

[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

the same hand as in II, 43; III, 1, 3, 9; IV, 15–II, 42; V, 11 and VI, 36. The writer tried another style, adapting himself to the different pen. At the end of the letter, approximately the last third of the verso, he relapsed into his usual style.

The letter preceded III, 1 approximately by one year; see the introduction there. The main section of the letter which has been preserved, which deals with the measures to be taken against the young Abu 'l-Faraj b. Moses/Mūsā al-Baghdādī, is of special interest. Baghdādī worked for Joseph on the basis of a commenda, according to which Joseph, as the investor, received two thirds of the profits, and Baghdādī one third (see margin, line 1). The young man, who had obviously misused Joseph's confidence, tried to abscond from India to Ceylon and from there to another country. The power of attorney, which Joseph issued against him, may have been executed before a Muslim court, since in reference to the warrant of proxy, he calls {Baghdādī's father} by the Arabic form of his name, Mūsā. However, Joseph was extremely careful not to expose the young man, unless it was established with absolute certainty that he "deviated from the right way." He was even prepared to assist Baghdādī with money to enable him to return to Aden. This shows that the reputation, even of a young man, was guarded with greatest care. On the other hand, Joseph seems not to have given up hope of retrieving his investment, perhaps by putting the young Baghdādī to work.

Translation

[A. Shipment of silk and arsenic and order of other commodities]

{[III, 6] (1) and... (2) and not... (3) my lord. Making a bold demand¹ on [your kindness, I have sent you a package] (4) through the agency of Sheikh Abū 'Ali b. Ṭayyib [and... (?) the Egyptians.² In it are (5) goods, namely six *manns* of good [...] silk in a waterproof satchel.³

¹ {Arabic *dālla*. For this expression, which usually appears in the second half of the letter, see 447, n. 49.

² The restoration of the word after the break, ending with *ryyn*, is speculative. Abū 'Ali b. Ṭayyib *al-Miṣrī* ('the Egyptian'; 'of Fustat') alone is referred to in III, 4, line 13; cf. III, 6*v*, line 3. Presumably the name of another Egyptian merchant (hence the plural *al-Miṣriyyīn*) traveling to India appeared here, perhaps Ḍāfir, mentioned in the margin, line 2.

³ Arabic *kharīṭa mushamma'a*. I have not found this expression elsewhere in the documents included in this collection.

(6) On top of the satchel is a canvas on which is written 'Abraham Yijū, sent by Joseph b. Abraham.' (7) Moreover, I had here a bag of yellow arsenic. I heard that arsenic in your place (8) is in demand, and in particular the people of Ceylon search for it a great deal. I have sent [it], my lord, (9) to you, its weight exactly⁴ 160 pounds. And it is fine arsenic.⁵ Please make an effort, [III, 5, line 1] my lord, to sell it all, as you are graciously accustomed to do, for whatever price God apportions (2) as livelihood.⁶

With the proceeds purchase for me, your servant, a small quantity of iron, if available, and cardamom, and if (3) you can, a little borax,⁷ or whatever you consider proper. For one who is present sees [III, 4] (0)⁸ what is not seen by [III, 5] (4) one who is absent.⁹ Send it to me on the first ship traveling to Aden. And you, my lord,} [III, 4] (1) are free of liability.¹⁰ And if [III, 5] (5) you, my lord, have an opportunity to come, bring it with you, God willing.} ¹¹

[B. Shipment of copper and bronze vessels and order of new ones]

[III, 4] (2) Furthermore, I sent a *mazza*,¹² in which there are 14½ pounds of copper,¹³ [III, 5] (6) including a ewer} [III, 4] (3) that is broken, a

⁴ Arabic *bi-ṣarfibi*. Cf. III, 42, line 28.

⁵ On the arsenic (mentioned below in III, 4, line 18), Goitein comments: Arsenic, used for medical and criminal (poisoning) purposes is imported to India from the West through modern times; see Watt, *Commercial Products*, 92–93. For its medicinal uses, see Lev, *Medicinal Substances*, 48. For the use of arsenic in medical purposes in the Geniza documents see now Isaacs, *Medical Manuscripts*, 125. In III, 12, line 41; III, 13, line 6 and III, 15, line 50, it is said that no arsenic was to be had in Aden at that time.

⁶ For this formula, see the discussion in pages 63–65.

