

found in Sicily, Egypt and Yemen. Joseph asks Ben Yijū (lines 27–28) *in kāna tamma laka safr ilā 'adan am lā*, the most simple translation of which would be 'did you succeed in traveling to Aden or not.' All of this leads us to the conclusion that the letter was sent to Ben Yijū somewhere in inland Yemen, where we find him, for example, in III, 32 and 38. The fact that he later wrote on the paper's reverse, blank side a list of items he carried with him on his way out of India to Yemen (III, 24) does not prove otherwise. As we have already seen, he saved and carried with him wherever he went every piece of paper he had and often wrote on a letter's blank space something else in a different place. Note, for example, that Joseph b. Abraham sent III, 2 from Aden to Ben Yijū, who was in India, but the latter later wrote in Yemen the text of his own letter to some other merchant in India (III, 28a). From all of this it follows that there is no evident reason to fix the time of this letter on the basis II, 7. On the contrary, it probably was written during Ben Yijū's stay in Yemen, ca. 1140–45; for these dates see the introduction to III, 21.}

III, 9 *Letter from Joseph b. Abraham to Abraham Ben Yijū*

Aden, ca. 1150 {ca. 1148–49}

TS 12.235

Same paper and hand as III, 1. Very much damaged by holes. About two thirds of the text is effaced by water. On the verso, Ben Yijū wrote accounts [= III, 27].

The letter was written in Aden, as proven by references to persons and places (lines 20–21; 13 and 15 respectively) and is addressed to Zabīd (verso, line 2).¹ About this town on the coastal plain of southwest Yemen, see II, 20, lines 45–47. From Zabīd, or rather its seaport Ghulayfiqa (see III, 25, lines 1–4), one traveled directly to India, without stopping at Aden, though it was along the route (see II, 20, line 47). This explains the reference to pepper (margin, line 3) in a letter sent to a town lying to the northwest of Aden. The elaborate description of a consignment of almonds (line 25 and margin, lines 15–17) appears puzzling. Zabīd, of course, is nearer to the almond growing district of Yemen than Aden.² However, in those years Zabīd was mostly in the hands of the Abyssinian Banu 'l-Najjāh, who were at war with the various other rulers of Yemen.³ Thus it was easier to supply that town with luxury fruits growing around San'ā from Aden, and, as we learn from our letter (margin, lines 16–17), even there only limited quantities were available.

A comparison of the passage in the margin, lines 11–18, with recto, lines 22–23, shows that the letter was sent after the sailing season, overland from Aden to Zabīd.⁴ Also in Mediterranean countries, letters dealing with people and merchandise traveling by sea were commonly sent by messengers overland; cf. IV, 76, lines 3–6. Perhaps our letter was damaged by water when Ben Yijū sailed from Yemen to Egypt {or, as I have suggested, when sent to him to India}.

The approximate date of the letter can again be fixed by a reference to Ben Yijū's brother Mevassēr. In lines 8–9 of the margin, Joseph announces that a letter had arrived from Mevassēr and would be forwarded together with our document. In 1148, Mevassēr still lingered

¹ {See the comments added at the end of the introduction, where an alternate interpretation is suggested.}

² See Grohmann, *Südarabien*, 1:229.

³ See Smith, "Şulayhids"; Strothmann, "Zabīd" and id., "Karam."

⁴ {Those passages, in my opinion, do not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the letter was sent by land. See page 591, n. 28.}

in Egypt (III, 16, lines 10–14), although he had previously expressed his desire to join his brother in the East (III, 12, lines 34–36). In 1149, after Ben Yijū arrived in Aden, he invited Mevassēr to come (see III, 29). In our letter, we find Ben Yijū in Yemen. Thus, it is highly probably, that here the reference is to a letter from Mevassēr in reply to III, 29, for in III, 41 Ben Yijū writes, that Mevassēr had arrived in Yemen and had proven a complete failure. Our letter can hardly have been written between 1132 and 1149, the years of Ben Yijū's stay in India, during a temporary stay in Yemen, for the whole tenor of III, 29 and 41 clearly indicates that Ben Yijū was not in contact with his brothers during that entire period. Accordingly, the most likely date for our letter is 1150.

This assumption is corroborated by the references to another person, Al-Fawfalī (line 11 and verso, lines 1–2). 'Alī b. Manṣūr al-Fawfalī was a shipowner; Maḍmūn, the representative of the merchants in Aden, made him his business agent in Mangalore on the Malabar coast of India (II, 24v, lines 11–13). Ben Yijū sent with him pepper from India (II, 25, lines 9–10). However, his ship was wrecked and lost (II, 55, line 17—before 1149, because that letter was written, although not sent, by our Ben Yijū). That disaster explains perhaps the not very dignified behavior of al-Fawfalī here.

