

[F. Additional greetings from one Fayrūz, the writer's children and Ḥasan 'to all']

[Margin] (1) Similarly, your excellency's servant Fayrūz<sup>11</sup> extends greetings to your excellency. (2) And all the children and Ḥasan extend greetings to all the excellencies. May your (3) excellency's servant receive an unequivocal reply concerning what you would like me to do! *And Peace.*}

<sup>11</sup> A Persian name. This man probably was a slave who served as Yeshū'a's factotum and business agent. {Fayrūz or Firūz ('Turquoise') was a common name for slaves. See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:138, 433, n. 50, 435, n. 83; Schimmel, *Names*, 71.}

III, 32 *Letter from Joseph ha-Kohen b. Meshullām to Abraham Ben Yijū, in Inland Yemen*

Aden, 1150–51

Bodl. Ms. Heb. d. 66 (Cat. 2878), fol. 61

The letter was written in Aden, as the details about the arrival of the ships and the activities of Maḍmūn b. Ḥasan, the representative of the merchants in that city, prove (cf. lines 18–22). It is addressed to inland Yemen, for the writer speaks about Ben Yijū's 'coming down' to Aden. Likewise, III, 38 was sent to Ben Yijū while he sojourned in inland Yemen. From III, 31, we learn that Ben Yijū, while staying in Aden—or having returned to it, considered leaving that town for the highland of Yemen. It is highly probable that Ben Yijū was the head of a small congregation of Tunisian merchants in the High Yemen (cf. the introduction to III, 31). Our letter, however, presupposes that he intended to return from there to Aden as soon as circumstances permitted.

This letter was written in 1150 or 1151, for Ben Yijū was still in Aden in September 1149 (see III, 29), while Maḍmūn died late in 1151 {see the introduction to III, 38}.

The *Dā'ī*, 'Missionary,' the official title given by the Fatimid caliphs of Egypt to the ruler of Yemen recognized by them, certainly refers here to Muḥammad b. Saba' (ruled 1139–53 or 1155), the most successful Sultan of the Zuray'id dynasty.<sup>1</sup> In 1150, he killed his last major rival, 'Alī b. Abu 'l-Ghārāt (cf. II, 51, line 13),<sup>2</sup> and in the same year (see Löfgren, *ib.*), he acquired by purchase twenty-eight castles as well as some towns, including Dhū Jibla, then the capital of Yemen. Clearly, our letter refers to these events, which contributed to the pacification of the country. The letter is interesting because of the reference to the high-handed ways of Maḍmūn and other details.

{See the introduction to II, 51, on the conflict between Muḥammad's father, Saba' b. Abū Su'ūd, and 'Alī. Another fragmentary Geniza letter, V, 9, probably refers to a battle between Muḥammad and 'Alī or other rivals and sheds light on the loyalties of the Jewish merchants of Aden. We have

<sup>1</sup> About him, see Strothmann, "Karam," and Löfgren, *Aden*, 2:217. {According to the chronicler 'Umāra al-Yamanī, in his *Ta'rikh al-Yaman*, Muḥammad b. Saba' died in 548 A.H. (March 29, 1153–March 17, 1154). Al-Janādī dates his death to 548, 549 or 540. See Kay, *Yaman*, 278, n. 70. Ibn al-Mujāwir, *Al-Mustabṣir*, 123, supports the 548 date.

<sup>2</sup> Both 'Umāra al-Yamanī (Kay, *Yaman*, 73) and Ibn al-Mujāwir (*Al-Mustabṣir*, 123) give 545 A.H. (April 30, 1150–April 19, 1151) as the year of 'Alī's death.

already had occasion to speak of the partnerships in the shipping business between Maḍmūn and Bilāl b. Jarīr, whom Saba' had appointed governor and military commander. In his letter to Abū Zikrī Kohēn, Joseph b. Abraham thanked God for Bilāl's victory and described Maḍmūn's active role in the war effort:

Maḍmūn [participated] in outfitting [...] *jāshujjyyas* and whatever they required. Sheikh Bilāl and the Sultan advanced to the vicinity of the mountains to conquer villages there from their enemies. God, the Exalted, gave them victory, and they conquered many villages and huge fortresses, in which there were many riches. And they derived from them each (or: the whole) year much food and income. Now, this gave us [...] great joy. *Let them praise the Lord.*<sup>3</sup>

In his Summaries of the documents, Goitein notes that the writer of III, 32, Joseph ha-Kohen b. Meshullām, was probably a cousin of Yeshū'ā Kohēn of III, 31.}

#### Contents

- A. Preamble, including two biblical verses<sup>4</sup> opening the letter (lines 1–10).
- B–D. See translation, below.
- E. Address (verso).

