

III, 15 *Letter from Khalaf b. Isaac to Abraham Ben Yijū, Jurbattan*

Aden, July 30–August 27, 1147

TS Misc. 25, f. 103

Because of the narrow sheet, Khalaf's script is here far smaller than, for example, in III, 10, 13, 14; cf. the introduction to III, 11. Another peculiarity in the outward appearance of this letter is the slight incline of the lines, i.e., they end somewhat higher than they begin. Between lines 32–53 the lines are also curved and their beginnings recess very slightly, with the effect that the margin at the bottom is wider than at the top. Obviously, Khalaf wrote this letter placing the paper on his knee¹ or the palm of his left hand. The other letters had been written with the paper spread on a writing pad or *mismada*; cf. Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 214.

Except for the address, nothing was written on the verso, nor was it used by the recipient, for here, as in III, 11 (although not as strongly as there), the ink seeped through. The paper is only slightly damaged. The hole in lines 40–41, as the text shows, was there before the letter was written, a very rare phenomenon in letters written on paper.

Translation

[A. Three biblical verses, wishes for a good journey]

- (1) *In Your name, O Merciful.*
 (2) *You will walk, without breaking stride; when you run, you will not stumble.*²
 (3) *And Shaddai be your treasure, and precious silver for you.*³ (4) *For the Lord will be your trust; He will keep your feet from being caught.*⁴

¹ {For writing on the knee, see page 764.}

² Prov. 4:12. *Ṣ'āyk* is spelled in the Massoretic text without *y*. Ben Yijū had expressed, in his letter to Khalaf, his intention to travel from India to Aden; see III, 16, lines 23–24. The biblical verses quoted here are used as wishes for a good journey. See III, 7, lines 2–7 (and 582, n. 1).

³ Job 22:25.

⁴ Prov. 3:26. Used for the same purpose in III, 7, line 2, where also *bksyk* is spelled plene, unlike the Massoretic text.

[B. Acknowledgement of letters and expression of good wishes]

(5–15) There arrived the letters, etc. (A combination, with variations and additions, of the introductory phrases used in Khalaf's letters, III, 10–11.)⁵

[C. Previous letters lost when two ships sunk]

(15) I, your servant, have taken note of your remark, (16) my lord, of how little I had written you, my lord, last (17) year.⁶ I, your servant, wish to inform you that I had (sent) {lit., 'written'}⁷ letters (18) with Sheikh Abū 'Abd Allah b. Abu 'l-Katā'ib,⁸ (19) and a consignment as well, to you, my lord, from me, your servant, in the (20) Jurbattan,⁹ the ship of the Sultan.¹⁰ You know, (21) my master, what happened to it. Thus, the letters (22) and the consignment entrusted to him were lost. In the ship (23) in which Sheikh Abū Zikrī Ibn al-Shāmī¹¹ traveled (I had sent)

⁵ In addition to the polite phrases known to us from previous letters, Khalaf uses in lines 11–12 two Hebrew expressions to describe his gladness at the receipt of Ben Yijū's letter: "It was like water on a thirsty land" (cf. Prov. 25:25 and Ps. 143:6) and "I was like one that finds much spoil" (cf. Ps. 119:162). {The former appears in IV, 13, lines 6–7; the latter is also used in II, 35, line 15; VII, 65, line 30; cf. IV, 11, line 15.}

⁶ I take this phrase as meaning that Ben Yijū had not received any letters from Khalaf that year. For, as we learn here, line 23, and indeed everywhere in our documents, owing to the great risks of sea travel, the India merchants used to refer in their letters to everything sent to an overseas correspondent. Normally, the ships heading for one port set out together; therefore, each year, there was only one opportunity to send letters to one destination. It may be, however, that Khalaf had sent a short letter (of course in a number of copies) to another port on the Indian coast, with which Ben Yijū was connected, e.g., in addition to Jurbattan (lines 20 and 28), Mangalore or Fandarayna (see line 44 and III, 10, line 24 respectively).

