

III, 46 *Letter from Moses b. Joseph Yijū to His Brother Perahyā, in Fustat*

April 14, 1155

TS 13 J 20, f. 7

The letter certainly was written by Moses himself, as it was continued on the margin by another hand, that of a friend, adding greetings in person. When letters were copied by a scribe, he normally mentioned all the persons who convey greetings; cf., e.g., II, 55 [II, 67] or VII, 36. Moses' writing is not as elegant as that of his older brother, who was an accomplished scribe, but still is very regular and could be used in copying books. His Hebrew is also quite exceptional. {Moses also wrote the next letter, III, 47, which is in the same hand. His Arabic, especially in III, 47, is somewhat substandard. Both his handwriting and style are better in III, 47a, sent to the family's patron Abu 'l-Fakhr Ibn al-Amshāṭī.}

As to the date, it is given as Wednesday, the 24th day of counting the Omer, i.e., the seven-week period starting on the second day of Passover. During the years 1152–56 {the only period during which the letter could have been written}, only in 1155 did the 24th of the Omer fall on a Wednesday, and this coincided with April 14. The letter obviously was written in Tyre {or rather, after the writer had been there, line 26; see page 725}, which then was in the hands of the Crusaders.

Concerning the background of this letter, see the introduction to III, 48 and III, 49. As many persons are greeted in Fustat, it seems that Moses had been there and was captured on his return journey from Egypt to Sicily. {He wrote III, 47 in Alexandria.}

Contents

- A. Long preamble in {rhymed, florid} Hebrew, expressing the hope to attend Perahyā's wedding (lines 1–23).
- B. Reference to the writer's forthcoming trip to Egypt and other matters (lines 23–margin, line 1).
- C. Greetings to persons in Egypt (margin, lines 2–20).¹
- D. Greetings and congratulations written by one David b. Isaac (lines 21–28).

¹ No greetings are extended to Abraham Ben Yijū, certainly, because the writer knew that he was away. {Cf. page 726.}

The letter is addressed to the Square of the Perfumers, *murabba'at al-'aṭṭārīn* to the shop of Abu 'l-Fakhr Ibn al-Amshāṭī the friend of the Yijū family.

Translation of sec. B

(23) This is to inform you, my brother, that (24) I intend, God willing, to come.² I have taken out a (passport) {alt. tr.: certificate} other than that of Binyam,³ (25) for he too is going up to Fustat {alt. tr.: traveling to Egypt}.⁴

I received {alt. tr.: collected} seventeen dinars.⁵ I inform you (26) also that I wrote in Tyre many letters and sent them⁶ (27) with Abraham Ibn al-Qarīṣ⁷ and to you as well. Furthermore, I sent with Abraham (28) of al-Mahdiyya⁸ your letter and letters from me, and told him how I was rescued.

² Arabic *al-mujī'* = *al-majī'*. {For writing the word with *u* rather than *a* (the same appears in I, 34a, line 14), see Blau, *Grammar*, 18. For the use of the def. art. here, see 746, n. 6.}

³ Arabic *barā* [= *barā'a*], written here first *bry* {for this spelling, see Blau, *ibid.*, 43–44} and then *br't* in the construct state. Moses had intended, first, to use the passport of one Binyam. However, as the latter also wanted to go to Egypt, Moses had to get a new one. A passport was necessary, as the travelers had to pass from Christian to Muslim territory. As a matter of fact, a *barā* or *barā'a* was needed for a non-Muslim even while traveling between Muslim countries, as he had always to prove that he had paid his poll tax. See Goitein, "Source for Muslim Civilization," 86. {This was republished as Goitein, *Studies*, 289. In a later study, Goitein, "Unity of the Mediterranean World" (= Goitein, *Studies*, 297; cf. Goitein, *Med. Soc.* 2:384), presumably corrected this note, by remarking that a *barā'a* "is not a passport, but a certificate to the effect that (one) had paid his taxes." On Moses' difficulties in paying the poll tax, cf. III, 47, lines 14–16. The words *barā ghayr*, 'a certificate other than,' are translated 'well and in good cheer' by Ghosh, *Antique*, 327, who obviously read *bari' jayyid*. Binyām = Benjamin; see 267, n. 4.}

⁴ One goes up a river; therefore, traveling from the coast to Cairo is expressed in this way; cf. also III, 43, line 20. {Arabic *yaṭla' ilā miṣr*. As in III, 43, line 20, this could mean here: travel to Egypt. An example of *ṭala'a* for travel from Alexandria to Fustat is found in II, 58, line 7.}

⁵ We don't know the circumstances of Moses' collecting this money. Perhaps it was related to the power of attorney mentioned in III, 45, line 8.}

⁶ Home to Sicily.

