

III, 21 *Two Accounts by Ben Yijū about Transactions with the Nākhudā Abū 'Abd Allāh Ibn Abu 'l-Katā'ib*

Aden, 1140–45 {1140–44}

ULC Or. 1080 J 95

These are rough drafts written on III, 19v. No. III, 21, sec. B is written in the opposite direction to sec. A. A blank space of about seven lines has been left between the two. In sec. A, the beginnings of lines 1–7 were torn away, but not much is lost.

The *nākhudā* Abū 'Abd Allāh Ibn Abu 'l-Katā'ib drowned on his way from Aden to India in 1146 (III, 15, lines 18–25). No. 21, sec. A, concerns goods brought from India; sec. B goods shipped there and sums due the *nākhudā* for transport of the goods mentioned in sec. A. We find him doing business together with his father Abu 'l-Ḥasan here, sec. B, lines 26 and 31, just as in II, 16, line 19. The terminus ad quem for III, 21 is, therefore, the summer of 1146. As, however, Ben Yijū was at that time in India (see III, 12–14), and had been established there for many years, these statements must have been written before that year. We have many letters written from Aden to Ben Yijū in India during the years 1133–40 and again from 1145–48. Presumably he paid a visit to Aden in the early 1140's, and these accounts were written at that time.

{We know that Ben Yijū was in India between 1132 (see III, 17) through at least the summer of 1139 (see III, 1, and III, 11) and then again between 1145 (see II, 28–29, III, 22) and 1149 (see III, 16 [July–August, 1148, in India] and III, 29 [September, 1149, from Aden]). His visit to Yemen probably began ca. 1140 and was an extended one, and during this time he wrote a poem in praise of Maḍmūn b. Ḥasan, when the Nagid was expecting his third 'son' (II, 40) and another when that son was a young child (II, 37).}

While the honorific name Abu 'l-Ḥasan was very common among Jews at that time, Abū 'Abd Allāh is seldom found, if at all.<sup>1</sup> The name

<sup>1</sup> Cf. TS 16.179 and 13 J 17, f. 2. {TS 16.179 has been published by Gil, *Ishmael*, 4:36 ff., no. 617, and 13 J 17, f. 2, ib., 3:357 ff., no. 400. In both, Abū 'Abd Allāh is identified by Gil as Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sā'igh, the last Muslim ruler of Sicily, concerning whom see ib., 1:553–56. Other Abū 'Abd Allāhs mentioned in Geniza letters are cited ib., 4:826. TS 16.179 was published also by Ben Sasson, *Sicily*, 36 ff., no. 8, and on 46, he identifies that Abū 'Abd Allāh as *ghulam sāhib al-sūq*, 'the boy of the market superintendent,' mentioned in CAJS 389v, line 40 (ib., 73, no. 12; Gil, ib., 4:470, no. 751), but there 'Abd Allāh is referred to, not Abū 'Abd Allāh; and while Abū of the honorific is often omitted, there is no reason to assume that was the case here. Over forty different Abū 'Abd Allāhs are mentioned in *EP*<sup>2</sup>, and all seem to be Muslims. 'Abd Allāh is the Arabic equivalent of the biblical name Obadiah. In Arabic documents a Jew named

Abu 'l-Katā'ib, moreover, was borne by at least one Muslim savant of the thirteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it is most probable that these merchants were Muslims.

These accounts are very instructive concerning various aspects of the Indian trade.

#### Translation of sec. A

(1) [The] *nākhudā* Abū 'Abd Allāh.

(2) His credit: eight *bahārs* of pepper in one bale.<sup>3</sup> (3) Price: 56 *mithqāls*.<sup>4</sup> And his credit: 22 (4) *mithqāls* on account of specific goods {alt. tr.: retail goods}.<sup>5</sup> (5) And his credit: the price of two *bahārs* of iron [[and of two *bahārs*]] (6) [and] two hundred [and si]x 'eggs,'<sup>6</sup> 16 *mithqāls*. (7) Total: 94 *mithqāls*.