⁷ Arabic *tinkār*. In V, 1, margin, lines 7–8 spelled *dinkār*. This sodium borate is "invaluable in welding and is employed by blacksmiths, brassfounders and electroplaters" (Watt, *Commercial Products*, 173; cf. Maimonides-Meyerhof, no. 383. [For the use of *tinkār* in the making of jewelry in Yemen, see Qāfiḥ, "Lāz," 971.

⁸ The first line in III, 4 contains only a few letters and was not copied by Goitein (he restored them in III, 5, line 4, from the context). I have designated it line '0,' so as not to alter his numbering of the rest of III, 4, because of the frequent cross-references in the book.

⁹ Arabic *al-ḥāḍir yarā mā lā yarā al-ghā'ib*. This aphorism was used when one requested that a partner found in another locality purchase something, the point being that he can assess the market conditions, while the writer cannot. See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:157, 168, 440, n. 11. It also appears in II, 58, line 14; IV, 29*v*, margin (so it seems, the text is fragmentary); VII, 41, lines 27–28, 32. As Prof. Joel Kraemer informs me, in Arabic sources *al-ḥāḍir* is usually replaced by *al-shāhid*.

¹⁰ Cf. III, 10, lines 53–54.

¹¹ Joseph b. Abraham foresees Ben Yijū's traveling from India to Aden.

¹² About this receptacle see III, 1*v*, line 11.

¹³ {Arabic *ṣufī* (also line 12). For the meaning of this term, see page 555, n. 11.}

broken stool¹⁴ and other things. Please be kind enough to make for me from it (4) a basin and ewer, which should be small and simple,¹⁵ their weight being exactly¹⁶ six pounds (5) or five and a half, more or less, and a small stand for a small (6) candle; its weight should be exactly from two to two and a half pounds; it should be simple (7) and of good workmanship of the type you find attractive.¹⁷ The rest of the copper should be sold and added (8) to the account (in my favor).

[C. Five presents sent]

I sent to your illustrious excellency what has no importance and which is not (9) worth mentioning, namely a large brazilwood box¹⁸ containing white sugar, an Alexandrian *maqta*,¹⁹ a half a pound (10) *Iṣbahānī*²⁰ kohl, half a pound of *ʿilk* gum, four *dasts*²¹ of Egyptian paper of small (11) size.²² Please accept this in return for some of your services.²³ The paper, the kohl, and the *ʿilk* are in (12) the *mazza* with the copper. The *maqta* alone is in a piece of cloth. All this, together with the bag of silk and the bag (13) of arsenic, is sent in the ship of Fidyār²⁴ with the above-mentioned Sheikh Abū 'Alī b. Ṭayyib al-Miṣrī.²⁵

¹⁴ Arabic *kursī*. The copper tray, which serves as table, is placed on this. Cf. Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, 146–47, illustration no. 45 (in chap. 3). In modern times, as depicted by Lane, the *kursī* is made of wood and inlaid with mother-of-pearl, etc. Here it is made of tinned copper. {Four wooden rods and a board for a *kursī* are noted in III, 24, line 34. For a detailed discussion of the *kursī*, see Sadan, *Mobilier*, 123–33; cf. Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:130.} On the sending of broken vessels as material for new ones see III, 1.

¹⁵ Arabic *sādhij*, Persian *sāde*, i.e., without decorations like the spirals ordered in III, 1*v*, line 1. {The same term appears in line 6 and in one of the orders of payments of Abū Zikrī Kohēn in V, 47.

¹⁶ Arabic *khālīs*. The same term appears in line 6; see 558, n. 26.}

¹⁷ It is noteworthy that Joseph relies on Ben Yijū's good taste.

¹⁸ See II, 16*v*, line 29, and III, 3, line 17, where also a large *baqqamiya* is used as a receptacle for sugar.

¹⁹ See 571, n. 17 for this gift.

²⁰ {From *Iṣfahān*, Persia.}

²¹ A *dast* was a certain quantity that made a set of a particular item; cf. page 304, n. 9.

²² For these commodities, see III, 1*v*, lines 11–12.

²³ {I have not seen in other letters this comment concerning gifts sent.}

²⁴ See below verso, line 1. With the same ship and the same man (Abū 'Alī b. Ṭayyib) goods are sent by Khalaf b. Isaac in III, 10*v*, lines 2 and 5–6. {See also III, 6*v*, line 3 and page 147.}

²⁵ Cf. III, 1, line 11 {and III, 6, line 4}.

