

the most beloved {alt. tr.: devoted} servant of their father {lit., 'his excellency'}, (28) to inform you of this, for you are one of the most beloved {alt. tr.: devoted} (29) servants of his excellency.⁷

[C. Greetings and request for information on travel plans.]

To your excellency and to all those embraced (30) by your care, the best greetings. Kindly send me—may God make permanent [Margin] your honored position!—your esteemed letter notifying me whether you will come to Dhū Jibla or travel on the sea...⁸

[D. Address]⁹

⁷ 'I wrote,' etc. {Arabic *kātaba ḥaḍratahumā al-sāmiya liyattaṣila bi-kutubihimā al-sharifa aḥbabu (!) mamlūk ḥaḍratibi muṭāla'atahā...*} The subject of *kātaba* is *mamlūk*, while the subject of *liyattaṣila* is *aḥbabu*, defined in line 28 by *muṭāla'atahā*. The writer's syntax is somewhat shaky. He obviously wants to say that he had informed Maḍmūn's sons of Ben Yijū's whereabouts, so that they could write to him directly. {Cf. IV, 15-II, 42, margin, line 3 where the words *aḥabba* (spelled: 'ḥbb) 'abduhu muṭāla'atuhu bi-dhālika mean 'your servant wanted to inform you of this.'}

⁸ The rest of the letter contains a medley of wishes, among them the wish of compensation for a loss, which obviously refers solely to Ben Yijū's bereavement of Maḍmūn and not to any material losses. After greetings to Ben Yijū's children, the writer concludes: 'may He strengthen their arms *wayumaḥḥil lahu qurabahu* and make strong his relatives'—a phrase not found by me so far elsewhere. {Perhaps *ikblāf 'alā* refers here not to 'compensation for a loss' but to 'satisfy,' 'multiply' good; cf. Dozy, *Supplément*, 1:396. As for 'make strong his relatives,' cf. III, 37, margin, line 2, *wa-tushiddu wasatāka*, 'and strengthen your surroundings.' Similarly, perhaps vocalize here *qurbahu*, 'his environs.'}

⁹ The writer's predilection for Hebrew rhymed prose induces him to begin the address of this letter, which is exclusively devoted to the announcement of Maḍmūn's death, with the words: 'May this letter reach in speed and joy...' {Writers often adhered to the conventions of correspondence even when not congruent with the contents of the letter. In II, 61, Maḍmūn's sons begin their (Judeo-Arabic) letter to Sulaymān b. Abū Zikrī Kohen with a florid description of their joy in receiving his letter, in which they learned of the death of his father. Also note the incompatibility between the style and contents of II, 64.}

III, 39 *Letter from Abraham Ben Yijū on the Way to Egypt: Distrust between Associates and Disruption of Family Life*

'Aydḥāb, probably 1152

TS 8 J 21, f. 10

Letter from 'Aydḥāb (spelled 'Adḥāb, 'tribulations'),¹ in which Ben Yijū describes the yearning of his little daughter for the family in Aden with which she had stayed (see III, 41 and III, 50). He would return to Aden, if he were successful in selling his goods in 'Aydḥāb.²

{After leaving India in 1149, Ben Yijū returned to Yemen, where he stayed about three years. He arranged a marriage for his daughter Sitt al-Dār with a distinguished family in Aden. But then his beloved son died, and he resolved on a reunion with his own kin, then residing in Sicily. He wrote them to join him in Egypt and promised to give Sitt al-Dār in marriage to one of his nephews and leave them all his wealth (III, 41).}

After departing Aden, Ben Yijū writes from the Sudanese port of 'Aydḥāb that his daughter cries day and night over her separation from the addressee's family. Obviously she had fallen in love with her intended groom, the son of Khalaf b. Bundār (see line 17; III, 41, line 21 and III, 50, line 6), in whose home she had lived for three years.

Using a conciliatory tone in addressing his correspondent (evidently a member of Khalaf's family) in Aden, Ben Yijū emphasizes that he is not fleeing because of a debt. The money he owes is not worth talking about, and, if he succeeds in returning to Aden, he will pay it in person. The letter is discontinued in the middle of the sentence, and this paper was obviously never sent to Aden but stayed in Ben Yijū's possession.