(8) [His credit: eleven] and a half *mithqāls* for specific goods {alt. tr.: retail goods}, in a second (9) account. The combined total: 105½ (10) *mithqāls*.

Obadiah is called 'Abd Allāh, e.g., TS Ar. 38.93v, line 4 (Khan, *Arabic Documents*, 460; cf. ib., 465). For 'Abd Allāh and its equivalence to Obadiah, cf. Mann, *Texts*, 2:1576; and for a Jewish 'Abd Allāh see, e.g., Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 6:1. Because of his ancestor Obadiah, Maimonides was sometimes referred to, especially in Arabic sources, as Ibn 'Abd Allāh (see Freimann, "Genealogy," 13; on 15, he unconvincingly suggests that Abu 'l-Ma'āni Joseph b. 'Abd Allāh was Maimonides' sister's son) or, with the diminutive, Ibn 'Ubayd Allāh (see Vajda, "Ibn Maymūn," 876a). It is curious that though Jews freely used the name 'Abd Allāh, they seem to have shunned Abū 'Abd Allāh. Abū 'Abd Allāh is usually coupled with the name Muḥammad (Muḥammad's father was 'Abd Allāh), and Prof. Joel Kraemer (in a private communication) suggests that for that reason Jews avoided this honorific. Perhaps the Muslims prohibited Jews and Christians from using this byname. Cf. 287, n. 20, for such a prohibition, usually observed in the breach, concerning the byname Abu 'l-Ḥasan.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Al-Kutubī, *Fawāt al-Wafayāt*, 2:28.

<sup>3</sup> The *nākhudā* had brought from India to Aden eight *bahārs*—i.e., 2,400 pounds (*raṭls*)—of pepper in one bale, Arabic *'idl*, literally '(camel's) load.' This quantity exceeds, of course, by far the weight, which can be carried by a camel. {See 190, n. 23.}

<sup>4</sup> Here a *bahār* of pepper costs at arrival at Aden seven *mithqāls*. From a comparison of sec. B, line 9 with lines 19–20, it is evident that the rate of exchange of the local Maliki dinar against the *mithqāl* was, at that time, 1:2.5. Thus, the price of a *bahār* of pepper at arrival was 17½ Maliki dinars. In 1133, as II, 20, lines 9, 10 and 20 show, a *bahār* of pepper cost at arrival in Aden 14 *d.* and was sold, while outgoing for Egypt, for 37 *d.*

<sup>5</sup> Arabic *tafāriq*. While the standard goods, such as pepper, iron or cardamom, appeared in the main account, other merchandise, which was handled in smaller quantities, was specified in separate accounts. Cf. II, 20, line 43; II, 23, line 50; II, 24, line 23; verso, line 20.

<sup>6</sup> See the note to II, 16v, line 20. For the identification of this commodity, it is important that it is reckoned together with iron under one and the same heading here and in sec. B, line 29. Here, the 'eggs' are *numbered*: 200 and x (perhaps 6); below, sec. B, line 29, their weight is given as one *bahār*. {For 'eggs,' see 369–70.}

(11) His debit: 186 *mithqāls*. Balance (12) of his debit: 80½ *mithqāls*.<sup>7</sup>  
 (13) Balance of his debit: 80½ *mithqāls*.<sup>8</sup>

Sec. B

[A (I). List of commodities delivered to the *nākhudā* for transport to India]

The nature and quantities of the items indicate that they were destined not for selling but for Ben Yijū's extended household and for presents. The list of prices, lines 12–21, was intended either for purposes of identification or because the shipowner had taken upon himself to refund their value in case they were lost. From this document it is evident that Ben Yijū was in Aden for only a short visit. The prices are given in line 10 and lines 13 ff. in *filī* (Indian) *mithqāls*, which is natural, as the commodities were transported to India. It seems that the Indian *mithqāl* was approximately of the same value as the Egyptian, for here its exchange rate for the Adenese Maliki dinar is 1:2.5, while the Egyptian mostly was 1:2.35 (II, 16v, line 16; II, 20, line 32) or 1:2.3 (IV, 1, line 23) and sometimes 1:3.5 (II, 23, lines 35–36; II, 25 and II, 26 margin).<sup>9</sup>

