

Yijū,² who donates in C29v {read: C30 = TS K 6, f. 149}, col. I, line 1, is referred to here twice as 'Abū 'Alī, my brother-in-law.' This man was probably a Yemenite or an Indian Jew, who had accompanied Abraham Yijū to the Egyptian capital and had become known there as the relative of the scholarly and influential Maghrebi merchant.

The synagogue referred to probably was a private place of prayer for merchants and refugees from the Maghreb. As of the late 1140's, an incessant stream of refugees moved eastward in the wake of the terrible Almo-had persecutions, as abundantly proved by the Geniza documents.

{Some textual notes to Mann's edition follow there. The discrepancy between the two accounts, the one in the India Book and the other in *A Mediterranean Society*, concerning the location of Ben Yijū's private synagogue and the related issues of intolerance of secessionist congregations and tolerance of small private places of worship of a transitory character touch upon issues beyond the scope of the present study, and will undoubtedly be addressed by future Geniza research.³ For other calendars written by Ben Yijū, see II, 16v; III, 26.

Chronologically III, 51 is followed by III, 54, which should be read in that sequence.}

² Besides brother-in-law, *šibr* also means father-in-law and son-in-law; see 348, n. 76.

³ The comment that Ben Yijū was 'later on' found in a town other than Fustat finds an echo in the introduction to III, 49. This might stem from Goitein's assumption at an early stage of research that the India trader became a judge in an Egyptian provincial town (al-Maḥalla); see 84, n. 92 and 792, n. 3. On the intolerance of private synagogues, see the sources cited by Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:555, n. 44. TS 16.187 (ed. Goitein, "Rāshūr"), cited there, speaks of a ban on all those who establish any private place of worship or pray there (with the exception of Abraham Maimuni's private prayer meeting), for a period of thirty years beginning 1205, but does not attest the situation prior to that date. Also see Friedman, "Notes by a Disciple," 527, n. 21. The other document cited in Goitein's note, TS 13 J 16, f. 21, deals specifically with the provincial town of Malij, in which there was communal dissension and in connection with which the Nagid Mevōrākh prohibited opening a private synagogue, *majlis*; see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:168, 555, n. 51; Cohen, *Self-Government*, 251. To the best of my knowledge, Goitein did not discuss elsewhere the possibility that Abū 'Alī, the brother-in-law of Ibn Yijū, was a Yemenite Jew. On the likelihood that he was identical with Ben Yijū's Indian brother-in-law Nair, see III, 18, sec. b, line 6 and 639, n. 17.}

III, 52 *Letter from Perahyā Yijū to Abu 'l-Fakhr Ibn al-Amshāṭī*

Alexandria {al-Maḥalla, ca. 1161-72}

ENA 4020, f. 1

Ed. Simonsohn and Gil, "Sicily," 50-52; English translation in Simonsohn, *Jews in Sicily*, 1:416-17. Reference is not made here to most differences in decipherment and translating the text.

Perahyā writes from Alexandria {or rather: al-Maḥalla} to Abu 'l-Fakhr (Saadya b. Abraham Ibn al-Amshāṭī), the trusted friend of the Yijū family in Fustat that he would prefer to travel to Sicily or Damascus {al-Shām} but since 'the little one' (his cousin) was grown up and 'had no one in the world except God' (that is, her father was dead), he could not do this. He refers to great misfortunes, which had befallen him.

{Perahyā, in the capacity of a judge, signed a court record in Fustat in February 1160 and in March 1161, signed a bill of divorce there. Subsequently he served as judge in the provincial town of al-Maḥalla.¹ Goitein, in his published studies, had identified our letter as having been written there.² But it might have been written in some other locality, to which Perahyā traveled to supervise the production of kosher cheeses (see margin). Here Goitein identified the place of writing as Alexandria probably because of Perahyā's statement, in line 10, about sending a letter to his brother with an Alexandrian merchant (but see the note there).³ Since III, 54, was written when Perahyā married his cousin Sitt al-Dār in August 1156, the present document, III, 52, was obviously written sometime later but probably after 1161. Abu 'l-Fakhr Ibn al-Amshāṭī, who lived in Fustat, extended his protection to the writer's brother Samuel, with whose financial difficulties the body of the letter is concerned. Abu 'l-Fakhr died around 1172; see page 97.

¹ {Fustat: TS 18 J 1, f. 9; ULC Add. 3350. Al-Maḥalla: see III, 55 and III, 56. See 728, n. 2.

² Goitein, *Education*, 79; *Med. Soc.*, 2:187, 559, n. 12.

³ Simonsohn and Gil, "Sicily," 50, also state that the letter was probably written in Alexandria.

