

III, 28 *Account by Abraham Ben Yijū of Indian Products Sold for Another Merchant*

Aden {ca. 1141–44}

ENA NS 48, f. 2<sup>1</sup>

This draft, in Ben Yijū's hand, is written on the back of a letter addressed to him (II, 27).<sup>2</sup> The neat copy was certainly sent to the merchant for whom the transaction was made (see line 8), while the draft went with Ben Yijū's other papers to Cairo and finally to the Geniza.

Evidently Ben Yijū had brought pepper, iron, and 'eggs' to Aden on one of his visits to that port from India—perhaps in the early 1140's (see page 648)—and sold them for a merchant out in India. The currency is the Adenese Malikī dinar (line 3), and Indian products are sold; accordingly, we must be here in Aden. Another quantity of pepper (restored; see line 10) was sent by the same merchant from a port (other than the one from which Ben Yijū embarked), namely Kūlam (Quilon, line 11); we may certainly assume that Ben Yijū was requested to deal with that consignment as well.

Here, the same three commodities, which according to III, 21, sec. A arrived in Aden, are sold; but since the quantities are entirely different, another consignment must be intended. There is nothing unusual in finding two different merchants sending the same kind of wares in the same boat with the same trusted individual.

The prices obtained here by Ben Yijū were mediocre. For two sales of pepper, he secured 25 and 28½ Malikī dinars respectively (lines 1 and 11). In a good year, as much as 37 dinars were fetched in Aden for a *bahār*; see II, 20, line 20 and IV, 1, lines 5 and 7 {38 dinars: IV, 15–II, 42, line 27}. For 'refurbished' iron, he received 17–18 dinars, while in II, 14v, lines 5–7, the same variety was sold for 20 dinars {21 dinars: II, 16, line 18}. Of the 'eggs,' Ben Yijū himself writes that they obtained a poor price. For three *bahārs* and 126 pounds (a small *bahār* had 250 pounds), he realized only 99 dinars, about 28.3 dinars per *bahār*. In III, 21, sec. A, line 6, a *bahār* cost, on arrival, 16 *mithqāls*, a *mithqāl* then worth 2½ dinars. Thus, a *bahār* of 'eggs' was worth 40 dinars and was sold here at a considerable loss. This is obviously the meaning of the Arabic word

<sup>1</sup> {The manuscript was formerly listed 'JTS Geniza Misc. 2,' which number alone appears in Goitein's writings.

<sup>2</sup> In Goitein, "Portrait," 461, n. 61, this account was mistakenly described as written on verso of one of the manuscripts of II, 13–15.}

*kāsid*, 'selling badly,' used here in line 6. See also the note to line 8.

As far as we can see, there is a slight error in the arithmetic, a rare phenomenon in the accounts of the India merchants: Ben Yijū sold:

pepper	for	600 <i>d.</i>
iron		220
'eggs'		99
		919 <i>d.</i>

Ben Yijū, however, states that the total was 927. As the numbers are written in words, there can be no mistake in the reading. I suppose Ben Yijū omitted a number, perhaps while stating the total for the iron, which, in any case, cannot be 220 according to the details given by him (rather less).

{The 24 small *bahārs* of pepper, sold at 25 dinars each, are probably the same 24 *bahārs* mentioned in III, 28a; see there. Accordingly, III, 28 was probably written one year after III, 28a. See there for the date.}

## Translation

(1) [...] I sold the pepper for 25 dinars, (2) which makes, for 24 *bahārs* of small measure, 600 (3) Malikī<sup>4</sup> dinars; the 'refurbished' iron, 12½ *bahārs* (4) and 30 pounds; of these, two *bahārs* for 18 (5) and the rest for 17 dinars.<sup>5</sup> Proceeds: 220 (6) dinars.<sup>6</sup> The 'eggs' were selling badly. I sold (7) a quantity {lit., 'weight'} of three *bahārs* and 126 pounds, after the weighing<sup>7</sup> (8) and the defect,<sup>8</sup> for the price of 99 dinars.

