

III, 53 *Fragmentary Letter from Peraḥyā Yijū to Abu 'l-Fakhr Ibn al-Amshāṭī*

{Al-Maḥalla, ca. 1161–72}

TS 8 J 20, f. 25

Fragment of another letter to Abu 'l-Fakhr, important for verification of various data.

{The fragment contains only the first few lines of the letter. The addressee, Abu 'l-Fakhr Saadya b. Abraham Ibn al-Amshāṭī, here bears the honorary Hebrew title *pe'ēr ha-sōḥarīm*, Pride of the Traders, presumably bestowed on him for his munificence to the Yeshiva.<sup>1</sup> Peraḥyā extends to him wishes that he celebrate the coming Passover together with his son and brother's son (the boy was presumably orphaned from his father),<sup>2</sup> and so for many years to come. Presumably, Abu 'l-Fakhr's other children, whom Peraḥyā had blessed with life in III, 52, line 3 and margin top, did not survive. Alternatively, III, 53, was written before the birth of the other children. The son and nephew are designated *pirḥē ha-ḥasīdīm*, 'budding pietists,' which confirms the association of the family with the circle of pietists. The letter is addressed to Abu 'l-Fakhr's shop in the Square of the Perfumers of Fustat. A similar letter from Peraḥyā (so it seems) to the same Abu 'l-Fakhr Saadya Pride of the Traders, is found in ENA NS 1, f. 8 (L44), and wishes are extended there that the recipient celebrate in years to come Passover and the Feast of Weeks with his son and brother's sons. On the presumed place and time for writing this letter, see the introduction to III, 52.}

<sup>1</sup> {This title was also granted to a well-known India trader, Abu 'l-Barakāt b. Hārith. See Friedman, *Polygyny*, 88; Gil and Fleischer, *Yehuda ha-Levi*, 621, 637, and sources and studies referred to there.

<sup>2</sup> See page 98.}

III, 54 *Marriage Agreement between the Ben Yijū Cousins Peraḥyā and Sitt al-Dār*

Fustat, August 1156

RNL Yevr.-Arab. I (Firkovitch II) 1700, f. 28

The folio is numbered '27' in pen (and is accordingly cited by Goitein as Firkovitch II 1700, f. 27) and '28,' which is the correct number, in pencil. Partial translation in Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:203–4.

Entry in the record book of the rabbinical court of Fustat from August 1156: Marriage of Peraḥyā b. Joseph Yijū to Sitt al-Dār ('Mistress of the House'), daughter of his paternal uncle,<sup>1</sup> Abraham (the name was added).

His marriage gift: 20 dinars, to be given to the bride immediately and 50 to be paid in the case the marriage is terminated. This was fair for a schoolmaster (cf. III, 50).<sup>2</sup> Of the girl's trousseau list only that of the jewelry amounting to the very considerable sum of 150 dinars (exactly 149)<sup>3</sup> has been preserved completely. Unlike other trousseau lists, the value of each piece is indicated not in whole dinars, namely round sums agreed upon by the two parties, but mostly with an exact price, such as 8<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> dinars for a silver-encased mirror.<sup>4</sup> Clearly Abraham Ben Yijū himself had drawn up the list in preparation for the marriage contract, and the court wished to honor the dead man's disposition.

{The record book was written by the judge Mevōrākh b. Nathan; see its description in Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:343. For the date, see the note to line 2. As noted in III, 50, Abraham Ben Yijū was disappointed with Peraḥyā and tried to postpone or discourage the marriage. Our document shows that the wedding took place only after Abraham's death.}

<sup>1</sup> {Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 3:29, cites this as an example for marrying the daughter of a paternal uncle. On 55–56, the story of the marriage is told as an example of predetermining the mate for an endogamous marriage.

<sup>2</sup> I assume that III, 50, line 11 is intended. It refers to Peraḥyā's position in Sicily but does not explicitly state that he had worked as a schoolteacher. See, however, III, 43, margin; in III, 57, line 18, Joseph Yijū in Sicily wrote that this oldest son, that is Peraḥyā, assisted him as a schoolteacher.