Translation

[A. Preamble; thanks to God for the addressee's recovery]

- (1) *The Lord will ward off from you all sickness, etc.*⁴
 (2) *The servant of his excellency, your honor, great and holy master and lord Saadya the respected elder—may God protect you, grant you success, straighten your paths, give life to all your children and grant you the merit to enjoy their Torah and their marriage!*⁵—kisses your hands. I have learned (4) that there had been sickness in your home,⁶ and God granted recovery.⁷ *Let them praise the Lord for His steadfast love.*⁸

[B. Payment of debt of Samuel, Perahyā's brother]

I, your servant, heard of your kindness (5) to R. Samuel. May God receive from him the best of prayers [for you] and make this a light (6) in front of you in this world and the next world!⁹ I have already sent for him the forty

⁴ Deut. 7:15. As usual, the verses cited at the top of the letter allude to its contents. Here Perahyā refers to Saadya's recent illness and prays that God protect him from any future sickness. See next note.

⁵ Such wishes are found in a number of Geniza letters, e.g., III, 48v, lines 34–35, III, 55, lines 1–2 (neither of which is reproduced in this book). These wishes can be traced back to the congratulations offered the father of a boy after his circumcision, according to Tosefta Berakhot 6, 12 (ed. Lieberman, 37, following Codex Erfurt and parallels): "Just as you brought him into the covenant, so may you bring him into Torah and the wedding chamber." Besides religious learning in general, 'his Torah' could be understood as referring to a boy's reading the Torah in the synagogue. Poems written in 1163 to celebrate a Karaite boy's first reading of the Torah (and Prophets) in the synagogue, include the blessing, "he merited Torah, may he merit the wedding chamber!" and, for the boy's parents: "Just as they merited his reading the Torah, may they merit enjoying his wedding!" On the significance of these poems, see Ben-Shammai, "Celebration." Letters found in the Geniza that were written to a father whose son evidently already passed the Torah reading stage include wishes that the recipient live to enjoy his son's wedding. On the supposed rite of passage of Torah reading referred to here, see also pages 415–16.

⁶ Lit., 'there had been weakness there.' This could refer to the illness of Saadya and his children, as well as other family members.

⁷ There may be an allusion to Saadya's illness in Joseph Yijū's remark that he was praying for his well-being in III, 49v, line 34. As we learn from a memorial list, Saadya died a young man; see pages 92, 101. His sons might have died before him.

⁸ Ps. 107:8.

⁹ A variation of an oft repeated wish that the benefactor's assistance ('this') increase his merit before God. On this theme, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 5:354.

dirhems. Please collect your debt from them, and let him use for expenses¹⁰ (7) the balance. God knows,¹¹ I had to take them out of my mouth.¹²

[C. Teaching job offered Samuel by the community]

I already sent him¹³ letters (8) and informed him that the congregation would like him to be a schoolteacher. They promised 20 dirhems a week plus gratuities at (9) all times. But I did not receive an answer from him.¹⁴ I even sent one letter with Sheikh (10) Abū 'Alī the prominent merchant,¹⁵ the Alexandrian.¹⁶ He met with him and told him: Send me the answer.¹⁷ He¹⁸ stayed there (11) afterwards for some time, but he¹⁹ did not give him anything.

¹⁰ Arabic *yatanaffaq*. While I have not found this use of *nfq* V in the dictionaries, it appears to be the meaning intended in context.

¹¹ Arabic *wa-llāh al-ʿālim*. Perahyā often uses this expression; cf. III, 55, line 4; III, 56, lines 3–4.

¹² In a discussion of relatives assuming the debts of family members, Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 3:43, quotes this sentence (in translation) and explains: "I had to starve to be able to make this payment."

¹³ To Samuel.

¹⁴ These three sentences are translated in Goitein, *Education*, 79, where he commented that 20 (black) dirhems per week was a decent salary for a teacher. As correctly explained by Goitein, the offer of a teaching position was for Samuel, Perahyā's indigent brother, and not for the wealthy addressee ('Splendor of the Traders,' III, 53), as explained by Simonsohn and Gil. Samuel was in fact known as a schoolteacher (see III, 58, lines 6–7 and page 83), but he apparently refused Perahyā's offer and stayed in Fustat; see top margin, lines 2–3, and III, 55 and III, 55a.

¹⁵ For *tājir*, 'prominent merchant,' see page 27, n. 4.

¹⁶ I assume he is the same as Abū 'Alī *al-tājir* b. Nathan the scholar who sold the Indian slave girl, Gazelle, to Abu 'l-Faḍl *al-tājir* in 1155 (ENA 4011, f. 62; on this document see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:138, 433, n. 48; there it is suggested that Abu 'l-Faḍl 'the dignified, wise and sagacious,' was called *ha-bāḥūr*, 'the youth,' not as an indication of his being unmarried but rather his lower status; but see Friedman, *JMP*, 1:109, n. 8). Since Abū 'Alī is called here 'the Alexandrian,' the letter itself was presumably not written in Alexandria; see the introduction to the document.

¹⁷ The verb 'send' is in the imperative form. As often appears in these letters, the writer combines a direct and indirect quote. Abū 'Alī obviously said: "Send him (Perahyā) an answer."

