

III, 7 *Short Letter from Joseph b. Abraham to Abraham Ben Yijū*

Aden, ca. 1147–48

TS 13 J 7, f. 27

For a description of the paper and the scribe see the introduction to III, 1. The handwriting of this clerk is different here from that of III, 2. Here the long final strokes turn to the right, while in III, 2, to the left. With the exception of the address, the verso is blank.

The date of this letter to India can be fixed with considerable certainty owing to the reference to the addressee's brother; see comments to lines 16–19.

Translation

[A. Preamble, six verses from the Bible]

(1) *In Your name, O Merciful.*

(2) *For the Lord will be your trust; He will keep your feet from being caught.¹ The Lord (3) is your guardian, the Lord is your protection at your right hand. The Lord will guard you (4) from all harm; He will guard your life. He will guard your going (5) and your coming now and forever. By day the sun will not (6) strike you, nor the moon by night.² Those who love Your teaching enjoy well-being; (7) they encounter no adversity.³*

¹ Prov. 3:26. Cf. III, 15, line 4. In the first occurrence the name of God is written here, perhaps by mistake, "י, afterwards with the more common "י. It was not uncommon, especially in Yemen, to open a letter with a quotation from the Bible; cf. II, 13, 25; III, 32. However, the concentration of so many verses here and in III, 15 is exceptional. The addressee most probably had expressed his intention to travel from India to Aden, as in fact he did two years after this letter (see below line 16) and III, 15 were written. The verses at the beginning of these two letters express the wish for a safe journey. Most of the verses quoted here are indeed from Ps. 121 and form part of the Jewish prayer for a safe journey.

² Ps. 121:5, 7, 8, 6. It is unusual that the verses of such a well-known psalm were written out of order. In line 4, the name of God was erroneously omitted. {Perhaps the verses were quoted from memory.}

³ Ps. 119:165. {Quoting this verse reflects Ben Yijū's reputation for scholarship.}

[B. Salutation]

To my esteemed lord, the light of my eyes and the ornament (8) on my neck, my master and lord Abraham, the son of his honor, great and holy master Peralhyā Ben Yijū—may he rest in Eden!⁴

[C. Receipt of small shipment of pepper, the balance of last year's transactions]

(9) My lord, there arrived the small shipment of pepper, namely one and a quarter *bahār* (10) less four pounds of big measure.⁵ I, your servant, went to take (11) delivery and received the whole due. Likewise, Sheikh Khalaf⁶ received (12) his shipment. You mentioned, my lord, that this (13) *bahār* and a quarter less four pounds of pepper was (sent against) the balance of my, your servant's, entire account (14) from the cardamom and the 'eggs,' etc.⁷ May God reward (15) and care for you well {alt. tr.: undertake to provide you with a good reward}, and may I never miss your favors!

[D. Concerning the addressee's brother]

(16) You, my lord, asked about your brother Mevassēr.⁸ He has not come during (17) this entire period, nor have I seen a letter for you (18) from Egypt. Had I gotten a letter for you, my lord, (19) I, your servant, would have forwarded it to you.⁹

⁴ The same phrases in III, 1, address.

⁵ The *bahār* came in two sizes, the smaller weighing about 1/5 less; see II, 16, line 4.

⁶ {Khalaf b. Isaac.}

⁷ Joseph b. Abraham had sent money to India for purchasing large quantities of cardamom. {For *bayḍ*, 'eggs,' see pages 369–70.} For the balance of the account, Ben Yijū sent pepper the following year. A similar transaction with regard to the balance of a preceding year appears in II, 16v, lines 25–26.

⁸ The expected arrival in Aden of Ben Yijū's brother Mevassēr is referred to three times in Khalaf b. Isaac's letters: in III, 12, lines 34–36, Ben Yijū was notified that his brother had arrived in Egypt (from Sicily or Tunisia; see III, 29); III, 15, lines 29–30, dated 1147, reports that he was well, but had not come to Aden; III, 16, lines 10–14, dated 1148, states that enquiries had been made whether he had gone to Eretz Israel, but in any case he had not come to Aden. It appears from III, 16 that, in 1148, Ben Yijū already had become very impatient with regard to news about his brother. Our letter seems to have been sent in the same year as III, 15, namely 1147. Mevassēr came to Aden only after Ben Yijū's arrival there; see III, 41, line 7.