<sup>3</sup> See the note to line 19.

<sup>4</sup> That figure is for the value of several items of jewelry, the last being the mirror; see lines 15–17. The reader will find in the list a number of items assigned an exact value in fractions of a dinar.

## Translation

- {(1) Dowry list for Sheikh Bu 'l-Surūr //Perahyā// b. Joseph, known as Ben Yijū.  
 (2) Sitt al-Dār, the daughter of his paternal uncle—*may his memory be for a blessing!*—Abraham.<sup>5</sup>  
 (3) The early installment—twenty. The later installment—fifty.<sup>6</sup>  
 (4) And the well-known conditions for daughters of Israel.}<sup>7</sup>
- |  |            |
|--|------------|
| (5) A golden <i>hadīda</i> , <sup>8</sup> without adornment                  | 20         |
| <<A golden <i>hadīda</i>   | 8 dinars>> |
| (6) A pair of golden <i>halqas</i> , <sup>9</sup> worth                      | 6¼         |
| (7) Another pair of <i>halqas</i> , without adornment                        | 4          |
| (8) A <i>mihbas</i> , <sup>10</sup> without adornment                        | 15 dinars  |
| (9) [[Two pairs]] A pair of peacock pins, <sup>11</sup><br>without adornment | 7 dinars   |
| (10) A <i>lāzam</i> , <sup>12</sup> without adornment                        | 7¼         |

<sup>5</sup> The word [*li-sh*] *tāvōt*, 'era of the documents,' is visible at the end of the line. Below it, some words from five additional lines of another document also appear. Evidently two small pieces of paper are stuck here to the page, one on top of the other. The piece referred to belongs to fol. 3 of the record book (= India Book V, 44). Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:420, n. 379: "The date is effaced, but since all the preceding documents, as well as the next—the last one preserved (when I copied them in Leningrad in 1965)—were written in spring and summer 1156, there can be little doubt that this *taqwīm*, or estimate of the dowry was made in that year." As I have noted, the examination (in St. Petersburg in 2003) of the original manuscript shows that the 'effaced date' belongs to a different page, and no date on this page can be discerned. Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 3:29, gives the date: July 1156. But on his copy of our trousseau list, Goitein noted that the latest date preceding it, in f. 23v, was "the last ten days of the month of Av" (which would correspond with August 9–18), 1156. Attention should also be called to Samuel Yijū's remark in III, 48, line 15, that in his letter that arrived in Sicily at the end of June 1156, probably after less than three weeks at sea, Joseph had made no mention of his bride-to-be.

<sup>6</sup> For this marriage gift, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 3:138 (456, n. 101), 365, 404.

<sup>7</sup> For a definition of the 'well-known conditions,' see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 3:105–6 (448, n. 37, where this document is cited as an example for not defining what the conditions were).

<sup>8</sup> For the *hadīda* bracelet, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:219, 428, n. 508: "When the India trader Ben Yijū, a Tunisian, gave his daughter as first and by far most precious item of her dowry a golden 'hadīda' and again another one in gold [...], he might have been following the usage of his native country."

<sup>9</sup> Earrings [or: other rings; see Shy, "Terms," 241, 247].

<sup>10</sup> The *mihbas* is a collar necklace. {See 207, n. 12.

<sup>11</sup> For 'peacock pins,' see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:210 (423, n. 429, where this document is cited.)