¹⁸ Abū 'Alī.

¹⁹ Samuel.

[D. Peraḥyā's orphaned wife, miscellaneous matters and greetings]

As to other matters, when I disembarked, I arrived on Friday (12) [...] with Sheikh Abu 'l-Baqā b. Ḥubaysh²⁰ the Levite and Sālim²¹ (13) [...] and I received 24 dirhems (?)²² [Margin] I owe Ibn [...]. I don't know what obliged him to give me the supervision²³ and why he reversed the situation. I had (or: have) already perished from the cheese and was (or: have become) perplexed as to what I should do.²⁴ Were it not for the 'little one'²⁵ //being an orphan//,²⁶ who already has matured and has no one in the world except God, [Top] (1) I would go to Sicily²⁷ or to Eretz Israel.²⁸ I would appreciate your kindly meeting with my lord *al-Mēvīn*.²⁹ Please inform him (2) what happened to me and (ask) how he accepts everything said about me. Let him (or: you should) ask him, what the reason is for this.³⁰ And if you should see³¹ my brother, he should inform me, (3) or

²⁰ The name Ḥubaysh ('Little Abyssinian') appears in a number of Geniza documents; see Friedman, *JMP*, 2:20.

²¹ He is probably the same Sālim mentioned in Peraḥyā's letter III, 55, margin, line 11.

²² The text is fragmentary and its decipherment uncertain.

²³ Arabic *ishrāf* can refer to various offices of supervision. The context suggests that here it refers to supervision of kosher food.

²⁴ On the supervision of kosher cheese production (and the import of cheeses from Sicily), see 562, n. 58; Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:251–52, 443–44, and the sources and literature cited there; cf. Zeldes and Frenkel, "The Sicilian Trade," 92–93, 100. Cf. IV, 57v, margin, lines 1–2: "I have suffered trouble with the Sicilian cheese, and have not received a return of one penny (*ḥabba*)."

²⁵ Arabic *ṣaghira* (fem.), a common designation for one's wife. See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 3:162.

²⁶ The word *yatima* was not deciphered by Goitein (or by Simonsohn and Gil), and he concluded that Abraham Ben Yijū had already died from the following "has no one in the world except God."

²⁷ For the story of a Jew who, a few years after this letter, emigrated to Egypt from Sicily then returned there, see Kraemer, "Messina."

²⁸ Arabic *al-shām* can mean Eretz Israel, Syria or specifically Damascus (the latter preferred by Goitein in his remarks above); see 285, n. 7. In III, 56v, line 7, Peraḥyā threatens his wife to leave the country. Note that in an enactment passed by the Jewish community of Maḥalla, they pledged their loyalty to their judge Peraḥyā [b. Joseph], the writer of our letter, to retain his position as long as he remained in the country and did not want to emigrate to Eretz Israel (TS 16.135, Maimonides, *Responsa*, 2:517; see Friedman, "Maimonides and Zūtā," 501).

²⁹ "The Understanding" (or 'Perceptive') was the Hebrew epithet of a contemporary *parnās* (welfare official); see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:427 (no. 137), 503 (no. 116); Gil, *Foundations*, 570 (index).

³⁰ The matter is obscure. Abu 'l-Fakhr Saadya is apparently requested to ask *al-Mēvīn* not to give credence to rumors about Peraḥyā but to ask the informant why he says such things. As mentioned above, Peraḥyā's office as judge in al-Maḥalla was a matter of some dispute, and the rumors might have been associated with that affair. See the discussion in Friedman, "Maimonides and Zūtā," 503.

³¹ Arabic *yunja'u labu*. For *naja'a*, see *Lisān al-'Arab*, 1:165.

someone who will teach will come to the city, because they are not to be satisfied.³² *May your well-being and the well-being of your children increase!* And to my lord Sheikh Abu 'l-[...] ³³ and his brothers peace. *And peace.*

[E. Address]

[Verso] (1) (To) *His excellency, your honor, great and holy lord and master Saadya the respected elder—may God protect him!—son of his honor, our great and holy master (2) and lord Abraham, the respected elder, the pious during his lifetime³⁴—may the spirit of God grant him rest!³⁵*

(1) (From) His servant Peraḥyā (2) b. Joseph—*may he be remembered for life in the world to come!*³⁶

³² While the translation is not entirely certain it seems that Peraḥyā repeats his urgent request that Samuel respond to the offer to take up a position as a schoolmaster in Peraḥyā's town. Otherwise another teacher would come, since the people who live there demand a solution to their children's educational needs. (Simonsohn, *Jews in Sicily*, 1:417, translates: "If my brother manages he should let me know, or have the man, you know who, come," etc.)

³³ The name appears to have been omitted.

³⁴ See page 94.

³⁵ Isa. 63:14.

³⁶ Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 5:182, 557, n. 306, translates this blessing: "may his record be [accepted] for life in the World to Come."