

III, 2 *Memorandum from Joseph b. Abraham to Abraham Ben Yijū*

Aden, ca. 1134–37

TS 8 J 7, f. 23

This is not a formal letter, but a short memorandum handed to the merchant mentioned in line 2, who carried the scrap copper to India. Accordingly, the document contains neither polite phrases at the beginning nor greetings at the end. The name of the sender is written above the text and not, as usual in letters, {opposite the address} on the reverse side.¹

This memorandum preceded III, 3 by a year and was referred to in it (III, 3, lines 6, 9); see the introduction to III, 1.

Translation

[A. Old copper vessels sent to the addressee]

- (1) *In Your name, O Merciful.* His servant Joseph b. Abraham—*may he rest in Eden!*
- (2) I have sent to Sheikh Abraham b. Peraḥyā Yijū, through the agency of Sheikh Maymūn, the Muslim,² (3) the {prominent} merchant, to Manjarūr,³ in the ship of the *nākhudā* Maḥrūz⁴—may God ordain its safety {alt. tr.: safe arrival}!—(4) a bag containing copper,⁵ in which are

¹ {The continuation with four lines on verso, concluding with the blessing 'And peace,' which is followed by a separate account written, in the opposite direction, by Ben Yijū, was inadvertently not copied by Goitein. The continuation is added below, and the account now appears as III, 28a.}

² The exact details seem to be superfluous in a memorandum sent with the bearer. However, it was common usage to send copies of such communications through other persons or even on board other ships. {For this practice, see page 9 (n. 23).} Obviously, it was necessary for this purpose to provide complete information about the addressee and the bearer. Maymūn is characterized as a Muslim, because this name was common also among Jews. Over a dozen Jews named sons of Maymūn (or Maimon, i.e., Maimonides) are mentioned in the Geniza papers. {This is likely the same Maymūn who sends regards to Abū Zikrī Kohen in II, 55v, line 11, a letter composed in Mangalore by Maḥrūz (see line 3) and penned by Ben Yijū. Use of the good services of Muslim acquaintances or agents occurs in a number of the India Book papers, e.g., II, 73.}

³ Mangalore on the Malabar coast. {For *tājir*, 'prominent merchant,' see page 27, n. 4.}

⁴ The shipowner Muḥrūz b. Jacob, on whom see the Introduction IIB1.

⁵ Arabic *naḥās* (also lines 13, 20). For the meaning of this term, see page 555, n. 11.}

four pieces of scrap,⁶ and a copper {ten-cornered} tray,⁷ weighing 41½ (5) pounds, and a tall boiler,⁸ in a separate package, weighing 12 pounds. Total weight: (6) 53½ pounds.

[B. Order of vessels described in detail]

If God decrees that it arrives safely, please have made for me (7) a {ten-cornered} tray the same size as the one sent to you and also a *marfa*⁹ decorated with wickerwork {alt. tr.: filigree},¹⁰ (8) which we call *zīr-khuwān* (a table jug). It should fit into the center of the {ten-cornered} tray, so that when (9) water is poured into it from a water skin, the drops should fall on the {ten-cornered} tray {lit., 'so that whatever water drips from the water skin above it should fall on the (ten-cornered) tray.}'¹¹ (10) The wickerwork decoration {alt. tr.: filigree} should be like that of a bamboo basket;¹² the table jug should weigh eight pounds, more (11) or less, and the {ten-corned} tray about four pounds.

⁶ Arabic *fajar*. For *fajara* see 511, n. 29. See below, line 17 {and III, 28a, line 12, written on the verso of this document, where *fajar* is also used}. In III, 3, line 6, scrap metal is called *kusāra*, with reference to our letter.

⁷ Arabic *mu'ashshara sufi*. For the material denoted by *sufi* (also line 16), see the note to 555, line 11. The word *mu'ashshara* seems not to be listed in the Arabic dictionaries, but it {or *ma'shara*} is common in colloquial Yemenite Arabic {see Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 328}. For a good picture of such a tray, see Scott, *High Yemen*, opposite 130. As the picture shows, these trays are very large; their main task is to protect the carpets, which cover the ground, from being spoiled by water dripping from vases with flowers, etc., and in particular from the charcoals of the water pipes assembled on them. These trays are often covered with inscriptions and are preserved in well-to-do families for hundred of years. The Yemenite Jews make more use of them as tables on which the whole family eats. This usage seems to be alluded to below, line 20. The connection with the table jug, line 8, indicates that at that time the *mu'ashshara* too served as a tray from which meals were taken in company. {See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:147, 393, n. 65, citing this text, where it is translated: 'ten-cornered tray.}'

⁸ Arabic *qumqum*. This word has two different meanings. Mostly, it denotes a flask for rose water; see II, 44, lines 20–21. Here it means 'a cucumber-shaped vessel used for warming water' (Steingass-Johnson, *Dictionary*, 989) or 'copper-boiler' (Hava, *Dictionary*, 627) (Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 413: 'metal meat pot.')