⁷ {The verb for sending is implied here and in line 23. See III, 12, line 46 and 620, n. 38.}

⁸ About this *nākhudā*, see page 149.}

⁹ I.e., the ship whose port of destination was Jurbattan. So far this place has been found only in our document (cf. also line 28). {On the practice of naming ships according to their destination, see page 24. For the town of Jurbattan (also spelled Jurbatan, with one *t*), known for its rice and pepper, five *marḥalas* from Fandarayna, see Nainar, *Arab Geographers*, 40–41. A *marḥala* is the distance a traveler can cover in one day, ca. 36–50 km.; cf. Ed., "Marḥala."}

¹⁰ While in documents from the Mediterranean, ships owned by a Sultan or a Qā'id (military leader), are very frequently mentioned {see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:310}, for the Indian Ocean we have so far only the reference here and in II, 48 {line 24}, a letter written by Khalaf in 1139 or 1140 {ca. 1138}. As there, too, shipwreck is alluded to, the two letters must refer to different ships {because of the different dates of the letters}.

¹¹ No doubt identical with Zechariah or Abū Zikrī b. Sar Shalom Ibn al-Shāmī. Details concerning him are found in 264, n. 31.

letters to notify you (24) about the consignment sent with Sheikh Abū 'Abd Allah b. Abu 'l- (25) Katā'ib. However, this ship, too, suffered what (26) you know. For I, your servant, enquired about you, (27) my lord, and learned {lit., 'and they told me'} that your house¹² and your children were in (28) Jurbattan. Therefore, I sent the things with the above mentioned.¹³

[D. Addressee's brother, Mevassēr, was well but had not come to Aden]

(29) As to the news concerning your brother Mevassēr¹⁴—he is well, but has not arrived. (30) I shall act in this matter {alt. tr.: concerning him}, as you advised, my lord.

[E. Forty dinars sent (to Ben Yijū's family) by Maḍmūn, the representative of the merchants in Aden]

Concerning (31) the forty dinars transmitted by Sheikh (32) Maḍmūn¹⁵ through Sheikh Abū Naṣr b. Elisha,¹⁶ (33) I have no information; I do not know whether he (Mevassēr) received something (34) or not.

¹² {Arabic *bayt*, coupled with *awlād*, 'children', would seem best taken not literally as 'house' but as the familiar metaphor for wife (see 235, n. 10). If so, this passage is of some interest, since the absence in Ben Yijū's letters of any reference to his wife seems to have been adduced by Goitein (*Letters*, 202) as support for his suggestion that Ben Yijū married his manumitted slave girl Ashu (III, 17).}

¹³ Khalaf had previously sent his letters and consignments to Mangalore (see III, 2) or Dahbattan (III, 10).

¹⁴ Cf. III, 7, line 16 (and 583, n. 8). Obviously, Ben Yijū had asked Khalaf to send some money to his refugee brother. {According to III, 12, line 35, Mevassēr intended to travel to Yemen.}

¹⁵ This suggests that Ben Yijū had asked the representative of the merchants Maḍmūn b. Ḥasan to transmit to Mevassēr, who was at that time in Egypt, forty dinars {mentioned in Maḍmūn's letter to Ben Yijū, II, 29, lines 3–4}. Maḍmūn obviously had been absent from Aden at that time, and perhaps it was not prudent to inquire about such delicate matters with clerks. In II, 31, line 15, we find that Ben Yijū had asked Maḍmūn to send twenty dinars to his other brother, Joseph, who was a refugee from Tunisia in Sicily. {Goitein evidently surmised that Maḍmūn had been away from Aden from the very fact that Ben Yijū had inquired with Khalaf about the money Maḍmūn had sent, rather than inquiring with Maḍmūn (or one of his clerks). This need not have been the case, however, since the inquiry was whether Khalaf, through his contacts in Egypt, had any information as to whether Mevassēr had received the funds.}

¹⁶ This Abū Naṣr b. Elisha must have been a busy traveler. Here we find him on his way from Aden to Egypt in 1146 or 1147. In 1149, he again made the same journey; see III, 29, lines 7–10. {For Abū Naṣr b. Elisha, see 487, n. 2. The dates in the two preceding sentences apparently require revision. In my opinion Khalaf was not informing Ben Yijū

