

{III, 47a Letter from Moses Yijū to Abu 'l-Fakhr Ibn al-Amshāṭī, Fustat Alexandria, ca. June 29, 1155

TS 13 J 18, f. 13

Cited in Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 3:473, n. 7, 474, n. 13.¹

Moses Yijū ("Moses son of his honor, our master and lord Joseph the teacher—may he live until the coming of the messiah!") writes a brief letter, almost complete, which is addressed to the family's patron Abu 'l-Fakhr b. Abraham but opens with salutations to 'the two esteemed brothers,' namely the addressee and his brother, here named 'Alī. Towards the end of the document greetings are sent to Abū 'Alī, who is evidently the same individual. Abū 'Alī Ibn Al-Amshāṭī is known from sources discussed in pages 103–4, and with the assistance of this letter he can be identified as Abu 'l-Fakhr Saadya's brother Ḥananel. Greetings are also extended here to an anonymous brother, apparently the third brother, Ḥayyim. The letter thus not only testifies to the Yijū family's dependence on the Ibn al-Amshāṭīs but also provides additional information on members of that illustrious family.

The letter is almost certainly connected to III, 47. Moses decided not to rely entirely on his brother Perahyā to ask Abu 'l-Fakhr's advice on what to do with the lac that he wanted to sell in Alexandria, as implied in III, 47*v*, lines 1–3, and addressed that important merchant directly:

(14) I have attached² these few lines to you to inform you of my condition and what happened (15) to me on disembarking. Your eminent excellency is well aware of (16) travel to Alexandria.³ I don't know what to do. (17) Should I sell that lac or leave it?⁴ I request (18) sound advice. Please do this act of complete kindness for (19) me, your servant, who is staying here.}

¹ {The citation in Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 3:433, n. 69, is a typographical error, and should read TS 13 J 8, f. 13. There is a mistake in citing the incorrect page number in Reif, *Bibliography*, 157, 165, and subsequently Goitein, *ib.*, 6:179. Goitein did not prepare an edition of this document or relate it to the documents in this book.

² Arabic *'allaqu*. Moses evidently attached this letter to the letter he had written his brother Perahyā, III, 47, which deals with the same matter. The same usage appears in Perahyā's letter, III, 45, line 1.

³ The difficulties Moses suffered upon disembarking from the ship in which he traveled to Alexandria preoccupied him, and therefore he said he would begin his letter by describing them. Upon consideration, he decided that a hint would suffice. More details appear in his letters in III, 46, lines 30 ff., and III, 47, lines 17 ff.

⁴ Perhaps the lac should not be sold until it could fetch a better price. Cf. III, 47, lines 22 ff.}

III, 48 Letter from Samuel b. Joseph Yijū to His Brothers Perahyā and Moses, Alexandria or Fustat²

Mazara, late fall {or, summer} 1156

Bodl. MS. Heb. b. 11 (Cat. 2874), fol. 15

Ed. Zeldes and Frenkel, "The Sicilian Trade," 109–17; English translation: Simonsohn, *Jews in Sicily*, 1:412–15.

Childish, oblong letters, about 4 mm. high. Like his father—see III, 49 {and brother Moses}—Samuel puts in many *w*'s and *y*'s to express short *u*'s and *i*'s, e.g. *tdkwr* for *tadhkur*, line 7, or *ybm* for *'ilm*, line 16, of course, without consistency, compare *kwtkm* in line 6 with *ktbkm*, line 22, and *ktb*, line 24, and sometimes he omits the *matres lectionis* for long vowels, *hl* for *h'l*, line 10.¹ Like some other Maghrebi writers, Samuel puts a horizontal stroke over *g* to indicate that it should be pronounced *j*, lines 26 and 39, and a dot in final *k* to indicate that it should be read *k* and not *kh*, lines 12–13, 30, 45 and—most significantly—once, verso margin, in *kathira* a dot in *r*. Cf. Goitein, "Autographs," 398, n. 19 (in reference to such a *dagesh* in a word in IV, 36, line 6).² The name of the coin *rubā'ī* is mostly abbreviated *rb'*, with only half of the *alif* written.³

As to the date of the letter, Samuel mentions letters of his brothers Perahyā and Moses, which had arrived in the first ten days of the month of Tammuz of (4)916 A.M., corresponding exactly to the last ten days of June, 1156. This reference {to the year} clearly indicates that the letter was written after the beginning of another year A.M.; on the other hand, the contents show that it is an answer to those letters, i.e., it was written in the same year C.E., in time to be sent with the ships going out to the African coast. The year (4)917 A.M. began on 17 September, 1156. Thus, our letter must have been written at the end of September or beginning of October that year.⁴

¹ {See, however, the note there.

² On the doubling of *r*, see the discussions by Liebes, "Double *Reish*"; Morag, "Response"; Liebes, "Response."

³ The same abbreviation appears elsewhere, e.g., III, 45, line 7.

⁴ Mention of the year 4916 suggests that the letter was written after the beginning of 4917, but this is not conclusive. When referring to a letter that arrived in the previous year, Perahyā Yijū specifically writes 'last year, the year (4)911' (III, 30, line 8). In III, 48, line 31, Samuel mentions receipt of a slip of paper in 4915. The year 4916 may have been noted here for the sake of clarity, though this letter was written in the same calendar year. Elsewhere in his notes, Goitein dated III, 48: July 1156. Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:317 and 482, n. 36, comments that ships arrived in Egypt from Sicily in August, one after seventeen days at sea (cf. *ibid.*, 1:325–26), and that letters from Sicily dated in Tishre (September–October), the new calendar year, were probably sent to Tunisia and from there forwarded to Egypt by land. On the duration of voyages from Sicily to Alexandria, see also Udovitch,