[D. Recommendation for an Egyptian merchant,
a newcomer to India]

(14) And, my lord, I would like you to help him (Abū 'Alī) in all he buys (15) and sells, for he is a stranger, unfamiliar with that country.²⁶ Whatever you do for him (16) will reach me. May I never miss your favors!

[E. Regret for being unable to send raisins]

By God, my lord, I attempted to get (17) some raisins to send to your excellency. However, none whatsoever (18) was to be had in Aden this year. Please forgive your servant for this.

[F. Details concerning the shipment of arsenic]

On the bag of arsenic there is written 'Abraham Yijū, (19) sent by Joseph b. Abraham.' It is wrapped in hides.

[G. Request to deal with the affairs of the young Baghdādī]

You, my lord, mentioned that the young man Abu 'l-Faraj b. Moses (20) al-Baghdādī was traveling to Ceylon. I received his letter, in which he complained that the *nākhudā* (21) Ibn Abu 'l-Katā'ib²⁷ demanded from him payment for the hire of a compartment,²⁸ even though he

²⁶ A similar request appears in V, 2, top, line 6.

²⁷ Abu 'l-Ḥasan b. Abu 'l-Katā'ib, a shipowner often mentioned in our papers. {See page 149.}

²⁸ Arabic *bilij*. Cf. I, 33, line 9 {where it is vocalized in the manuscript *balij*, with *a*, and appears to mean 'bungalow'}; IV, 30, line 4; V, 8, line 12. See Dozy, *Supplément*, 1:108b. The word is derived from the Malayan and designates a place in a ship separated from others by mats and serving for the storage of goods. The goods were normally covered with hides and each merchant slept on the cover of his own *bilij*. Sometimes, several travelers shared one such 'compartment'; cf. V, 8, line 12. {The *bilij* is discussed in Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:315, 481, n. 15, where (315) he notes that such cabins or compartments are known from the Indian Ocean but not from the Mediterranean. The comment that one would sleep on top of his consignment, found there, seems to refer only to the Mediterranean evidence, and it is not at all clear that in the Indian Ocean one would sleep on top of his *bilij*. A door and boards for a *bilij* are mentioned in III, 24, lines 30, 33; accordingly, these compartments might have been made of wood as well. See the discussion on cabins in Indian Ocean ships by Meyer, *Glass*, 115, where it is suggested that they might have been temporary structures erected at the beginning of each voyage. The aforementioned door and boards for a *bilij* adds weight to this suggestion. For sharing a *bilij*, besides V, 8, line 12, cf. VI, 38a, line 9; both of these documents refer to the same journey on a Red Sea vessel to Aden. Also

did not carry {alt tr.: did not agree to carry}²⁹ for him anything (22) in his ship.³⁰ He also mentioned that he might travel to Ceylon or stay on.

[Margin] {(1) [... Between us] [III, 6] is a commenda for 259 dinars. His share [III, 5] in it is one third of the profit,} [III, 4] while I, your servant, get two thirds.³¹ Now, my lord, if he has traveled to Ceylon, nothing can be done. However, if he returns to you or if he did not make the journey (2) {... perhaps he intends to travel to} [III, 6] a place other than to Aden. My lord, when [III, 5] I learned this} [III, 4] news, that he was traveling to Ceylon, I became distressed. Afterwards I took courage and saw that Sheikh Dāfir³² b. Farāj was traveling to your place {lit., 'to you'} [Verso] (1) this year in the ship of [[Nbrdwy {or read: Nbyrwy}]] Fidyār.³³ I sent with him {alt. tr.: wrote and sent with him}³⁴ a letter of proxy, (2) {which I confirmed by witnesses; and the document}³⁵ is (designated) 'a letter of proxy against Abu 'l-Faraj b. Mūsā (3) al-Baghdādī.' I did so as a matter of precaution.

Now, may I, your servant, ask you a favor—may God make permanent (4) your honored position! If this young man is (still) with you, or has come back from Ceylon and is going to (5) Aden, let no one know that I sent a letter of proxy against him or against anyone else. Moreover, please tell Sheikh (6) Dāfir that in this case he should not undertake anything in the matter despite my instructions to him. However, if

see Margariti, *Aden*, 241; Chakravarti, "Nakhudas," 49 (which seems to be based in part on VI, 38a, line 9). The editor of Buzurg, *'Ajā'ib al-Hind*, comments on 194, that he changed the diacritic marks from بليج (*blijj*) in the manuscript to read بلنج (*blnj*: *balanj*); see also Nadvi, "Navigation," 439. The Geniza texts written in Hebrew characters prove that بلنج (*bilij*) is correct. Also note the English bilge.

