

as an influential communal official in Alexandria in a letter from this period.³⁶ But the passage is too damaged for safe reconstruction.)

9 AFTER CAPTURE BY INDIAN PIRATES

A Representative of Merchants in the Capital of Egypt, Stuck in Broach, North of Bombay, after Having been Captured by Pirates, is Invited by his Brother-in-law in Mangalore, Southern India, to Join him in his own Ship on the Way back to Aden

Ca. 1145

The writer of this letter, Maḥrūz ("Protected by God") b. Jacob, was a *nāḳhodā*, or shipowner, who commuted in his own boat between Aden and India. Occasionally we find him in the capital of Egypt, where his sister was married to the recipient of this letter, Judah b. Joseph ha-Kohen, representative of the merchants there. Judah's own sister was married to Maḍmūn, representative of the merchants in Aden (see no. 37, introduction). Thus we see that these India traders bolstered their economic positions by carefully arranged family bonds.

Judah b. Joseph ha-Kohen was the grandson of his namesake, the Rāv, or Master, who was so prominent in the Jewish community of Egypt during the second half of the eleventh century (see no. 35, nn. 1, 2, below). In more elaborate addresses he, like his grandfather, is called "Scion of the Gaons," and, like the latter, he himself signs documents with the title "Scion of Yehōseph (same as Joseph), the righteous priest," referring to the first member of the family, who, after emigrating from Baghdad to Jerusalem, became president of the High Court there at the end of the tenth century.¹ Such transitions from religious and legal to commercial leadership and vice versa were natural to the bourgeois society of

³⁶ TS 13 J 21, f. 30, l. 12, ed. J. Braslavsky, *Eretz Israel* 3, p. 208.

¹ See the genealogical lists and discussion in Mann, *Jews in Egypt*, II, 62-63.

the medieval Middle East and common to the three monotheistic religious communities.²

Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Heb. b 11, f. 22 (Cat. 2874, no. 21).
India Book 133.

IN (YOUR) NAME, O MERCI(FUL)!

*"Your hand shall be lifted upon your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off."*³

I am writing to you, my lord and master, my chief, the illustrious elder—may God prolong your life and make permanent your prominent position, may he be for you and with you and guard you in all your affairs. I am writing to you out of a strong longing; may God make us meet together presently in the best circumstances in his favor and bounty, if God wills, for it is up to him and it is in his power alone.

I wish to inform you, my lord, that I had previously written to you at Tāna.⁴ Meanwhile the accompanying boat of the ship⁵ arrived, and its soldiers told us that the ship in which your excellency my lord traveled was taken by pirates, and I was very sad about this. But afterwards I praised God and thanked him, when I heard that your life was saved. *"O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness."*⁶ Everything can be replaced except life; I would indeed like to mention to you, my lord, that your servant had a large shipment in the boat of Fōfalī ("Betel-nut merchant"), then God ordained what happened (i.e., everything was lost); in the end, however, God compensated me—praise and thanks to him. Likewise, my lord, do not be sad. God will replace your loss to you soon;

² India with its castes might have been different.

³ Micah 5:8. Intended as a good wish for the pirates.

⁴ Spelled Thana today, "21 miles northeast of Bombay city," S. Maqbul Ahmad, *India and the Neighbouring Territories, etc.*, Leiden, 1960, p. 106, and passim (see index). This and the following Indian localities occur also in other Geniza letters.

⁵ A large, ocean-going ship carrying freight and passengers was usually accompanied by a smaller vessel serving as lifeboat. The soldiers stationed on it for the protection of the ship on which Judah traveled, made off as soon as the pirates made their appearance.

⁶ Psalm 107:8. Usually said on such occasions.

you will live, if God wills and God will compensate you many times.