Only about one third of the letter is legible.

{'Zabīd' is not part of the address itself, which as usual is written on verso in the opposite direction, but is referred to, in the body of the letter, verso, line 2, as the place to which Al-Fawfalī absconded. The continuation, *fa-in waṣala ilaykum*, was translated by Goitein: 'when he arrives at your place,' from which he obviously concluded that Ben Yijū himself was in Zabīd. A more literal translation would be: 'if he arrives at your place.' As such, the letter presumably was sent by ship to Ben Yijū in India (and was identified as such, by Goitein, in Shaked, *Bibliography*, 55). Other portions of the letter, as the list of gifts sent Ben Yijū, the reference to almonds and pepper, Ben Yijū's dealing with the *kardāl*, and the apparent reference in lines 5 ff. to bronze vessels manufactured by Ben Yijū corroborate this suggestion.

While III, 29 and III, 41 speak of Ben Yijū's separation from his brothers for an extended period, they do not say that he had no indirect contact with them since he traveled to the East. In III, 7, lines 16–19 (dated by Goitein 1147 or 1148), for example, Joseph promised to forward to Ben Yijū any letter from Mevassēr that might arrive. Earlier Ben Yijū had sent a gift of 40 dinars to Mevassēr; see II, 29, lines 3 ff. and 363, n. 18. In the note to III, 16, line 12, Goitein in fact comments that Mevassēr had

informed Ben Yijū, who at that time was residing in India, of his intention to visit Eretz Israel. Accordingly, our letter was probably written during 1145–49, when Ben Yijū was in India (see page 648) or as suggested by III, 7, ca. 1148–49. Maḍmūn's later attempts to apprehend al-Fawfalī at Zabīd are described by Joseph b. Abraham in V, 9.⁵

Contents:

A. Acknowledgement of Ben Yijū's letter (lines 1–4).

B. Sundry items (lines 5–10).

{For the continuation, see the following translation.}

Translation

[C. Iron salvaged from ship grounded near Abyan, east of Aden, and other losses]

(11) Al-Fawfalī⁶ has not arrived. (12) The Kūfī iron,⁷ wh[ich was sent in] the ship of (13) Ibn al-Muqaddam,⁸ the ship [foundered] off the coast of Abyan⁹ [. . .] (14) The pepper and a part of the ir[on] was lost. [The iron] which [was salvaged]¹⁰ (15) is being detained¹¹ in the Furḍa¹² [. . .] and I do not know how much we will realize (16) from it, if anything at all [. . .]. You, my master, mentioned [. . .] that my share in it was (17) one and a quarter *bahārs* [. . .] (18) will be salvaged, God willing. Let's wait for what will arrive from it. This will be only after the sailing of the ships.¹³

⁵ See 704 and n. 3.

⁶ See the introductory comments and verso, line 1.

⁷ Cf. III, 25, lines 2, 3, 5, 9.

⁸ {For Ibn al-Muqaddam's ships, see page 147.}

⁹ The town Abyan, east of Aden, is intended. {See II, 71, line 61, margin, line 15, verso, lines 17, 36, 46, on Abyan and ships that sank in its vicinity.}

¹⁰ The restoration of the line is based on what follows here and on the striking parallel in III, 10, lines 28–34.

¹¹ Arabic *muhayyar*, common in this sense both in central Yemen (cf. Goitein, *Travels in Yemen*, 84) and in Aden (see Stace, *Vocabulary*, 47b; Dozy, *Supplément*, 1:344b: empêcher). {Cf. Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 117; Margariti, "Aden," 176, where delays in the customs house are discussed.}

¹² The customs house of Aden.

¹³ In III, 10, line 34, the writer remarks that the salvaging was done while he was writing his letter, at the time of the end of the summer season. Here obviously the custom officers were busy and could not attend to the assessment of the salvaged iron before the ships were dispatched. {Cf. Margariti, "Aden," 48.}

(19) Whatever will be realized, is profit,¹⁴ for it is better [...] (20) Should there be anything {add: more} realized from the *kārdāl*,¹⁵ kindly send it. Please make an effort (21) in this matter. Likewise in the matter of the 'eggs,'¹⁶ whatever will be realized [...], God willing.

