

dinars on these goods until their proceeds would arrive. But after these settlements had been reached, we both began to argue and wrangle until the matter reached the courts. Finally, upright elders intervened, and today a settlement was reached to the effect that I should write you as follows:

Kindly list all the proceeds from the goods belonging to the elder Abū Ya'qūb, the Doctor, and also of the fifty sacks (of pepper), as far as they have been saved, on the payment of which my lord had given me respite,⁴ for I had made up my mind that he should have fifteen sacks of them. Of the total received deduct the 100 dinars I have prepaid him here, plus 11 1/2 dinars I had paid for the goods,⁵ and hand over the balance to your representative in accordance with your kindness to me at all times. I know well that all this causes you much trouble and I feel very badly about this, but it is not on my initiative that I write this letter. I am forced to do so. The account given to your representative should be an *official document*, signed by the elders.⁶

I wish to inform you also that it was established here *in court* that the total due me from my lord is:

100 dinars

11 1/2 dinars for the balance of the copper⁷

3 dinars for the additional expenses⁸

Fifteen sacks of pepper, 5 dinars per sack.

All that is above the total of this sum belongs to him and all that is less, to me, and he has no share in it and no responsibility; even if all has perished he is not obliged to return the prepayment of 100 dinars. This is stated expressly in *the record of the court*.

Now, my lord, exercise your usual circumspection—may I never

⁴ Since Ḥasan-Japheth had goods of both Lebdi and the Doctor in his warehouse, he ordered pepper for them in India without demanding cash in advance, as was usual. While writing the letter referred to in the previous note, Lebdi did not yet know that most of the pepper, too, had been lost. This additional misfortune naturally exacerbated the situation.

⁵ See n. 7, below.

⁶ And not merely a report of the trustee of the merchants.

⁷ The Doctor had sent hammered copper (*naḥās darb*). In Aden it was found out that only cast copper (*ṣabb*) could be exported to India. Lebdi paid the difference, 11 1/2 dinars.

⁸ The Doctor had given 20 dinars to Lebdi for expenses (freight, customs, etc.). But the total at reaching Aden was 23 dinars.

be deprived of you and never miss your favors—and examine with the light of God, the exalted, the case of those fifty sacks of pepper. Divide what has been salvaged in proper proportion between him and me. Originally, thirty-five sacks had been mine and fifteen his. So, divide the remains accordingly and explain everything clearly. The proceeds from the cast copper⁹ belong to the elder Abū Ya'qūb, not to me. Please copy from your account book all that is due him after deduction of customs and commission and give a certified copy to your representative. Buy whatever you deem fit for my 100 dinars and send it with whomever you prefer. If possible, send pepper or lac. At the time of the sending of the shipment, please inform some of our coreligionists traveling here, at least two of them. *And peace*.

37 THE LEADERS OF THE INDIA TRADE

The Trustee of the Merchants in Aden writes to his counterpart in the capital of Egypt

Ca. 1130

This important and large fragment (69 lines preserved) lacks both the beginning and the end and consequently the address is also missing. But it is in the unmistakable, characteristic hand of Maḍmūn I b. Japheth, the son and successor (in his capacity of trustee of merchants) of the recipient of the preceding selection, no. 36. The graphological evidence is confirmed by many details, which also indicate that the letter was addressed to Maḍmūn's counterpart in Fustat, Abū Zikrī Judah Kohen b. Joseph, who also happened to be his brother-in-law (see no. 9, above).

This letter presents an excellent illustration of the activities of a Jewish trustee of merchants in a port city. He takes care of the estate of foreign traders who perished in shipwreck (sec. A) and collaborates closely with the most prominent Muslim merchant in town (secs. B, C). This man, Bilāl b. Jarīr, later became a general and ruler of Aden, a transition natural in medieval mercantile nations, such as the Arabs and Italians. Maḍmūn constructed a ship, presum-

⁹ Called here *butrūh*, the term common in the India trade.

ably an especially strong one, for the route of 2,100 miles to Ceylon, the island near the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent, from which cinnamon and other Oriental products were imported. It is remarkable and perhaps not without interest for the history of minor arts that, besides merchants, three Jewish gold- (or silver-) smiths, one of them a Maghrebi, traveled in this new ship to Ceylon.

Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Heb. a 3 (Cat. 2873), f. 19. *India Book* 32.

A. ABOUT THE ESTATES OF TWO SHIPWRECKED TRADERS AND
A LARGE GIFT TO THE FAMILY OF ONE OF THEM

My lord inquired about Zikrī b. Abu 'l-Faraj of Tripoli.¹ He arrived safely, sold, bought, finished his affairs, and returned home² in the same year.