#### Translation of B–D

##### [B. Report about the pacification of the country by the Dā'ī]

(10–11) Your servant [lit., 'the property of his hands']<sup>5</sup> took notice of your inquiry, my lord, (12) about the news of the roads and the reconciliation between the Dā'ī (13) and his adversaries. I am able to inform you, (14) my lord, that even one or two persons (15) can travel on any

<sup>3</sup> Ps. 107:8. No. V, 9, margin and top. The *jāshujjyya* was a military vessel; see the note to II, 23, line 12. In the continuation here Joseph described how Maḍmūn took advantage of the military operation to try to apprehend al-Fawfalī, who had absconded to Zabīd without paying debts (see III, 9v, lines 1–2).}

<sup>4</sup> Mic. 5:8, used also by Maḍmūn in II, 13, line 1 and by another writer, possibly from Alexandria, II, 6, line 36 [also II, 55, line 2]; Job 22:25, used also by another writer from Aden, see III, 15, line 3. {See also III, 10a, line 1; IV, 11, line 5; V, 8, line 1.

<sup>5</sup> Arabic *milk yadihi*. The same appears on verso, in the address. See III, 15v, address, and 626, n. 31.

road<sup>6</sup> and that the whole country (16) is *peaceful*. Likewise, the Dā'ī has been reconciled (17) with all his enemies and has received from them (18) hostages.<sup>7</sup>

##### [C. Details about happenings in Aden]

All the ships have arrived (19) safely.<sup>8</sup> Sheikh Maḍmūn—*may God remember him favorably* [alt. tr.: *may he be remembered for a blessing*]<sup>9</sup>—has seized (20) the entire two shops,<sup>10</sup> and nothing remains in the possession of Ibrahīm (21) except the doorway and the room for the manufacture of wine. This was done out of compassion (22) by him (Maḍmūn) for the people.<sup>11</sup>

Now I pray to the *God of Israel* to protect you (23) from all misfortunes and calamities.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>6</sup> In light of the warning in the margin to travel only with trustworthy people, this would appear to be an exaggeration.

<sup>7</sup> I am not aware of information supplied by the chroniclers on his taking hostages, which of course were taken to guarantee the continued peace. See above, n. 3, on V, 9, concerning apprehending al-Fawfalī.

<sup>8</sup> This remark about the safe arrival of 'all the ships' seems to indicate that traffic on the Indian Ocean must have been rather regular, i.e., that it was known in Aden, and even in inland Yemen, which ships were expected to arrive each year.

<sup>9</sup> The blessing for Maḍmūn is either a matter of routine or meant sarcastically. {Z'ī is used as a blessing following the name of the living; see II, 13, line 2, and 312, n. 4.}

<sup>10</sup> Arabic *al-saqīfatayn*. The word is damaged, partly by emendation and partly by water {and essentially illegible}. 'The two shops' obviously refer to that belonging to the man mentioned in the same line and to the writer; cf. line 26. For *saqīfa*, cf. Dozy, *Supplément*, 1:663a, 'portique, galerie couverte.' [Cf. Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 225: 'small portico of house or shop . . . ; kitchen.']} Obviously 'shop' is intended here. On both sides of the entrance door to a Yemenite house, there may be shops. Under circumstances not specified, but obviously known to the recipient, the two merchants were 'robbed' (line 26) of these places, while one of them retained the entrance to the house and the room for the preparation of wine (line 21). Such a room (mostly for the preparation of brandy) is found in every better Jewish house in Yemen at the back of the entrance hall; see Rathjens, *Architecture*, 24. The partition even of one floor between different properties was common in Yemen; see the documents published by Goitein in Rathjens, *Architecture*, 71–74. [Cf. Goitein, *Yemenites*, 141–59.

<sup>11</sup> This could either be praise of Maḍmūn for not having taken possession of the door and the winery or a sarcastic remark about his high-handed behavior, concerning which see III, 11, lines 27 ff.}

<sup>12</sup> Here, the writer intended to conclude his letter with good wishes for a safe journey, but added an afterthought concerning his own shop. {'To protect you', *yakfīhi*, literally, 'to protect him,' could be a sarcastic blessing for Maḍmūn.