Translation

(1) I delivered to (2) the *nākhudā* Abū 'Abd Allāh Ibn <Abu> 'l-Katā'ib:  
 (3) three water skins of melted butter<sup>10</sup> and (4) two other water skins; two

<sup>7</sup> The account is correct. Most probably, Ben Yijū had handed over in India to the *nākhudā* the amount of 186 *mithqāls*, but the latter had found merchandise worth buying for only 105½ *mithqāls*. Ben Yijū and the *nākhudā* certainly traveled on different ships because they set out from different ports.

<sup>8</sup> {The balance is repeated as a final total.

<sup>9</sup> For the exchange rate of the Adenese Maliki dinar, see 172, n. 27.}

<sup>10</sup> Arabic *samm*. Melted butter (ghee) is one of the most common foodstuffs of Yemen and obviously was cherished by the Jewish craftsmen engaged in Ben Yijū's workshop in India; see III, 18, sec. B, line 9, where one Joseph receives a certain quantity. But ghee is also extremely popular in India and was even exported from there already in Roman times; see Watt, *Commercial Products*, 478. The reason for shipping it to India here could hardly be religious, as the most observant Yemenite Jews—as far as I know—eat, without scruples, *sammāh*, or clarified butter, prepared by Muslims. The import of ghee to India possibly was a matter of taste. Perhaps on the Malabar Coast ghee was made from buffalo milk, while the Jews (as certainly the Muslims and Christians) who came from

*dasts*<sup>11</sup> of large-sized paper;<sup>12</sup> (5) four cushions,<sup>13</sup> two of Zanzibar type<sup>14</sup> (6) and two of new *miḥbas*;<sup>15</sup> ten (7) beryl stones;<sup>16</sup> two *farāsīlas* of garlic;<sup>17</sup> (8) also a 'fulled' *fūta*,<sup>18</sup> worth (9) 3½ dinars //and a quarter//<sup>19</sup> from Aden; a Manārī *fūta*<sup>20</sup> (10) worth a *filī mithqāl*; a silk band<sup>21</sup> (11) with (?) [lit., 'in which are'] forty silver beads, five little bells.<sup>22</sup>

the West were accustomed to ghee from cows. 'If carefully enclosed in skins, while still hot, [ghee] may be preserved for many years without requiring the aid of salt or other preservatives,' Watt, *ibid.*, 479. There was, therefore, no difficulty in sending quantities of it from Yemen to India.

<sup>11</sup> A *dast* was a certain quantity that made up a set of a particular item; cf. 304, n. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Arabic *qirtās* (for *qirtās*). See 620, n. 35. In line 13, the more common *kāghadh* is used for the same item. About the enormous need for paper in India, where none was produced at that time, see II, 14, line 20.

<sup>13</sup> Arabic *makhādīd*. This form is Maghrebi colloquial; Schiaparelli, *Vocabulista*, quoted by Dozy, *Supplément*, 1:353a.

<sup>14</sup> As Zanzibar is famous for its leathers and not for textiles, most probably cushions covered with leather are meant here.

<sup>15</sup> According to our documents, *miḥbas* textiles were going both from West to East and vice versa. [See 207, n. 12.] New: in those times, when textiles were of a high quality and handed down from one generation to the next, it was emphasized when a material was new. In the Geniza, many lists of trousseaus have been preserved, in which similar statements occur, which shows that the brides often got used clothes. [See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:184–85, 188.]