Your servant thought that your honor my lord was in Tāna, and I had previously sent letters to the nākhodā Tinbū, advising him to pay to my lord 21 mithqāls (Egyptian dinars) or more. Afterwards, however, my lord the Sheikh Abu 'l-Qāsim Ibn Qaṭṭān ("Dealer in cotton") came to Mangalore. I inquired about you and he told me that your excellency was in Broach.⁷ In all circumstances please come quickly to Mangalore and do not tarry, for I am waiting here in Mangalore and—if God wills—we shall embark on our way home as soon as possible. It is better for you to travel from Mangalore with me than to travel in the ships of foreign people. Please remember that there is no difference between us, my money is yours, it is just the same. The boats⁸ start presently from your place, from Kanbayāt,⁹ and from Tāna; please set out immediately so that you reach Mangalore with the vessels which, God willing, will soon be arriving in Malibārāt,¹⁰ Kayākannūr,¹¹ and Mangalore. If, my lord, you need any gold, please take it on my account from the nākhodā Tinbū, for he is staying in Tāna, and between him and me there are bonds of inseparable friendship and brotherhood.¹²

You would certainly like to know, my lord, that a sum in favor of your excellency remained with me on account of the silk. With it I bought twelve [. . .] and sixteen large [bahārs]¹³ peppers for

⁷ About four days' travel north of Tāna. Maqbūl (see n. 4, above), p. 102.

⁸ Ar. maṭāyā, a general word for mounts, riding animals, means of locomotion. The word may mean also carts drawn by oxen. The Middle East, throughout the Islamic period, was practically unfamiliar with any form of carriages and therefore had no word for them, see *Et*², s.v. 'Adjalah. Carts drawn by oxen were common in India and here possibly reference is made to convoys of them setting out at fixed periods. But see no. 10, n. 4, below.

⁹ Present day Cambay on the gulf with the same name, still north of Broach.

¹⁰ Malibār or Manibār is Malabar, but meaning both a region and a place on the southwestern coast of India.

¹¹ Kayākannūr, explained by Professor A. L. Basham as "Lesser Cannanore," kay meaning "lesser" in Tamil, the language spoken in those parts. Not found in any other Geniza paper.

¹² Tinbū, apparently a Hindu. Abu 'l-Qāsim, who was mentioned before in deferential terms, was a Muslim.

¹³ The terms "large" and "small" were applied to the bahār, usually 300 pounds in our papers. See no. 37, n. 35, below.

you, and I dispatch this for you under God's protection from Mangalore with the "Blessed" ship—may God ordain her safety.¹⁴

Attached to this letter, is another one in Arabic characters of the same content as this letter; please notice this. And again, my lord, do not take to heart what you have lost; you have, my lord, praise be to God, plenty to have recourse to and to be compensated with. When life is saved, nothing else matters. Nor do I need to urge you again to come to Mangalore.

Accept, my lord, copious regards for your noble self and convey copious regards to the elder Abu Sa'd. The writer of these lines,¹⁵ Abraham b. Yijū, conveys to your excellency copious regards, and those who attend the writing of this letter do the same. *May the well-being of my lord grow indefinitely and never become reduced.*

(Address:)

To be delivered to my noble lord, the light of my eyes, his honor, (our) M(aster) and T(eacher) Judah ha-Kohen, the wise and understanding, the son of his honor, greatness, and hol(iness), (our) M(aster) and T(eacher) Joseph ha-Kohen, may his soul be satiated with pleasures in the Gardens of Eden until he will be quickened at the end of the days.

From his servant Maḥrūz, the son of Jacob, (may he) r(est in) E(den).

Given in trust (i.e., no fees for delivery).

10 MEMO FROM THE INDIA ROUTE TO QŪṢ, UPPER EGYPT

This tersely written memo is instructive in many respects. Its time is fixed by the references in secs. 4 and 7 to the Jewish chief judge of Cairo Menaḥēm b. Isaac b. Sāsōn, who was active during the first third of the thirteenth century (see no. 8, n. 1, above). The

¹⁴ The "Blessed" (ship) belonged to Maḍmūn of Aden (see no. 37, below) and operated between Aden and Mangalore. *India Book* 28v, ll. 5-6.

¹⁵ The letter is a beautiful example of Abraham Yijū's calligraphy. The letter in Arabic characters probably was written by Maḥrūz himself and was destined to be shown, if necessary, to his non-Jewish business friends, especially Tinbū. The Hindu shipowner certainly knew Arabic.

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