<sup>12</sup> The *lāzam* is a necklace with pendants. {For this piece of jewelry, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:458, n. 142. As noted there, 'not adorned with pearls,' in the continuation, "shows

- |  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| (11) Pearls for 'adorning' all the previously mentioned ornaments. Their weight                    |                   |
| (12) 53¼ dirhems, <sup>13</sup> their price  | 40 dinars         |
| (13) A pair of bulging <i>siwārs</i> <sup>14</sup>   | 13½               |
| (14) A pair of granulated <i>siwārs</i> <sup>15</sup>  | 16⅔ <sup>16</sup> |
| (15) Two pairs of silver pins with arrows,<br>one pair gold-plated; <sup>17</sup> one pair of      |                   |
| (16) spoon(-pins); <sup>18</sup> one pair of<br>open-worked sun disks; <sup>19</sup> a kohl stick; |                   |
| (17) an encased mirror <sup>20</sup>   | 8½ <sub>12</sub>  |
| (18) A silver <i>dabla</i> <sup>21</sup>   | 1⅞ [...]          |
| Total (122 and one <i>habba</i> ) <sup>22</sup>  |                   |
| (19)   | 150 <sup>23</sup> |
| {[Verso] (1) [X] gold [ri]ngs  | 6                 |
| (2) Two [r]ings, silver and budding <sup>24</sup> coral  | 2                 |
| (3) [X] crystal kohl tubes <sup>25</sup>   | 3                 |

that in Egypt (unlike Yemen, as far as I know) it normally had that additional ornament." See Shy, "Terms," 244. The groom's grandson (Perahyā, *Commentary on Shabbat*, 125) translates *qatlā* ('chocker'): *lāzam*.)

<sup>13</sup> Ca. 165 grams.

<sup>14</sup> {The *siwār* is a type of bracelet. According to Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:211, 424, n. 446, *manfūkh* (here translated 'bulging'), means "literally, puffed up, probably meaning hollow and protuberant."

<sup>15</sup> 'Granulated' here translates *mukharraz*. Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:212 (425, n. 451): "I noted 'beaded,' which I take to mean granulated, *siwār* bracelets (no other ornaments) only three times, all from brides marrying in summer 1156."

<sup>16</sup> Misprinted in Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:204: 16 1/3.

<sup>17</sup> Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:211 (424, n. 447): "Another important specification concerning the body of a piece of jewelry was whether it was solid precious metal or only plated. If it was plated, the main material seems to be mentioned only when it was silver."

<sup>18</sup> For pins shaped as arrows, *nashāshīb*, and spoons, *malā'iq*, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:211, 424, n. 440.

<sup>19</sup> Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:210 (423, n. 436), with reference to this list, "probably to be used as pendants." See 711, n. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Mirrors were inlaid with silver. See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:222, 429, n. 531.)

<sup>21</sup> A *dabla* is a finger ring.

<sup>22</sup> {= 1/72 dinar. The sums in this line may have been erased or perhaps belong elsewhere.

<sup>23</sup> A fragment of a dinar seems to be missing in line 18. According to my addition, the jewelry on this side of the page totaled 146<sup>21</sup>/<sub>24</sub> dinars. Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:420, n. 379: "My addition is somewhat different but their arithmetic was better. Or perhaps the sum was rounded out."

<sup>24</sup> Arabic *muqamma*. Cf. Dozy, *Supplément*, 2:406b.

<sup>25</sup> Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:224, 430, n. 539, notes that this item is likely to be the pieces of jewelry listed by Ben Yijū in the inventory of goods he deposited with Abu 'l-Fakhr Ibn

(4) [...] leuco-sapphire and semiprecious stones	$\frac{1}{2}$ 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ <sup>26</sup>
(5) Two [...]	$4\frac{2}{3} + \frac{1}{8}$
(6) A [ <i>ni</i> ]qāb <sup>27</sup> and a pair of scarves <sup>28</sup>	$1\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{12}$
(7) A full taqni'a <sup>29</sup> and full maqṭa' <sup>30</sup>	$1\frac{3}{8}$
(8) A green dabīqī linen kerchief	$3\frac{3}{8}$
(9) An Iskandarānī malḥafa <sup>31</sup>	$1\frac{3}{12}$
(10) A silk ḥulla <sup>32</sup>	$3\frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{4}$
(11) A doubled (?) half mantle <sup>33</sup>	$3\frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{24}$
(12) A locally-made maqṭa'	$\frac{5}{8}$
(13) A white wasaṭ' <sup>34</sup>	2
(14) Two Iskandarānī maqṭa's	$1\frac{2}{3} + \frac{1}{4}$
(15) Three maqṭa's [...]	$\frac{3}{4}$
(16) A taqni'a	$\frac{2}{3} + \frac{1}{4}$
(17) A quilt cover <sup>35</sup>	$\frac{3}{4}$

al-Amshāṭī, on his arrival in Egypt, III, 42, line 3. For the meaning of *billawr*, see also Shy, "Terms," 237–38.