²⁹ Arabic *mā fa'al yahmil*. In my opinion, *fa'al* with the word of negation denotes here 'did not agree (to do something).' Similarly, II, 75v, line 10: *wa-in lam yaf'al yusallim*, 'if he does not agree to pay' (cf. II, 75, line 12: *fa-lam yaf'al*). Goitein apparently understood *fa'al* here as an auxiliary verb. For this possibility, see Blau, *Grammar*, 188, 329 (where also *lam yaf'al yadfa'ba*, could be translated in my opinion 'he did not agree to pay them').

³⁰ A warning not to pay a *nakhudā*, who might demand payment without cause, is found in III, 8, line 18.

³¹ The writer had given the young man capital {259 dinars} for doing business; in such a contract the investor took two thirds of the profit and the other partner one third, cf. VII, 10, line 6 {and Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:171 ff.}. Joseph correctly writes here the classical *thulthayn* for the unconnected form and not *thulthay* as did the learned scribes of II, 1, line 10; IV, 3, lines 13, 20, 22; VII, 10, line 6.

³² See III, 10, line 23.

³³ Most probably Nbrdwy {or: Nbyrwy} was the owner of another ship which sailed from Aden to India at that time. About Fidyār see above, line 13.

³⁴ {Arabic *katabtu ma'ahu*. For this phrase, see 375, n. 37.

³⁵ Arabic *wal-bayyina*. Goitein translated: 'confirmed by witnesses and proof.'

(7)—God forbid—he has deviated from the right path and has declared bankruptcy³⁶ or intends to travel (8) to a place other than Aden, please inform Sheikh Dāfir to produce the letter of proxy against him in order to demand from him (9) what he owes. Sheikh Dāfir is a very busy man and perhaps will not attend to this matter {alt. tr.: will temporize}³⁷ and not (10) 'break' him.³⁸ I can rely only on your excellency and your kindness for reprimanding him, and for dealing with {alt. tr.: to counsel him and investigate}³⁹ (11) this discreetly, not overtly. However, if he deviates from the right path, there is no choice (12) but to deal with it overtly. Please make an effort to act for your servant in this matter as is right.

Furthermore, my lord, (13) I wrote to this young man three letters, each sent on another ship and each accompanied by another copy {lit., 'by your letter'},⁴⁰ (14) and instructed those carrying them to hand them over only to your excellency; and (15) I told him in his letter what you will read {alt. tr.: are reading}.⁴¹ Please, open every letter addressed to him (16) and read it and give it to him, without his knowing (that you read it).

³⁶ Arabic *mufti*. This word seems to be merchants' jargon and a combination of *muftis*, 'bankrupt,' and *muftit*, 'escaping,' with the *t* pronounced as *l*, perhaps under the influence of Hebrew. Even the Jewish grammarian Ibn Janāḥ (*Hebrew Roots*, 573, line 33), writes the word with *l*; cf. Dozy, *Supplément*, 2:279a. Perhaps also compare *taballaṭa*, 's'enfuir,' Dozy, ib., 1:111b (according to an ancient source, al-Balādhuri); cf. Mez, *Renaissance*, 450, n. 8, *muballit*, 'pleite' (German 'Boersen-jargon'), according to *Tāj al-'Arūs*, s.v., *blt*. (*Tāj al-'Arūs*, 19:158, actually gives *ablata* in the sense of *aftasa*, becoming bankrupt.) {Cf. Piamonta, *Dictionary*, 379, *fālīt*, 'to be all gone, to be through.' Nurit Reich calls my attention to Ratzaby, "Leshōnōr," 111, who cites 'āsā *peleṭā* from the responsa literature with the meaning 'went bankrupt.' Also note that the Mishnaic Hebrew *pāshaṭ lo et ha-regel* is understood as: had insufficient funds, refused or delayed payment and absconded; see Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshuṭah*, 6:379.

³⁷ Arabic *yatawānā*.

³⁸ Arabic *yahudduhu*. Perhaps this too belongs to the merchants' jargon. Otherwise, the writer probably omitted one *d* and intended to write *yuhaddiduhu*, 'to threaten him.' {According to Piamonta, *Dictionary*, *hdd* (I) means 'threaten, menace, frighten.' Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:331, refers to the affair of Baghdādī, but inadvertently speaks of a letter of excommunication instead of a letter of proxy and on 599, n. 17, cites III, 1, which in fact refers to a threat of excommunication (against someone else); see III, 1, lines 13–17, and 557, n. 18.