[D. Five presents sent]

(22) There was already sent to you, my master, in the ship of Sheikh Maḍmūn with the *nākhudā* (23) Maḥrūz¹⁷—may God ordain his safe arrival!—what has no importance, namely a *maqta*¹⁸ for (24) your boy¹⁹ and a *dast*²⁰ of 12 sheets of Ṭalḥī paper,²¹ a bottle of wine, (25) a *rubā'yya*²² of soap and a *rubā'yya* of almonds. Please accept all of this. (26) The *maqta* and the paper are wrapped in a piece of cloth, on which is your name. Likewise on (27) every item is your name [...]

[E. The low price of pepper]

[Would] you, my lord, [send me] [Margin] (1) this year some (2) profitable purchase, as you have (3) kindly accustomed me to? However, the pepper (4) this year was cheap and did not return (5) the capital.²³ It is better²⁴ not to risk one's (6) possessions²⁵ and go bankrupt {alt. tr.:... this

¹⁴ When all might be lost, anything salvaged is profit. Similarly in II, 51, line 28.

¹⁵ See 592, n. 35.

¹⁶ {See pages 369–70.}

¹⁷ Maḍmūn b. Ḥasan and Maḥrūz b. Jacob.

¹⁸ For this gift, which Joseph sends, see 571, n. 17.

¹⁹ {Arabic *ghulām* can mean, among other things (see 598, n. 20), 'slave-agent' or 'son.' The context shows that 'son' was almost certainly intended here.}

²⁰ A *dast* was a certain quantity that made up a set of a particular item; cf. 304, n. 9.

²¹ Cf. II, 16v, line 31; II, 3, line 14.

²² {For this measure, see 314, n. 14. Joseph spells *rubā'yya*, with short *a*; see 561, n. 46.}

²³ The writer obviously asks not to buy for him pepper, which shows that Ben Yijū either was setting out to India again or had there the appropriate business connections. {As noted above, this letter was apparently sent to Ben Yijū in India. Accordingly, he is asked not to purchase pepper there.}

²⁴ Arabic *akhyar*. Same form in III, 10, line 50 (Yemenite); III, 29, line 16 (Maghrebi). See Dozy, *Supplément*, 1:416 (modern Egyptian) and Fück, *Arabīya*, 116 and 172. {Also see *Lisān al-'Arab*, 4:265; for the Yemenite dialect, cf. Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 141. In II, 55, line 30 (dictated by a Yemenite to a Maghrebi), *akhyar* is crossed out and corrected to *afḍal*. *Akhyar* also appears in II, 59, line 16, verso, line 5 (Yemenite, written in Egypt, the context somewhat similar to that found here); VII, 38, line 12.}

²⁵ Arabic *rahl*, literally 'baggage', i.e., the total of merchandise and money sent to a country or acquired there. Cf. III, 1, line 9; III, 4v, line 18. {*Rahl* can mean 'goods'; see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:452, n. 1.

year has sold poorly and does not guarantee the capital better than a risky investment on which one loses all}.²⁶

[F. Conclusion]

Please accept, my master, (7) the best, profuse greetings for your esteemed self. *And Peace*.

[G. Postscripts: Arrival of a letter from Ben Yijū's brother]

(8) There arrived a letter from your brother²⁷ (9) and I am forwarding it to you with this letter. (10) *And Peace*.

[H. Shipment of almonds]

(11) I beg to inform you, my master, that the ship (12) had sailed and could not be seen for some days. Then it came back (13) safe, thank God. (14) The aforementioned goods were forwarded to you, (15) except the almonds, for they were spoiled. I tried to get (16) others for you; but none arrived in town before the departure (18) of the people.²⁸

[I. Arrival of iron (from India) as well as some of the salvaged iron]

The iron has arrived.²⁹ (19) I took 123 pounds (20) and Sheikh Khalaf³⁰ his share, (21) while Sheikh Maḍmūn took the rest for you.³¹ [Verso]

²⁶ Arabic... *rakhīṣ mā yukhallīṣ rās al-māl akhyar min mā yukhātīr al-insān bi-raḥlihi wayuksar*. For *kballas*, 'guarantee,' see Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 134.} For *yuksar* cf. modern *inkasar*, Spiro, *Dictionary*, 376 and *kasara al-ḥākim al-tājir*, 'the judge declared the merchant bankrupt' (literally, 'broken'), Dozy, *Supplément*, 2:465 according to *Muḥīṭ al-Muḥīṭ*. See also III, 12, line 29. {Piamenta, *ibid.*, 430, *ksr* VII, 'to lose.'}

²⁷ See the introduction to this document.