<sup>26</sup> This is a subtotal of jewelry added on verso, lines 1–4. I do not know why it was not included in the total on recto.

<sup>27</sup> A *niqāb* is a face cover with two holes for the eyes. See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:320, 454, n. 75. For veiling women's faces in the Geniza society, see Friedman, "Sexual Mores," 91–99; Stillman, *Arab Dress*, 138 ff.

<sup>28</sup> Arabic *raddāt*.

<sup>29</sup> I have not found the *taqni'a* in dictionaries. Other forms of *qn'* mean veil, and I assume that this too is a type of veil.

<sup>30</sup> Robe or cloth. See II, 16v, line 8 and 325, n. 26.

<sup>31</sup> For this item, a blanket, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:167, 401, n. 124. According to Diem, *Dictionary*, 195, vocalize *milḥafa*. Iskandarānī = Alexandrian textile.

<sup>32</sup> Gala costume. See 178, n. 24.

<sup>33</sup> Arabic *niṣṣridā'*. See 169, n. 11. 'Doubled' translates *mushaffa'*; similarly IV, 61v, line 1: *maqṭa' mushaffa'*. But the exact meaning of the term is unknown.

<sup>34</sup> Broad belt.

<sup>35</sup> Arabic *wajh liḥāf*. Perhaps translate: a blanket cover. The translation of *wajh* follows Diem, *Dictionary*, 222, in reference to *wajh matraḥa*, a mattress case.}

### III, 55 Letter from Peraḥyā Yijū to his Brother Samuel, Including Questions of Religious Law

Probably Maḥalla, seventies or eighties of twelfth century

ULC Or. 1080 J 38<sup>1</sup>

On the verso, the address is given both in Hebrew and Arabic characters. In addition, it contains a postscript in one line by the sender and the draft of an answer by the recipient, Peraḥyā's brother Samuel. However, the script cannot be the same as that of the writer of III, 48. Although III, 48 was written by Samuel in Sicily while he was a boy, whereas in III, 55 he was a member of the rabbinical court of Fustat {or rather: was a schoolteacher there} and father of a son, still the two scripts are far too different to admit the possibility that they belong to one and the same person. However, an examination of those two lines written in the left upper corner of III, 55v shows that the handwriting is in the style of the scribes of the Fustat court, which we know from very many documents, especially those emanating from the pens of Hillel b. Eli at the end of the 11th century and even more of Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Manasseh in the first part of the 12th. Accordingly, it seems certain that Samuel dictated these lines to a scribe of the court. {See the added comments below for another interpretation.}

No. III, 55 is interesting, because it shows us how the Yijū family, who had been traders in the Mediterranean (Joseph<sup>2</sup> and Mevassēr) and the Indian Ocean (Abraham), ended up as religious dignitaries. The informal way, in which Peraḥyā addresses here four {three} questions on religious law to his brother with the request to secure an authoritative answer, clearly indicates (a) that the two brothers were *dayyānīm*, or judges, and (b) that while Samuel was in Fustat (as the address shows), the central seat of Jewish religious learning in Egypt, Peraḥyā must have been in some smaller town in Egypt (for the letter indicates that it was not being sent overseas), and not even in Alexandria, where also a respectable Jewish court with important scholars was in existence at that time.

<sup>1</sup> {In Reif, *Bibliography*, 236, 404, TS 12.322 and ULC Or. 1080 J 38 are confused. Goitein's citations concerning both documents are correct.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph was a schoolteacher. For the suggestion that he had earlier been involved in Mediterranean trade, see the page 745.}