³⁹ Arabic *mudhākaratihi wa-'fikādika*. Perhaps Goitein read *mudākhara*.

⁴⁰ This procedure of sending three copies of one letter in three different ships obviously was nothing exceptional. {For sending multiple copies of letters or accounts, see page 9 (n. 23) and below, III, 6v, line 2.} With each letter, Joseph sent here another copy {of the letter addressed to Ben Yijū} for Ben Yijū's own use; the latter needed it for reference, as he was asked to hand over money to the young Baghdādī, see lines 16–21.

⁴¹ {The intention seems to be that Baghdādī's letter contained information on the affair but not the exact specifics, such as the instructions to read his letters, mentioned in the continuation, since this was to be done in a clandestine fashion.}

I wrote to him in his letter (17) that I sent to you currency.⁴² If he wants {lit., 'needs'} from you about ten dinars (18) or ten *mithqāls* from my goods, you should give it to him, my lord, if he is proceeding to (19) Aden without delay.⁴³ However, if he deviates from the path, do not pay him anything, my lord. (20) Thus, please inquire {alt. tr.: do not pay him anything, my lord, after you, my lord, have inquired} into that matter; and if he, my lord, is proceeding to Aden and asks (21) for ten *mithqāls* and even more, pay them to him from my goods.

[H. Shipment of sugar and letters to be forwarded to Baghdādī; greetings]

My lord, (22) I sent him (Baghdādī) a large brazilwood box with sugar, on [III, 5v] {(1) which is his name, through the agency of Sheikh} [III, 4v] (23) Abū 'Alī, mentioned above. [III, 5v] {(2) If he is at your place, give him the letters and the brazilwood box} [III, 4v] (24) with sugar. [III, 5v] {(3). And if, God forbid, he is in Ceylon, kindly be so good as to send (4) to him these letters and sugar with someone whom you trust, in your kindness.⁴⁴ Accept, my esteemed lord, (5) for yourself, best, profuse greetings. Whatever⁴⁵ need or service you require, my lord, [III, 6v] (1) let me know to perform it. *And upon you be peace!*⁴⁶

[J. Postscript: three copies of letter sent as well as another letter]

On the first of *the month of Elul*,⁴⁷ [... there were] (2) forwarded to his illustrious excellency three letters with the same text, this as a precaution.⁴⁸

⁴² Arabic *sabīb*; cf. 560, n. 39. Adenese Malīkī dinars and Egyptian *mithqāls* are intended.

⁴³ {Arabic *tukhalluf*. Cf. 570, n. 11.

⁴⁴ Obviously a second box of sugar, other than that with white sugar sent as a personal gift to Ben Yijū (III, 4, line 8), is intended in these lines, this one as a gift to Baghdādī. Even though his reliability was questioned, Joseph b. Abraham sent him gifts, presumably to mellow the caustic remarks in his letters.

⁴⁵ For *ma'a mā* = 'whatever,' see 484, n. 29.

⁴⁶ Hebrew *we-shālōm lākh*. For this expression, see 563, n. 64.

⁴⁷ This letter was probably sent in a ship that sailed soon afterwards. Arabic-Hebrew *awwal ḥōdesh* means the first of the month but can also designate 'the beginning of the month.' See page 90, n. 2.

⁴⁸ A clarification concerning the ships and carriers of the three copies of letters is added here to III, 4v, lines 12 ff. The text here and in the following lines is effaced, and the decipherment somewhat uncertain. As above, III, 4, line 20, and commonly found in the Yemenite documents, *kitāb*, 'letter,' is feminine.

One is in (3) the ship of Fi[dyār wit]h Sheikh Abū 'Alī. The second is in the ship of [Nbrdwy/Nbyrwy (?)]⁴⁹ (4) with Muwaffaq al-'Ashā'irī.⁵⁰ The third is in the ship of Ibn Abu 'l-Katā'ib,⁵¹ with his son. (5) And with your letter is a letter to Sheikh Abu 'l-Surūr b. Khallūf al-Ṭalḥī.⁵² Please deliver/send⁵³ it to him.}

⁴⁹ Cf. III, 4v, line 1.

⁵⁰ Also mentioned in III, 11, lines 15 (see 609, n. 11), 52.

⁵¹ See above, III, 4r, line 21.

⁵² See on him III, 1v, line 18, and 562, n. 63.

⁵³ Read either *tūjidhā* or *tunfidhbā*.]