²⁸ {Arabic *a-nās* (= *al-nās*). This term is used regularly in the documents of this book for 'merchants' or 'traveling merchants.' See 239, n. 4. As noted above, Goitein deduced from this passage that the letter was sent overland. I suggest that after the return of the ship to port, the writer took back the letter and checked the merchandise. The ship apparently returned because of a storm at sea, during which the almonds were spoiled. The postscripts, where the ink is slightly darker in the original than in the preceding lines, were added at this time, and the letter was then returned to the same ship. As was the practice, copies of the same letter could have been sent in different boats (see page 9 [n. 23]); this would explain the naming of the ship in recto, line 22.}

²⁹ Ben Yijū had bought or ordered that iron, while he was still in India. {Again, we can assume that this letter was sent to India. The iron referred to here and in the continuation is the same iron spoken of on recto, lines 12–18.}

³⁰ Khalaf b. Isaac.

³¹ Ben Yijū's share was brought to the warehouse of Maḍmūn b. Ḥasan, the representative of the merchants.

(1) Likewise, a little of the iron that was salvaged for us from the shipwreck.

[J. Measures to be taken concerning two unreliable merchants]

Al-Fawfalī (2) absconded to Zabīd.³² When {alt. tr.: If} he arrives at your place,³³ take from him for me the 'eggs'³⁴ or their proceeds. (3) Likewise, you mentioned that the *kārdāl*³⁵ did not deliver to you anything. And (4) you did not deliver to me goods purchased from him for six *mithqāls*. You know, my lord, (5) that you paid the *kardāl* (!) at your own initiative. Now, if you, my lord, send something, fine. However, (6) I leave the decision entirely to you {alt. tr.: if not—your opinion is more worthy}.³⁶ *And Peace.*

[K. Address]

(1) (To) *His excellency, the most illustrious sheikh [my master and lord] Abraham, son of his honor, great and holy* (2) *master Perahyā the scribe*³⁷ *b. Yijū*—may God make his honored position permanent!

³² See the introductory comments concerning al-Fawfalī. Absconded, Arabic *kharat* (or perhaps the word was pronounced *khiriṭ*), obviously a word from the merchants' jargon; cf. V, 8, line 17, *kunnā mukhriṭin* 'we fled'. The root *khriṭ* has in its first and seventh conjugations various meanings from which the sense intended here could be derived. So far, however, I have not found the latter in any other source. In southern Yemen, *ynkhrut* means to trick people. [Cf. Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 125: 'brag,' 'exaggerate,' 'lie,' 'allure,' etc. See II, 28, line 18, *kharat labu shay*, tentatively translated: 'something had made you act in haste.' Al-Fawfalī fled to Zabīd, because at that time forces that were the enemies of the rulers of Aden held it.

³³ For the significance of the alternate translation in establishing Ben Yijū's whereabouts, when this letter was written, see the discussion in the introduction.

³⁴ See recto, line 21.

³⁵ See III, 1, line 13. Ben Yijū had ordered from him merchandise and paid for it with Joseph b. Abraham's money; however, the man did not deliver. It is not clear who had to bear the loss under such circumstances. In III, 18 A and E, Ben Yijū paid back similar losses incurred from the *kārdār* (this is the correct form; see III, 1, line 13), while in III, 12, lines 27–29, we read a complaint that Ben Yijū charged his customers for money spent in transactions with that man (who perhaps had a monopoly in a certain field, viz., cardamom).

³⁶ {Arabic *fa-huwa awlā bi-ra'yihī*. Cf. III, 12, line 33. For such *ra'y* formulas in Fatimid petitions, see Khan, *Documents*, 314–16. For similar *ra'y* expressions, see 411, n. 21; 695, n. 8.}

³⁷ The addressee certainly excelled in the art of writing; and in II, 37, vs. 47, he calls himself a scribe, *lawlār* {for instances of his serving as a scribe, see page 54 and n. 15}. It seems, however, that here (and in III, 10v, the address; III, 10av, line 3) the title *sāfir* refers to his father. Ben Yijū's nephews, Perahyā (cf. III, 43, 45 and 55) and Moses (cf.

(1) (From) His servant, who is grateful for his favors (2) Joseph b. Abraham—*may the spirit of the Lord give him rest!*³⁸

III, 46), also were calligraphers (especially the former); it is a well-known fact that the art of writing was handed down in the same family for many generations, as is proved by the colophons of Hebrew manuscripts and by the living tradition in both Morocco and Yemen; see Goitein, *Yemenites*, 209 and n. 34 [id., *Med. Soc.*, 2:240].

³⁸ Isa. 63:14.