His hasty departure with Sitt al-Dār evidently led his time-tested associates to conclude that Ben Yijū could no longer be trusted for even a small debt. As we know from other documents, his decision to break the engagement and return to Egypt was deliberate and absolute. This letter suggests that he may have intended to conceal his true intentions. Perhaps

¹ {In lines 6 and 9. The same spelling occurs in III, 40a, line 5; VI, 1, line 13; VI, 31v, line 3. In VI, 1, line 13 the writer makes the pun explicit: *wasatru ilā 'Aydḥāb bil-ḥaḡiq innahā balad al-'adhāb*, "I arrived in 'Aydḥāb, which truly is the city of 'adhāb (tribulations)." Accordingly, the spelling without *y* in the other texts is not an error but an allusion to the same pun. This, in fact, as called to my attention by Prof. Joel Kraemer, was found in contemporary Arabic sources as well. So in the twelfth century al-Wahrānī, *Manāmāt*, 19: 'Aydḥāb bi-kull naqma wa-'adhāb, "Aydḥāb, in all affliction and 'adhāb (tribulations)."

² Goitein identified this text, prepared a draft transcription and wrote this brief description; otherwise, no edition was prepared.

he decided not to send the letter because of doubts as to how it would be received as worded. Mistrust often became mutual. Here Ben Yijū mentions goods, which he had left in the Adenese warehouse, from which the debt could be collected. In II, 45a, an Adenese associate denies accusations that he had stolen a package left by another trader in the warehouse. As the international trade was based on the mutual trust of partners, these accusations were extraordinary and unsettling.

Translation

[A. Introduction]

(1) *In Your name, O Merciful.* (2) *For the Lord will be your trust; He will keep your feet from being caught. You will decree and it will be fulfilled, etc.*³

(3) My letter to my lord and master, the most illustrious sheikh—may God give you long life and make permanent your well-being!—(4) written in a state of well-being and good health, with strong longing for you. May God soon reunite me with you (5) in the best of circumstances, through His favor and grace, for He is omnipotent⁴ and trustworthy!

[B. Arrival in 'Aydhāb and daughter's loneliness]

(6) You will be pleased to know,⁵ my lord, that I arrived in complete safety at 'Aydhāb ("Adhāb"). (7) *Let them praise the Lord for His steadfast love, etc.*⁶

My lord, the little one, my daughter, cries day and night⁷ over (8) your (pl.) separation from her.⁸ May God facilitate //her// reunion with you—

³ Prov. 3:26; Job 22:28. Biblical verses at the top of a letter allude to the writer's situation (or the addressee's). Here he prays that God protect him from danger and help him realize his plans.

⁴ Arabic *qadīr*. The wish to be reunited with the addressee is ubiquitous in our letters. But while several other examples of this particular wording are found in the Geniza, it is not common in the letters in this book. Besides another letter by Ben Yijū, III, 41, line 5, and his brother Joseph's letter, III, 49, line 24, I have only seen one other example, in a letter from Halfon ha-Levi b. Nethanel to his brother, IV, 4, line 10.

⁵ Arabic *alladhī tuḥibbu 'ilmahu*. This phrase is repeated in the letters of Ibn Yijū. See 478, n. 25.

⁶ Ps. 107:8. The prayer of thanksgiving of the seafarers, often found in Geniza letters.

⁷ As usually expressed in Arabic, the original has *layl wa-nahār*, lit., 'night and day.' This probably fit the circumstances, as the crying increased at night; the same expression, 'crying night and day,' appears, e.g., in III, 48v, line 1.

⁸ Arabic *fīratkum minhā*.

God willing—in the best of circumstances! (9) I am making a great effort to accomplish this. Were I able to make a sale in 'Aydhāb ("Adhāb"), I would sell and return. (10) But only what God decrees will come about.⁹

[C. Accusations of fleeing a debt]

I have heard that you had mentioned that I owe you the balance (11) of an account and that the smaller packages¹⁰ left in the warehouse do not cover the sum. Your account, (12) my lord, is this: I owe you five dirhems, no more no less! You already made an accounting with me for it. (13) If there is good iron in the warehouse, which will cover the sum, after you kindly (14) give instructions to someone to sell the smaller packages left in the warehouse, fine. If your servant still owes something, I am not (15) running away.¹¹ What I still owe is not worth talking about.¹² I shall either arrive, (16) God willing, in Aden and pay you, or I shall send something of that value, or you can collect from (17) the *nākhudā* Ma'ālī¹³ or from my lord and master Sheikh Khalaf¹⁴ . . . }

⁹ The wish expressed by the verse cited at the end of line 2 notwithstanding, the writer knows that God sets market conditions, not man.

¹⁰ Arabic *dabash*. See 228, n. 9.

¹¹ Arabic *hārib*. On fleeing when unable to pay debts see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:382, 607, n. 44.

¹² Contrary to Margariti, "Aden," 325, Ben Yijū does not say that the *dabash* was completely worthless.

¹³ Not known from other documents.

¹⁴ Probably Khalaf b. Isaac.