Please (24) do not ask me, my lord, what I experienced from Mūsā b. (25) Mevōrākh<sup>13</sup> and his malicious joy at my misfortune<sup>14</sup> over the loss (26) of my shop. Yes, my shop was taken away from me by force {alt. tr.: I was robbed only of my shop}.<sup>15</sup>

[D. Advice to the addressee about his journey from the High Yemen to the Coast]

[Margin] (1) Receive for your honored self the best (2) greetings, and do not defer your travel<sup>16</sup>—may God assist you!—(3) indeed,<sup>17</sup> to our place. And please, do not travel (4) except in the company of people on whom you can rely.<sup>18</sup> (5) *May peace for you overtake* (6) *peace!*<sup>19</sup> (7) This letter<sup>20</sup> was written in a hurry.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Both this man's name and that of his father are common in their Hebrew and Arabic forms, and it is interesting that the two were mixed here.

<sup>14</sup> On gloating over a rival's misfortunes in the Geniza papers, see the note to II, 20*v*, line 6 (335, n. 42).

<sup>15</sup> Arabic *wa-mā suriqtu illā min saqifati*, another sarcastic statement.

<sup>16</sup> Lit., coming down.

<sup>17</sup> {Arabic *wa-a-mā*. Goitein, who had not deciphered the preceding phrase, translated: 'or.'}

<sup>18</sup> Arabic *tkn* [*alayhim*], from *wkn*. In the High Yemen, the relevant form would be pronounced *tūkan* or *tkan*; cf. Goitein, *Jemenica*, XXI, para. 17a. {Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 53, has only *wikin bi*-.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. III, 31, lines 27–28 and 701, n. 10 and III, 37*v*, line 15.

<sup>20</sup> Arabic *rq'* (vocalization is uncertain). See notes to II, 34, side f, line 2 and III, 30, line 12 (385, n. 46; 695, n. 7).

<sup>21</sup> A frequent form of apology for the poor handwriting, etc.}

III, 33 *Letter from Yeshū'ā ha-Kohen b. Jacob to Abraham Ben Yijū re House Rented for Him*

Dhū Jibla, Yemen, 1150–51

TS 10 J 14, f. 2

For the background of this letter and its relationships to III, 31 and 38, see the introduction to III, 31.

Contents

- A. Preamble, consisting mostly of rhymed Hebrew prose (lines 1–15).
- B–C. See translation, below.
- D. Address (verso).

Translation of B–C

[B. Communication that everything was all right with Ben Yijū's house in the sender's town]

(15) I,<sup>1</sup> the servant of (16) your excellency, inform you—may God make your prosperity permanent!—(17) that when you departed from me {alt tr.: I departed from you},<sup>2</sup> I went to the house; (18) and the hand mill<sup>3</sup> and the durra crusher<sup>4</sup> were in the house. I locked<sup>5</sup> (19) the house and departed and entrusted<sup>6</sup> Sheikh Ḥusayn with the care (20) of the

<sup>1</sup> {This section begins with the words, *ghayra anna*, 'furthermore.' I have not seen this usage in dictionaries; cf. Blau, *Grammar*, 203, *ghayra dhālika anna*.

<sup>2</sup> Arabic *maḍā minhu*, lit., 'when he departed from him.' The third person is used for both writer and addressee.}

<sup>3</sup> Arabic *maḥan*. A sketch of a Yemenite hand mill can be seen in Rathjens, *Sūdara-bien-Reise*, 3:120. {For the *maḥan*, also see Margariti, "Aden," 161.}

<sup>4</sup> Arabic *marhā*, a common word in Southern Yemen denoting a smaller hand mill for the crushing of peeled durra. The peeled durra grains, after having been soaked in water overnight, are crushed in the *marhā*, until they become a liquid used for the preparation of *lhūh*, a flexible flat cake forming one of the main dishes of the population; cf. details in Goitein, *Jemenica*, 136, no. 1004 [cf. Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 190]. While the hand mill normally is built on a fixed platform, the *marhā* is mobile.

<sup>5</sup> Arabic *rbt*, normally meaning to tie, to bind. As the door is fastened with a leather string, one says in Yemen, *urbuṭ al-bāb*, 'tie up the door.' Perhaps, the writer intended to say *al-bāb* and wrote erroneously *al-bayt*. {On locks in Yemen, see page 313, n. 7.}

<sup>6</sup> Arabic *zakkan* (a *shadda* is written on the top of the word). This is Yemenite speech. *Ant muzakkan bifulān*, 'you are responsible for so and so (e.g., that he should not escape)',