<sup>3</sup> The document opens with two illegible letters, most probably *br*, an abbreviation of *bi-shmākh raḥmānā*, 'In Your name, O Merciful.'

<sup>4</sup> The spelling of the final *a* in *malakiya* with *alif* instead of *he* occurs again in *abhira*, line 7, and is common with Ben Yijū and other Maghrebi writers. {Ben Yijū often spells *tā marbūta* with *alif*; see 332, n. 16.}

<sup>5</sup> These merchants mention the higher price first (18, 17 and not, as we would say: 17, 18).

<sup>6</sup> {According to my calculation the iron should have sold for 216.54 dinars!}

<sup>7</sup> The first letter in the original is not sure, and it is difficult to see how weighing could influence the price. {See next note.}

<sup>8</sup> Arabic *al-qilla*; see Dozy, *Supplément*, 2:387a. It seems that the very low price was due, in addition to the general slump in the market, to some defect, known, of course, to the sender. {Perhaps translate 'decrease.' In any event, Ben Yijū seems to be referring here to the weight rather than the price (see preceding note): I sold what weighed three *bahārs* and 126 pounds—after the weighing and decrease. Sometimes at sale the weight was decreased. Such seems to be registered in II, 49v, line 7; see II, 23, line 40 and 344, n. 46.

His total credit: (9) 927 dinars.

(10) He owes for the rest of the freight<sup>9</sup> of the pepper 30 *fil*[*īs*. Due him for pepper]<sup>10</sup> (11) from Kūlam priced at 28½ [...]

<sup>9</sup> The freight had been paid at dispatch, but not in full.

<sup>10</sup> I restored 'pepper', since approximately the same price as that mentioned for this commodity in line 1 is obtained here. {For *fil*, see III, 18, sec. A, line 11 and 637, n. 7.}

{III, 28a *Account of a Merchant in India Written by Abraham Ben Yijū*

Yemen, ca. 1140–43

TS 8 J 7, f. 23

For a description of the paper, see above III, 2.

The document contains a final draft or a copy of an import-export account of a merchant in India, written by his business associate in Aden (or elsewhere in Yemen), the text of which was undoubtedly incorporated in a letter. The writer can be identified as Ben Yijū both by his handwriting (at its best) and by the very fact that the account is written on the blank space of the verso of III, 2, a memorandum sent from Aden to Ben Yijū in India. Prof. Goitein inadvertently failed to copy the two texts on TS 8 J 7, f. 23v (four lines continuing III, 2 and III, 28a), and subsequently he did not include the present document in the India Book.

The nature of the text is exceptionally clear from the commodities mentioned in it. Here Ben Yijū serves as the agent in Aden (or elsewhere in Yemen) of a Jewish merchant who was residing in India. Ben Yijū obviously took with him the paper, on which he later wrote this account, when he traveled back from India to Aden; compare III, 25.

The text is intact, and with the exception of a few words can be deciphered with certainty in its entirety. The first and main item in the account is a large shipment of pepper, 60 *bahārs* of small measure. Of these Ben Yijū sold 36 *bahārs* at 24 dinars each and stored 24 *bahārs*, per instructions of his associate, so that they could later be shipped elsewhere (the destination is not indicated, and here the text is discontinued). It stands to reason that this is the same pepper, 24 *bahārs* of small measure, sold by Ben Yijū at 25 Malikī (Adenese) dinars each, for an associate in India according to III, 28. Accordingly, we can assume that III, 28a precedes III, 28, probably by one year. During this period, Ben Yijū was instructed by his business associate to sell the remaining 24 *bahārs* in Aden, and they brought a slightly higher price than the first quantity of 36 bales.

Like Ben Yijū, his correspondent engaged in India in both the import-export business and the manufacture of bronze vessels. While it is possible that he continued the work in Ben Yijū's bronze factory in the latter's absence, a separate factory could be intended as well. The account contains new data, not found in other India Book texts, such as the export of Qal'ī 'lead' from India to Aden and the name of an otherwise unknown *nākhudā*, and also corroborates and complements data attested in other manuscripts.