

III, 3 *Short Letter from Joseph b. Abraham to Abraham Ben Yijū*

Aden, ca. 1135–38

TS 10 J 9, f. 24 {+ TS 10 J 32, f. 6}

The upper piece of the letter has been detached. The paper is brown, darkened by stains. On the verso, the sender had written only the address; the address in Arabic letters is preserved. The missing piece must have contained the address in Hebrew characters, for Joseph b. Abraham used to write the address either in Hebrew alone, as in III, 1 and 9, or in the two scripts, as in V, 11 and VI, 36; and an address always appeared on the top of the reverse side of a letter, so that it could be read when the letter was folded, for in those times no envelopes were used. [The missing portion is found in TS 10 J 32, f. 6, the verso of which is III, 35. While a few letters are missing in the margin, the match is perfect, and the tops of the letters/in III, 3, line 1 are preserved at the bottom of TS 10 J 32, f. 6. The content of verso is exactly as Goitein surmised.]

On the free space on the verso, Ben Yijū wrote drafts for responsa to two legal questions. On the margin of the recto, he wrote two lines concerning a third legal problem. See III, 34 {and 35; cf. Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:195}.

The letter obviously was sent to India a year after III, 2 and a year before III, 4 (see the introduction to III, 1, and here the note to line 7), approximately between 1135 and 1138. Despite its shortness, it contains a number of new interesting details.

## Translation

## [A. Receipt of addressee's letter and small shipments]

{TS 10 J 32, f. 6

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

(2) The letter of your excellency, the most illustrious elder, my lord, has arrived. It was the most pleasant letter that came and the most delightful (3) [message] that arrived. I read it with joy, examined it with delight, with gladness. I understood it, and was happy} [TS 10 J 9, f. 24] (1) [to learn that] you were well and your affairs in order, for which I thanked God very much and asked Him, in His mercy, to give you more (2) of every good thing, God willing.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the letter's opening lines compare II, 14, line 3; II, 17, line 4; IV, 13.

There arrived, my master, what you have kindly sent, (3) namely, a basket<sup>2</sup> with pepper and ginger;<sup>3</sup> another basket with *Manjal*-turmeric,<sup>4</sup> in which there was also a little ginger, and 3 *qaṣ'a*-bowls.<sup>5</sup> (4) May God reward you well and satisfy your needs, and may you never cease to bestow kindness (on me)!<sup>6</sup>

However, the water skin with lemon and mango<sup>7</sup> (5) arrived spoiled and stinking, and we threw them away.

There arrived also the cardamom. I took (6) one fourth from Sheikh Maḍmūn, and he took three fourths.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Arabic *zanbil*. See note to 562, n. 57. As is explained in line 14, small quantities of Oriental spices, packed in baskets—rather than leather-bales—were free of charge for the freight and the customs duties in Aden. They were obviously regarded as personal goods of the carrier. Cf. III, 10, line 20.

<sup>3</sup> This strange habit—attested here twice—of mixing two commodities in one receptacle is found elsewhere; cf. III, 15, lines 35–36, V, 1, line 20. [There and in III, 41, line 28, such a 'mixture' is called *khulṭa*. See the discussion and additional sources in Goitein, *Letters*, 67, n. 5.]

<sup>4</sup> The word *manjal* is Indian; see Watt, *Commercial Products*, 445. This plant, *Curcuma longa* L., is cultivated in {two} different varieties. The rootstocks of one, which is fairly soft, is used as a condiment, being one of the indispensable ingredients in curries; the other is harder and employed mainly for dyeing purposes (Watt). In our documents, both varieties are mentioned. Here, certainly the condiment is intended, while with *hurud*, V, 1, margin, lines 5–6; VII, 36, line 17, the dye is meant. Up to the present day, Yemenite village women dye their faces yellow with this *hurud*, while all Yemenites use it to color and season soup. {Cf. Pimenta, *Dictionary*, 507.}

<sup>5</sup> Large bowls, from which the whole family used to eat; see 326, n. 33.

<sup>6</sup> {Arabic *wa-lā zāla mutafaḍḍil*. Since the third person is used, the syntax is ambiguous and one might take the subject to be God ('may He never cease to bestow kindness [on you]'), rather than the recipient of the letter. The ambiguity is lacking in some of the parallels of this phrase (IV, 15–II, 42, line 20; II, 48v, line 32; III, 7, line 15; III, 9, line 8; IV, 34v, line 6; V, 8, lines 11–12; VI, 28, line 13; VI, 36, line 15), from which it is evident that the recipient was intended. Nevertheless, one was believed to grant kindness because he was the recipient of divine grace. Cf. 426, n. 67.}

<sup>7</sup> The mango fruit of the *Mangifera Indica* L. (cf. Watt, *Commercial Products*, 764–66) was described in detail by the Moroccan geographer Idrisi (1100–66) (Maqbul Ahmad, *India*, 20). According to him—and the same is true today (cf. Watt, loc. cit.)—the mango was pickled in vinegar; in the Indian diet, it took the place of olives in Mediterranean countries. From Idrisi it seems that the mango was not eaten in the West. In our documents, this (together with III, 2, line 15, which contains the order executed here) is the only instance of mango exported to the West; and it was not successful. However, the way in which the order is given in III, 2, shows that such orders must have been a matter of routine; and the Italian Varthéma describes in 1510 the mango under its Arabic [rather, Marathi] name *ambā* ({Arabic} *'ambā*); see Watt, loc. cit., and also Spies {*Ibn Faḍlallah*, 32, n. 14; Maqbul Ahmad, "Hind," 408b}.