⁹ {In III, 9, margin, lines 8–10, Joseph writes Ben Yijū that he was forwarding a letter from Mevassēr.}

[E. News from Egypt]

You, my lord, (certainly) have (20) heard the news from Egypt from the merchants who arrived, (21) God willing, at your place.¹⁰

[F. Greetings]

I send your eminent excellency the best (22) profuse greetings, and to all those in your protective care (23) the choicest, profuse greetings. *And much peace. Salvation is near!*¹¹

[G. Address]

[Verso] (1) *To his honor, great and holy master and lord Abraham, son of* (2) *his honor, great and holy master and lord Rabbi Parahyā Ben Yijū—may his rest be honored!*¹²

(1) (From) *He that experiences your favors daily,*¹³ (2) *Joseph b. Abraham—may he rest in Eden!*

¹⁰ Ben Yijū had asked about news from Egypt. The Near Eastern merchants frequented many ports on the Indian West Coast, and apparently they did not arrive at Ben Yijū's place every year. Joseph knew that some were due to arrive there the year he wrote this letter. Here we see additional evidence that ships sailing from Aden had their fixed ports of destination in India.

¹¹ See 484, n. 30.

¹² This blessing for the dead, *חַדָּא מְאוּחָדוּ כְבוֹד* (see Isa. 11:10), is not common in our papers; cf. II, 11a, line 18 {מְאוּחָדוּ כְבוֹד חַדָּא חַסָּא הַכְבוֹד} and see Zunz, *Geschichte*, 345. {It appears on some twelfth century tombstones from Aden. See Goitein, "Tombstones from Aden," 84.}

¹³ Literally, 'every morning.' This strange phrase is based on Ps. 27:4 {cf. commentaries}.

III, 8 *Letter from Joseph b. Abraham to Abraham Ben Yijū*

{Mangalore, India, ca. 1140–44}

TS NS 324, f. 114

A brief letter written by Joseph b. Abraham, about the same time as III, 7, and sent by him, not from Aden, as with his other letters, but from somewhere in India, to Abraham Ben Yijū, Mangalore. We are able to ascertain that Joseph was in India from, *inter alia*, the goods which he sent to Ben Yijū and ordered from him, their small quantity and the fact that they were carried not by Sheikh PN but by a soldier (*muqātil*), who in order to transport them hired a *fāl* (*fʿl*), apparently a compartment in a ship.¹ Ben Yijū is asked whether he intends to travel to Aden this year, and Joseph presumably wanted to travel there with him. Ben Yijū did indeed make the trip, and verso of the manuscript contains a list of goods, which he shipped with him on his way out of India; see below, III, 24. It is unusual, however, that Joseph asks Ben Yijū, who too was in India, to send him *burr*, wheat.²

{The letter is complete and contains an address. It did not indicate Ben Yijū's whereabouts, presumably because the letter was to be delivered by the bearer. I read the document somewhat differently from how Goitein seems to have read it according to the sparse notes he left. Due to the vagaries of the Arabic syntax and the writer's style (he alternates between the third person and the first, in referring to himself, and between the third and second, in referring to Ben Yijū), it is not clear whom the writer mentions as being in Mangalore. I believe it was Joseph. The goods he sends Ben Yijū include salted fish and pickled foods, items otherwise shipped from India to Aden. The commodities that Joseph ordered from Ben Yijū include wheat, which as noted by Goitein was normally sent from Aden to India.³ Joseph also ordered the spice (and medicinal substance) cumin. While in modern times cumin is grown extensively in India, it is not indigenous there and is assumed to have come from Egypt or the countries of the Mediterranean.⁴ As attested by the India Book documents (III, 27, sec. a, line 10; III, 43v, line 12) and other Geniza papers, cumin indeed was

¹ {According to II, 55, lines 10–11, soldiers, who protected a ship, traveled in a smaller boat that escorted it. A *fāl* is mentioned in connection with shipping something valuable from Aden to India in IV, 14, line 15.

² These comments are based largely on notes written by Goitein on May 29, 1979.

³ See II, 26, line 3; III, 10, line 46.

⁴ See Watt, *Commercial Products*, 442–43.}