⁷ {So vocalized by Goitein. Ibn al-Zubayr, *Asmā'*, 743, lists three names that correspond to the Hebrew consonants that appear here: al-Qurayḍ, al-Qurayḍ and al-Qarid.}

⁸ See III, 29v, line 1. {There he is identified as Abraham b. Joseph Ibn al-Baqqāl, with whom also Abraham Ben Yijū sent his letters. But 'Abraham of al-Mahdiyya' could refer to Abraham b. Elijah of al-Mahdiyya, to whom III, 30 is addressed. Also see 732, n. 36.} Moses wrote home to Sicily via Tyre, but most probably sent letters also through other ports. {The letters spoken of in line 26 had been sent from Tyre; here letters sent from a different location were apparently intended.}

Thank God (29) I am well and healthy—may I never miss God's favor (30) under your auspices {alt. tr.: thanks to your auspiciousness!}⁹ However, on the day I disembarked, I was so ill (31) that I did not expect¹⁰ to stay alive, and I wrote those letters¹¹ (32) only out of duress. *But He acted for the sake of His name, and on the fifth day [Margin] I recovered.*¹²

⁹ Arabic *bisa'adatika* = *bisa'adatika*, cf. Dozy, *Supplément*, 1:654. {Cf. 518, n. 30.

¹⁰ Arabic *mā ḥisābī*, an expression I have not seen elsewhere.}

¹¹ Most probably letters of despair asking for help.

¹² {Cf. Jer. 14:7, etc.; 2 Kings 20:5.}

III, 47 *Letter from Moses b. Joseph Yijū to His Brother Peraḥyā, Fustat*

Alexandria {probably June 29, 1155}

TS 10J 14, f. 16

In a letter from Alexandria, Moses informs Peraḥyā that lac (certainly given to him by his uncle Abraham) did not sell there. He would travel to Fustat accompanied by two Spanish friends who had just disembarked from a ship arriving from Denia. Greetings are sent to many acquaintances in Fustat, most of them probably refugees from North Africa.¹

{Note that according to III, 42, the goods that Abraham Ben Yijū brought with him from India to Egypt included lac. Moses Yijū seems to have written in haste, and as in III, 46, his Arabic is somewhat substandard (as is his Hebrew). Due to its interest for the study of Judeo-Arabic, I call attention here to one phenomenon. In line 15, he writes *אל מרבעה אל עטארין* (*ilā 'l-murabba'atll al-'attārīn*), 'to the Square of the Perfumers.' *Murabba'at al-'attārīn*, appears regularly in our papers (and is used by Moses in III, 46, there with *t* for *tā marbūṭa*). It is clearly in the construct. The added def. art. *al* before the first noun in the construct is a common feature in Judeo-Arabic.² *Al-murabba'atll al-'attārīn* accordingly = *murabba'at al-'attārīn*. Vestiges of the *tanwīn an* (here marked *ll*), irrespective of the case ending required in classical Arabic, are common in Judeo-Arabic and other Arabic dialects, as we know thanks to the researches of a number of scholars, especially Joshua Blau.³ The *tanwīn* has not been identified in the construct, however. It is difficult to assume that here it is merely the result of a slip of the pen, since the writer uses the same formation in lines 17–18, *בעד מדרה י אים* (*ba'da muddatll 'asharat ayyām*), lit., 'after a period of ten days.' It is not clear how this formation is to be explained, whether as a hypercorrection or whether the writer twice (!) inadvertently drew two lines (*ll*), rather than one (*l*), which he uses once in the text to mark *h* as *tā marbūṭa* (here he spells *mrbb'hll*, *mdbhll*). Blau has noted the *tanwīn an* in the construct in Arabic dialects of Uzbekistan, but he attributed this to the influence of Persian in its Tāgīk form.⁴ He also found the phrase *bekalilll ziti*, 'with a little oil,' in a Middle Arabic Egyptian text in Coptic characters, presumably from the thirteenth century but discounted the possibility that it

¹ {For this document, only this description is preserved among Goitein's papers.

² See Blau, *Grammar*, 40–41.

³ See Blau, *Emergence*, 167 ff.

⁴ See Blau, *ibid.*, 201.