[F. Acknowledgement of goods received]

There arrived what you, my lord, kindly sent, namely the three (35) *qaṣ'a*-bowls,¹⁷ the water skin with lemon,¹⁸ the ginger, and the basket (36) with pepper and ginger.¹⁹ I received all this and thank (37) you, my lord, for your kindness and effort in this matter. (38) May God reward you, my master, and satisfy your needs {alt. tr.: undertake your compensation}, and (39) may I never {lit., 'may He never let me'} miss you!

[G. Delay in sending betel nuts not Ben Yijū's fault]

As to excusing you, my lord, for not being able to purchase the new (40) betel nuts—you, my lord, (41) are excused, for all the travelers (42) arrived and told the same story.²⁰

[H. List of presents and household orders forwarded]

I, your servant, sent (43) with Sheikh Abū 'Alī Ibn al-Ḥallā²¹ to (44) Manj<ar>ūr²² two bottles of sugar, two bottles of raisins, and a bottle (45) of almonds, a total of five bottles.²³ The bottle with almonds was

here of a shipment made by Abū Naṣr but rather responding to Ben Yijū's inquiry, sent from India, about the success of that mission. Accordingly, Abū Naṣr must have traveled from Aden to Egypt approximately in 1145. No. III, 29, lines 9–10, which Ben Yijū wrote in 1149 from Aden, to Mevassēr in Sicily, refers to the same trip by Abū Naṣr. He had not succeeded in delivering the goods, since in the meantime Mevassēr had returned to Sicily, where the goods were then forwarded. Abū Naṣr b. Elisha is probably identical with the Abū Naṣr (whose father's name is not mentioned), who a few years later assisted Ben Yijū's nephews, Moses and Peraḥyā sons of Joseph, according to III, 47, line 14, verso, line 3.

¹⁷ About these bowls, see 326, n. 33.

¹⁸ In III, 3, line 3–4 lemons and mangos were carried in a water skin. {Here Goitein did not read the word *al-līm*, 'the lemon'; cf. III, 8, lines 4, 9, 31, 33.}

¹⁹ The ginger mentioned first was a separate shipment, certainly of a considerable size. That forwarded in a basket together with pepper (as *khullā* or 'mixture') was dispatched in that form in order to save freight and customs duties; see III, 3, lines 3 and 4.

²⁰ Cf. III, 11, lines 16–20, where cardamom was not to be had at Ben Yijū's place. The testimony of 'all the travelers' proved that Ben Yijū had not been remiss in his efforts for his Adenese correspondents.

²¹ The son of the silversmith. Arabic *hallā'* is the common word for silversmith in southern Yemen {cf. Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 106}, while in central Yemen and most other Arabic-speaking countries, the usual word is *ṣā'igh*. The word could be used here also as a family name. {See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:108, 420, n. 54.}

²² = Mangalore. See III, 16. Khalaf wrote *Manjūr*. In this line, he omitted letters three times.

²³ {The same items were sent a year later; see III, 16, lines 18–19.}

filled (46) with sugar, for it had a little empty space; therefore, I filled it (47) with sugar. I, your servant, sent you also with the above (48) mentioned (Abū 'Alī) half a pound of vitriol, half a pound of chewing gum, (49) ten sheets of white²⁴ paper and a pound of costus. (50) I could not get hold of arsenic in (51) the market; otherwise, I would have sent it to you, my lord {alt. tr.: but it will reach you (later), my lord}.²⁵

[I. Greetings and date]

Please, my master, (52) receive for your esteemed self the best greetings from me. (53) And to my lords, your children—may God let you enjoy their being alive {alt. tr.: give you pleasure with them throughout your life}!—²⁶ (54) and to Sheikh Bama²⁷ the best greetings. (55) And your servants,²⁸ my children, send you (56) and your children the best greetings.²⁹ *And Peace.*

(57) *Written in the month of Elul of the year (58) 1458 E.D.*³⁰

[J. Address]

[Verso] (1) (To) His excellency, the most illustrious Sheikh (2) Abū Ishāq Abraham b. (3) Peraḥyā, known as Ibn Yijū.