<sup>8</sup> The merchandise may have been sent to Maḍmūn b. Ḥasan, because he had ordered the greater part of the shipment (cf. IV, 12, line 55 {which concerns a partnership with another merchant for goods ordered}), rather than in his capacity as representative of the merchants.

## [B. Urgency of immediate dispatch of copper vessels ordered]

You mentioned, my lord, (7) that you would have the copper<sup>9</sup> vessels that had been ordered made from the scrap.<sup>10</sup> By God, do not postpone it<sup>11</sup> (8) this year, for the matter is urgent. Do not delay any of the copper vessels, //that is// the shipments {alt. tr.: items}, which (9) I had mentioned to your excellency, for all this is very urgent. Please, my master, have a {add: another} look (10) at my previous letter<sup>12</sup> from last year, and do not defer any of the shipments {alt. tr.: items} //of the copper vessels//. (11) By God, oblige (me by) this deed {alt. tr.: grant me this favor.}.<sup>13</sup>

## [C. Request to keep son's consignments separate]

The copper ordered for [[the sake of apprenticeship<sup>14</sup> of]] //my son// (12) should be in a separate account. Please do not mix his account with mine.

## [D. Note on balance of previous account]

(13) For the balance of my {lit., 'your servant's'} account, please buy some betel nuts or, if that is not to be had,<sup>15</sup> (14) pepper in one or two baskets, in order to save freight and customs duties in Aden.

<sup>9</sup> {Arabic *ṣif* (also lines 9, 10, 12). For the meaning of this term, see page 555, n. 11.}

<sup>10</sup> Arabic *kuṣāra*. The reference is certainly to the broken or old vessels enumerated in III, 2. Though such vessels are mentioned in several letters, III, 2, was devoted solely to an order of new copper vessels and to the sending of old ones in considerable quantities. In addition, only there are found the details about an order of mango (see above lines 4–5), and the writer's wish to keep his son's account apart (here, line 11 and III, 2, line 18).

<sup>11</sup> Arabic *lā tukhallifhu*. The same usage appears in III, 11, lines 43–44. {Cf. III, 4*v*, line 19, III, 8, lines 14–15; cf. Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 135, 'leave' (intransitive; here apparently transitive).}

<sup>12</sup> No. III, 2, is intended; see line 6.

<sup>13</sup> Arabic *yūqallidunī fī dhālika 'l-ṣanī'a*. A similar phrase occurs in I, 14, line 57 [and III, 49, line 20].

<sup>14</sup> Arabic *al-ta'allum*. The father wants his son to become a merchant by his own right. {Perhaps read *al-mu'allam*, i.e., *muṭa'allim*, apprentice. Cf. the note to III, 1, line 20; and Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:192, 561, n. 9. On apprenticeship, see Goitein, *ib.*, VI, 11; cf. Frenkel, "Adolescence," 276–77.}

<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note that such staple goods as cardamom or betel nuts were assumed likely to be not available at a reasonable price in a port on the Malabar Coast of southern India. Pepper, on the other hand, never seems to have been lacking. {Cf. III, 2, line 15.}

## [E. Dispatch of two consignments of eleven presents]

I sent to you, (15) my lord, for your esteemed household<sup>16</sup> what has no value or importance, namely (16) an Alexandrian *maqta'*,<sup>17</sup> a goat-wool *fūta'*<sup>18</sup>—your name is written on them—15 large sheets of Ṭalhī-paper,<sup>19</sup> (17) a brazilwood box<sup>20</sup> with sugar, a brazilwood box with raisins and a brazilwood box with soap—large boxes, (18) on which is //written//: 'Yijū, shipped by Joseph.'

I also sent you five pounds of costus, a half a pound (19) of kohl,<sup>21</sup> an ounce of ladanum,<sup>22</sup> a half a pound of vitriol<sup>23</sup> and half a pound of *samgh* gum.<sup>24</sup> These commodities are in a *mazza*.<sup>25</sup> (20) All this is forwarded to you through the *nākhudā* Mahrūz.<sup>26</sup> May God ordain his safe arrival!

May my lord receive for his esteemed (21) self the best greetings! *And may my lord be blessed with peace!*<sup>27</sup>

<sup>16</sup> I.e., as a present; the same phrase {*bi-rasm manzilīhi al-sharīf*} in III, 2, margin, lines 1–2.