⁹ The *marfa* (or *mirfa*) was a container (with a cover) for water or other liquids. See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:147, where from here to line 11 is translated, and above, 555, n. 13.

¹⁰ Arabic *mushabbak*, also in line 19; in line 10 *tashbik*. For this term, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:211; Shy, "Terms," 236.}

¹¹ The tray should be so large that when water is poured from a water skin into the table jug no drops would fall on the carpet. {This seems to refer to the positioning of the table jug in the center of the tray, rather than the size of the tray.}

¹² Arabic *khūzarān*. This word, too, seems not to be listed in the dictionaries. In southern Yemen, *khūzarān* denotes the plant from which the straw skullcaps are made

Furthermore, a (12) small candlestick, weighing about three pounds, made in the form of steps;¹³ and a small *t'lm* (?),¹⁴ whose (13) mouth should be no more than one and a half handbreadths,¹⁵ and whose *'sb' dr*¹⁶ should be of fine workmanship.

As to the remainder of the copper, (14) please sell it, and with its proceeds pay the craftsman's fee. With the balance buy me, your servant, a small quantity of (15) fresh betel nuts, or, if they are not available, cardamom or tumeric.¹⁷

[C. On similar shipments and orders on the separate account of the sender's son]

There was also sent (16) to your excellency an Indian basket¹⁸ with nineteen pounds of copper, four pieces (17) of scrap and a basin.¹⁹ I, your servant, was asked by my son to help him with this. However, I would like you to please (18) keep his account separate; it should not be entered in my account.²⁰

Please have made from it for its owner (19) a basin and a ewer, both small, a small *marfa'* with nice bamboo wickerwork {alt. tr.: filigree, like bamboo wickerwork}. (20) He wishes to place it on a platter²¹ on the table.

which most men wear beneath other headgear. These *khūzarān* caps are of a very fine texture, which, imitated in brass or bronze, would indeed make a beautiful ornament. {Cf. Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:138, 388-89, n. 217, where this text is cited (for 'lines 7, 10' there, correct: lines 10, 19). Here and in line 19, *khūzarānī* is clearly spelled with *w* for the second letter, and the suggestion in Diem, *Dictionary*, 63, n. 64, that Goitein may have misread *w* for *y* is to be rejected. For *khayzurān*, see III, 24, line 11 and 662, n. 19.

¹³ Cf. Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:135, 388, n. 206.

¹⁴ Cf. III, 24, line 37, where the plural seems to appear.

¹⁵ Handbreadth, Arabic *shibr*. Joseph b. Abraham orders from Egypt a basin with a diameter of one and a half handbreadths in II, 43, line 14.}

¹⁶ Meaning unknown.

¹⁷ See III, 3, line 3.

¹⁸ Arabic *zanbil*. See 562, n. 57.

¹⁹ Arabic *ʿasl*. {See 410, n. 13.}

²⁰ See III, 3, lines 11-12. {Cf. III, 1, line 22 and 558, n. 23; Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:192, 561, n. 9.}

²¹ Arabic *ṣaḥn*, which is smaller than the *mu'ashshara*, but serves the same purpose of a platter for the whole family. While the *ṣaḥn* is put on a low table, the *mu'ashshara* rests permanently on a tripod or a construction similar to that seen in the picture mentioned above, in the note to line 4. {This passage is translated in Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:147. See Pianta, *Dictionary*, 278.}

As to the remainder of the copper, please sell it for him (21) and use the proceeds to pay the craftsman's fee. With the balance buy him a small quantity of betel nuts or cardamom.

[D. Presents sent to the addressee]

[Margin] There was dispatched to your excellency for your esteemed (2) household what has no importance and no value, namely a bottle of raisins; a *rubā'iyya*²² of almonds and a *rubā'iyya* of soap; an embroidered kerchief,²³ [Verso] {(1) woven in Aden; five *dasts*²⁴ of Egyptian paper; half an ounce of civet;²⁵ half a pound of kohl; (2) and half a pound of mastic gum.²⁶ The kerchief, civet, paper, kohl and gum are (3) all in one piece of cloth, on which is written your excellency's name. All of this is sent together with (4) the aforementioned Sheikh Maymūn.²⁷ And peace.}

²² For this measure, see II, 14, line 21. {As already noted, Joseph spells *rubā'iyya*, with short *a*.}

²³ See II, 44v, lines 5 and 20, where various embroidered fabrics are ordered from Cairo for Aden, and ib., line 18, where an order is given to embroider the sender's name on a piece of fine cloth. {See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:474, s.v. embroidery; Stillman, *Arab Dress*, 120 ff. As the continuation shows, here Adenese embroidery was intended.

²⁴ A *dast* was a certain quantity that made up a set of a particular item; cf. page 304, n. 9.

²⁵ The export of civet perfume (*zabād*), as a gift, from Aden to India is noteworthy, since according to Goitein, *Letters*, 49-50, it was imported from the Far East ("from far away... the Malay archipelago"). For example of civet being sent from Aden to the West, see III, 29, lines 8, 10.

²⁶ Arabic *masṭakā'*.

²⁷ Mentioned above, recto, line 2.}