(1) (From) His servant and the property of his hands,³¹ (2) Khalaf b. Isaac—(3) *may God's spirit give him peace!*³²

²⁴ Arabic *bayād*, which occurs only here. As we have often had opportunity to state that the Yemenite letter writers sometimes use brown and sometimes white (now grayish) paper, it stands to reason that with *bayād*, a particularly white paper is meant. {Also in II, 24, line 9. According to IV, 69v, line 10, sheets of white paper, *waraqa baydā*, were used to prepare a letter from Alexandria in 1141, in order to highlight the writing.

²⁵ Arabic *fa-kāna yaṣīlu*. . . Cf. III, 8, lines 9–10. Also in the letter written before this one, Khalaf commented that arsenic was not available; see III, 12, line 41.} All the presents and household goods mentioned here have occurred in the other letters. Cf. especially III, 16, lines 16–19, where also the same quantities were sent.

²⁶ {Arabic *amta'abu allāh bibim*. For this phrase see Hava, *Dictionary*, 706; Diem, *Arabische Briefe*, 15.

²⁷ Ben Yijū's servant, mentioned repeatedly.}

²⁸ Arabic *mamlūkak*, in the singular, perhaps because Khalaf had first in mind to send greetings in the name of one son only. {Perhaps read *mmlykk*, a defective spelling of *mamālīkāk*, 'your servants.'}

²⁹ The greetings as in the previous letters. A novelty is introduced by the regards sent by Khalaf's children. The same is found in II, 51, margin {cf. II, 46, lines 67–68}.

³⁰ July 30–August 27, 1147. On writing the date, see III, 16, introduction.

³¹ {Arabic *ydh* looks more like *wdh* (*milk wuddihi*): '(the possession of) his love' (expressions of love are common here; see, e.g., 621, n. 42); but the reading *ydh* is clear in III, 32, line 10 and address and IV, 12, address, which is also written by Khalaf.

³² Isa. 63:14.}

III, 16 *Letter from Khalaf b. Isaac to Abraham Ben Yijū, Mangalore*

Aden, July 19–August 17, 1148

JNUL 4° 577.3/6

Ed. Ashtor, "Documents," 148–51. Described by Yellin, "JNUL Geniza," 295. No reference is made here to some mistakes, misconceptions, and an omission made in the first edition of this document. Had its learned editor had at his disposal the material collected in this book, he would have made all the necessary corrections himself.

The double lines created during the manufacture of the paper are clearly visible; they parallel the length of the sheet. Written in Khalaf's own hand; see the introduction to III, 10. The verso is blank, except for the address, which is written in the same direction as the letter itself and not upside down, as usual. The reason for the normal procedure was to differentiate the address from the text, which, as a rule, continued on verso. Here, where the verso bore no writing except the address, it was more convenient to write the latter in the same direction as the main text, so that the reader had only to turn the page without needing to turn it also upside down. {The address in Hebrew characters was normally on verso in the same direction as the text of recto, whether the letter had a continuation on verso (almost always written in the opposite direction) or not as, e.g., here and III, 7. The address in Arabic script, added when the letter was to be delivered by a non-Jew, was written in the opposite direction, as usual. Perhaps the direction of the address was connected to the practice of folding and sealing the letter before delivery.}

Normally, letters were not dated, as the carrier who had received them from the sender handed them over in person to the addressee. The special reason for dating this letter was perhaps that the usual yearly business letter had already been sent out to Ben Yijū by Khalaf, while our short note was sent in response to Ben Yijū's query about his brother, which was accompanied by presents, reciprocated here immediately. As usual, only the month, but not the day, is noted, for normally it took an unforeseeable number of days before the ship in which the letter was to be carried could set sail. {Khalaf dated other letters that he wrote, e.g., III, 15, IV, 12, IV, 14. This book includes additional dated letters, many of which include the day in the month.}