<sup>17</sup> {For this piece of cloth or robe, see II, 16*v*, line 8, and 325, n. 26. Joseph sends a *maqta'* to Ben Yijū also in III, 4, line 9; III, 9, line 23.}

<sup>18</sup> In III, 21*b*, line 19, the same present goes from Aden to India. In I, 1, line 10, it is sent from Cairo to Aden as merchandise to be sold.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. III, 9, line 24, where 12 sheets, not designated as large, were included in the list of Joseph's presents.

<sup>20</sup> Arabic *baqqamiya*. Cf. 327, n. 34.

<sup>21</sup> See III, 1*v*, line 11.

<sup>22</sup> Arabic *lādan* {here spelled *lādān*}, a word used already by the Assyrians and appearing in the Mishna under the form *lōtem*. Herodotus III, sec. 112, quotes it as an Arabic word. The ladanum is a resin excreted by various bushes found in Asia Minor, Cyprus, Crete and the isles of the Aegean Sea, especially *Cistus ladaniferus* L. and *Cistus creticus* L. It was highly appreciated owing to its pleasant aroma and its use for the treatment of ailments of the stomach and the eyes. Daumas, *Sahara*, says that rich people used to give ladanum as a present; See Dozy, *Supplément*, 2:524a; Maimonides-Meyerhof, no. 208, 104; Loew, *Flora*, 1:362–63 {Lev, *Medicinal Substances*, 173–74.}

<sup>23</sup> See III, 1*v*, line 11.

<sup>24</sup> See *ib.*, line 12.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ib.*, line 11.

<sup>26</sup> Mahrūz b. Jacob. {See Introduction IIB1.}

<sup>27</sup> This Hebrew phrase, *we-shālōm yehi ladōnī*, appears also in the contemporary Yemenite letter IV, 15–II, 42, margin, line 8.}

## [F. Address]

[Verso, in Arabic letters]

(1) (To) His excellency, the most illustrious elder, my lord Ibrāhīm (2) b. Yijū, the Israelite.

(1) (From) His servant Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm.

{TS 10 J 32. 6v, in Hebrew characters:

(1) (To) His excellency, the most illustrious elder, my lord (2) Abraham b. Peraḥyā—*may he rest in Eden!*

(1) (From) His servant, who tha[nks him for his kindness], (2) Jose[ph b. Abraham].}

III, 4–6 *Letter from Joseph b. Abraham to Abraham Ben Yijū re Undependable Merchant*

Aden, ca. 1136–39

III, 4. TS 10 J 12, f. 5

III, 5. TS NS J 181

III, 6. TS AS 146, f. 12

{Three contiguous pieces of a long letter, which, on recto, begins with III, 6, continues with III, 5 and concludes with III, 4. Goitein prepared an edition of III, 4 during the early stages of his work on the India Book. Years later he added the other two small pieces and made provisional copies of their texts, without translation or notes. Since he identified them as dealing with the same topics and written at the same time as III, 4, when he rearranged the documents according to the New List, they became III, 5–6. In preparing this chapter for publication, I realized that the three items belong to the same document.

The letter was written on (at least) two sheets of paper, pasted together beneath III, 6, line 9. The very bottoms of the letters, ך and ך, written in this line, appear at the top of III, 5. Nos. III, 5 and 4 comprise the lower sheet, which was torn unevenly in two, between lines 4–6 of III, 5. The match is perfect, and between nos. III, 5 and 4 the entire text of the lower sheet is intact. On recto it contains 25 lines. No. III, 6's upper edge is torn unevenly; and, in general, this piece has suffered more damage. It consists of part of eight or nine lines (of its first line, only the very bottom of a few letters are intact). Were we to assume that the upper sheet had the same dimensions and number of lines as the lower one, we would conclude that the complete letter had on recto ca. 50 lines. Of these some thirty lines are intact, and parts of three or four more remain at the top of III, 6. Verso contains between the three pieces 31 lines, 26 on III, 4–5 and 5 on III, 6. After the last line on III, 6, there are about 5 cm with no traces of writing, and this was evidently to be the end of the letter. Due to the poor state of preservation of the writing on III, 6v, much of the postscript, added after the concluding greetings at the middle of line 1, has been lost or eludes decipherment. The tops of the long letters ך on III, 6v, line 1, appear at the bottom of III, 5v.}

Same paper, width and script as in III, 1. Beginning and end, including the address, lost. The writer's name is mentioned in III, 4, line 19 {that of addressee *ibid.*, line 18; the two names in III, 6, line 6.}. At first sight, the handwriting looks different from that in other letters written by Joseph b. Abraham. This impression is caused by the different pens used. The other letters were written with a broad pen, which emphasized the contrast between thick and thin strokes and enabled the writer to give to his letters serifs; see the introduction to III, 1. Here, a pen of medium width was used, which caused the horizontal and vertical strokes to be of the same thickness. However, an analysis of the form of the individual letters, as well as of the general character of the writing shows that we have here