<sup>16</sup> Of the three meanings of the word *bizādī*, given by Dozy, *Supplément*, 1:81a, according to a twelfth century vocabulary of Spanish-Jewish origin, obviously the second is intended here. As there, *bizādī* is here defined by *hajar*, 'stone.' *Bizādī* has the meaning beryl also in Persian; cf. Steingass-Johnson, *Dictionary*, 182. [Here for 'stones,' the plural is written *hijār*; in line 16, the usual *ahjār* appears. For *hajar*, 'jewel,' see 381, n. 16.]

<sup>17</sup> Garlic is used by the Jews of High Yemen sparsely and only for cooking, while those of southern Yemen consume it frequently in its natural state. The considerable quantity mentioned here seems to indicate that it was intended not only for Ben Yijū's household, but for the people working in his factory as well.

<sup>18</sup> See I, 1, line 12 [and pages 175–80]. Below, line 19, it is described as a fulled goat wool *fūta*. Clothing of exactly the same description was sent to Ben Yijū, while in India, from Aden by Maḍmūn (cf. II, 23, lines 49–50) as well as by Joseph b. Abraham (III, 3, line 15; where the word 'fulled' is not used).

<sup>19</sup> Here, the price of the *fūta* is given in (Maliki) dinars: 3¾ to which below, line 20, corresponds to 1½ *mithqāls*, i.e. a ratio of 2.5:1.

<sup>20</sup> Two Manārī *fūtas*, obviously a Spanish fabric (see II, 16v, line 9), were sent to Ben Yijū by Maḍmūn (see *ib.*). This kind of clothing must have been popular among the Maghrebis living in India at that time. The price of those sent by Maḍmūn was three Maliki dinars per piece. The price here, according to the exchange rate calculated from line 20, would be two and a half dinars.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibrizim* = *ibrīsim*, silk, here a silk band with silver beads and bells. [Cf. Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:60, 103; Gil, "Silk," 31–32 ('*ibrīsam*').]

<sup>22</sup> Arabic *jalājil*, perhaps for a robe of Ben Yijū's little daughter. Such bells (obviously of silver) constituted part of a trousseau of a bride from al-Maḥalla in Lower Egypt according to TS 12.125v, line 7. {By a strange coincidence, Ben Yijū's daughter Sitt al-Dār eventually settled in al-Maḥalla (see III, 56). The trousseau list is approximately from the same period she was living there (see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:427, n. 486). On *jalājil*, see also Shy, "Terms," 246.}

[A (II). Prices of the commodities listed above]<sup>23</sup>

(12) Price of the five water skins with melted butter, three *fiṭi* (13) *mithqāls*. Price of the two *dasts* of paper,<sup>24</sup> one *mithqāl*. (14) Price of the four cushions, one half of a *mithqāl*. (15) Price of two *farāsilas* of garlic,  $\frac{1}{4}$  *mithqāl*. (16) Price of ten stones, one quarter of a *mithqāl*. (17) Price of the silver beads and the bells, (18) three quarters. Price of the Manārī *fūṭa*, (19) one *mithqāl*. Price of the woolen, 'fulled' *fūṭa*, (20) one and a half *mithqāl*. Total: nine *mithqāls* (21) less one quarter.<sup>25</sup>

[B. Payment due the *nākhudā* for the transport of the goods listed in sec. A from India to Aden]

(22) [[Pepper

(23) His credit: [[7 (?)]] *mithqāls* for freight after the *bārbazā*<sup>26</sup> (24) [[and he received]] and also his credit]<sup>27</sup>

(25) His credit: freight for eight *bahārs* of pepper, less (26) one *bahār* duties paid for his father<sup>28</sup> (27) and one *bahār bārbazā*; balance in his credit, six (28) *mithqāls*.<sup>29</sup>

His credit: freight for two *bahārs* of iron (29) and one *bahār* of 'eggs,' three *mithqāls*, including the customs.

(30) Total: nine *mithqāls*. His debit: freight (31) for one *bahār* of iron belonging to his father.

