfilled as far as Ben Yijū was concerned. His only son died in Yemen on the way back to the West, where Ben Yijū arrived accompanied by a daughter; see III, 41. {A revised reading of III, 41, reveals that Ben Yijū also had a young son who died in India.}

You asked, my lord, to buy a dinar's worth of arsenic.³³ But, it is not to be had in the town, (42) nor is ladanum.³⁴ However, I bought you a dinar's worth of paper, (43) 30 sheets.³⁵

There were forwarded to you also half a pound of kohl (antimony), half a pound of chewing gum³⁶ and half a pound of vitriol.³⁷ (44) This is from me, your servant. It cost nothing {alt. tr.: No charge}. As to the dinar for the paper, add it to my, your servant's, account (45) for the ginger and pepper salvaged in the *shaffāra* and buy, my lord, what (46) God facilitates <and send it>³⁸ in one of the ships heading (for Aden) {alt. tr.: arriving (here)}. There is no need, my lord, to give you advice.

[G. Greetings]

Receive, my master, (47) for your esteemed self the best greetings from me, your servant, and give the best greetings to my lords, your two children {alt. tr.: your two sons},³⁹ (48) and greetings to Sheikh Bama.⁴⁰

[H. Added request for cardamom]

If you are able to buy some cardamom, (49) send it together with what you happen to buy {If there is some cardamom available, . . . with what you were able to buy}. *And Peace.*

³³ A year later, arsenic was also not available; see III, 15, lines 50–51. In III, 6, 160 pounds of arsenic are shipped from Aden to Ben Yijū in India, for sale in Ceylon.

³⁴ See III, 3, line 19 (and 571, n. 22).

³⁵ {Cited by Ashtor, *Prix*, 212, n. 9. The word for paper used here (twice in line 42 and once in line 44), Arabic *qirtās* (in III, 21, sec. b, line 4, spelled *qirtās*), originally papyrus or papyrus roll, then parchment, was used for rag paper. See Sellheim, "Qirtās" (cf. Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:334). The regular word for paper in our documents is *waraq*. Sometimes *kāghadh* was used; see III, 21, sec. b, line 13.}

³⁶ Arabic *ṣamgh*; see III, 1v, 1, line 12 (and 561, n. 54).

³⁷ See III, 1v, 1, line 11 (and 561, n. 52).

³⁸ Mistakenly omitted by Khalaf and the clerk. {Rather than an error in writing, the word for sending was sometimes omitted when it could be inferred from the context. So in IV, 17v, margin, lines 9–10, *kutiba . . . kutub fi markab*, 'letters were written (and sent) in the ship.' For *kataba mā'a fulān*, 'he wrote (something and sent) with PN,' see II, 32, line 51 and 375, n. 37. Similarly, here 'buy . . . in one of the ships' implies sending. Cf. III, 15, lines 17, 23; 754, n. 30.

³⁹ Arabic *al-waladāyn al-sayyidayn*. On Ben Yijū's second son, see above note to line 41. Cf. below, III, 16, line 22. However, in 1151, when Ben Yijū had only a son and a daughter, the writer of III, 38 (top, lines 2–3), sent greetings to *sādātī awlādih*, 'my lords, your children.'

⁴⁰ Bama, Ben Yijū's slave-agent and commercial agent, was a member of his household and is addressed with the title 'sheikh,' i.e., honored elder; see III, 10, line 74 (and 604, n. 59).}

[I. Address]

[Verso] (1) (To) His excellency, the most illustrious Sheikh, my lord, Abū Iṣḥāq (2) *Abraham son of his honor, great and holy master Perahyā—may he rest in Eden!—b. Yijū.*

(1) (From) Your servant, who is grateful for your beneficence, (2) Khalaf b. Isaac—may I be spared losing you!⁴¹

(Followed by the address in Arabic script which adds 'the Israelite' for both sender and addressee; the name of the sender is prefaced by: 'the one who is sincere in affection for you.')

⁴¹ Arabic *wuqiya 'adamahu*, for the more common *mā 'adimtuhu*. {The same is found in IV, 13v, line 3, also written by Khalaf b. Isaac.}

⁴² Arabic *ṣafī waddihī*; also in III, 22v. {See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 5:279, for this and other expressions of love in the Geniza letters; Diem, *Dictionary*, 125, 223, where he suggests reading *ṣafī wadduhū*. Cf. IV, 42, line 9: *ṣafī waddihī*.}