<sup>23</sup> In two cases, lines 8–10, the writer had already stated the prices and repeats them in lines 18–20. This is only a rough copy and precision is not to be expected.

<sup>24</sup> Arabic *kāghadh*. {On its manufacture and use, see Huart & Grohmann, "Kāghadh." This word is familiar from a variety of sources but appears only sporadically in the letters of this book. Another example is in III, 48, line 32. The same is called *qirtās* in line 4; this shows that the terms were interchangeable. See also Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:348–49, 19 (there spelled *kāghidh*).}

<sup>25</sup> The total of the prices enumerated in lines 12–20 is  $8\frac{1}{4}$  and not  $8\frac{3}{4}$  *mithqāls*. The reading of all the numbers is certain. {The end of line 13 is torn; perhaps read there *waniṣf*, 'and a half.'}

<sup>26</sup> 'After the *bārbazā*' obviously means that for the iron sent in *bārbazā* packing (cf. III, 11, line 38) freight had been paid in advance in India. {Ben Yijū often spells *tā marbūṭa* with *alif*—see 332, n. 16—accordingly, probably read here and in line 27: *bārbaza*.}

<sup>27</sup> Lines 22–24 are crossed out.

<sup>28</sup> The pepper belonged to Ben Yijū (see sec. A, line 2), but a sum equivalent to the freight of one *bahār* had been paid by Ben Yijū to 'Abd Allah Ibn al-Katā'ib's father. The word *rasm* (duties) seems to have been added later and in different ink.

<sup>29</sup> This shows that for one *bahār*, costing seven *mithqāls*, a freight of one *mithqāl* was paid for the transport from India to Aden.

III, 22 *Statements by Two Yemenite Merchants about Consignments Shipped by Ben Yijū and Mostly Lost*

India, probably 1145

TS 18 J 2, f. 14

Thick, light-grayish paper. On recto, beneath line 22, about 10.5 cm of the height were left blank and obviously had been intended for another statement, which was, however, written on the verso, in the middle of the page.

The two merchants themselves wrote the statements, and both betray typical Yemenite hands. The first is of the cursive type, like III, 7 and III, 32, while the second, with its unusually big and strong letters, resembles III, 33 and III, 38.

Maḍmūn b. Sālim, the writer of the first statement, was in the spring of 1153 {read: 1156} a member of the rabbinical court of Aden (II, 71v, margin, line 12). However, as his very erratic spelling, his afterthoughts (lines 1, 2, 10), and his clumsy and awkward sentences show, he was not experienced in drawing up written statements.<sup>1</sup> Even less trained is the hand of his companion, Abraham b. Fayyūmī, a merchant mentioned in several documents as staying in India (see II, 20, line 29; II, 24v, line 1–2).

Fortunately, we have another source for the events so imperfectly described in these statements, namely a passage in the letter III, 12, lines 10–26. From the two documents, the following details emerge:

Ben Yijū, whose family name is spelled Yishū by Maḍmūn and Ishū by Ibn Fayyūmī, sent from India consignments of pepper and ginger on a ship called *ghazāla* ('Gazelle'). Its owner bore the name Bashīr (lines 2, 6, 9 {see II, 24v, lines 4–5}), while its captain was Makkī b. Abu 'l-Hawl (line 19).

A smaller ship, described as a *shaffāra*,<sup>2</sup> escorted the 'Gazelle.' When an attack occurred, the sailors would jettison part of the cargo in order to increase the speed and maneuverability of the galley. Such an instance is reported in II, 31, lines 9–10, with reference to an attack of Indian pirates in the Fam al-Khawr, the entrance to the gulf of Broach and

<sup>1</sup> {Maḍmūn b. Sālim was a merchant, who traveled back and forth between Aden and India, and is mentioned in several documents in connection with Ben Yijū. See III, 12, line 36, III, 22, lines 1, 3, 22, III, 32v, line 1.}

<sup>2</sup> See 341, n. 26.