The elder Nahray b. 'Allān³ arrived with him, carrying a power of attorney from the son of Nissīm b. Benaya,⁴ and Zikrī of Tripoli, too, had a power of attorney from the families of the two Maghrebis who perished in the boat of Ja'far. I took notice of the two writs. The two dead men had deposited with me 140 Maliki dinars.⁵ With this sum the attorneys bought two bales of lac, containing 1,000 pounds, for 113 dinars, the expenses⁶ for these two bales being 13

¹ One of the two traders who had a power of attorney to deal with the estates (see below). He is mentioned again as being engaged in the India trade in a letter written about ten years later by Judah Kohen, the surmised recipient of our letter (*India Book* 244v, ll. 3-4).

² Ar. *ḵharaj*. For this use see no. 43, n. 18, below. Normally, merchants who made this long voyage remained out on the India route for more than one year.

³ A seasoned India traveler, repeatedly mentioned. An interesting letter of his is translated in no. 40, below.

⁴ ENA 4011, f. 57v, dated June 24, 1129, shows him still active in Egypt.

⁵ The exchange rate between this dinar of Aden and the internationally accepted Egyptian dinar varied in the Geniza papers from 1:2.2 to 1:4. The official exchange rate was 1:4.5 (see O. Löfgren, *Arabische Texte zur Kenntnis der Stadt Aden im Mittelalter*, 1936, glossary, p. 34). According to a communication of George C. Miles, the American Numismatic Society possesses a Maliki dinar weighing 2.33 grams. This would correspond approximately to the rate 1:2.2, provided it was not excessively debased.

The bulk of the dead men's possessions, their merchandise, naturally was with them in the shipwrecked boat.

⁶ Customs and other dues in Aden plus freight Aden-'Aydhab. Our Maḍmūn was also *nāzīr*, or superintendent, of the port and as such able to know such things exactly.

dinars. They bought Qaṣṣī⁷ fabrics for 14 dinars to cover the expenses of the customs in 'Aydhāb⁸ and the freight for the way through the desert. This makes a total of 140 dinars.

The two attorneys agreed between themselves to put this shipment into the hand of Abraham, son of the *Reliable* Claimant,⁹ in order, if God wills, to carry it to Fustat together with my merchandise. When all of them are there, the two attorneys will go to court and each one's right on this shipment will be established and he then will take it. Here in Aden there is no one who could decide this matter or even who knows the situation. I took a writ of release from each of them and no longer have any responsibility with regard to this.

I also gave two *bahārs* (sacks) of lac to Zikrī of Tripoli, as a gift to the family of the Nafūsī¹⁰ in Tripoli, for I have heard that they are very poor. I believe this was the right thing to do.¹¹

B. A PARTNERSHIP WITH THE MUSLIM MERCHANT
PRINCE BILĀL FOR THE TRADE WITH CEYLON

After asking God, the exalted, for guidance I constructed¹² a boat in Aden and sent goods in it to Ceylon in partnership with the illustrious sheikh Bilāl. These of our coreligionists traveled in it: Sālim, the son of the cantor,¹³ Ibn Ḥidāda ("of the art of smithing"), and al-Baṭīṭī ("maker of slippers"),¹⁴ and the goldsmith, who had

⁷ An Indian textile, which was one of the staple goods going West, mostly spelled with *ṣṣ* (not *ss*). See Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles*, XIII-XIV, 113-115.

⁸ The great port on the Sudanese coast, now extinct, corresponding approximately to Port Sudan of today. From there one traveled overland to the Nile, and then by boat down to Cairo. See no. 10, sec. 14, above.

⁹ A nickname probably given because of an incident during a lawsuit. The name appears elsewhere.

¹⁰ Several merchants with this family name, derived from the Nafūsa region near Tripoli, were active in the India trade at that time.

¹¹ Two *bahārs*, averaging 600 pounds (see n. 25, below) were an exceptionally great gift, the like of which would never be sent even to the highest religious dignitary. We find gifts to the bereaved families of traders elsewhere, too, a kind of mutual insurance of merchants engaged in perilous undertakings.

¹² Ar. *anṣhā*.

¹³ Back in Aden in 1134 (*India Book* 87, ed. S. D. Goitein, *Sinai* 16 [1953], 231).

¹⁴ These two merchants appear together in a letter to Judah Kohen (the

arrived here in his company, and the two goldsmiths, who came this year, Abū 'Alī and the Maghrebi. All these traveled in the boat, may God ordain their safe arrival.

C. A PARTNERSHIP WITH BILĀL FOR
THE TRADE WITH EGYPT

Again your servant asked God, the exalted, for guidance and sent sixty bales of lac, weighing 100 bahār, with the illustrious elder Nahray b. 'Allān and with the elder¹⁵ Abraham, son of Abu 'l-Ḥasan, known as son of the Reliable Claimant, and through both,¹⁶ in partnership with the illustrious sheikh Bilāl b. Jarīr al-Awḥadī¹⁷ and eight bales of pepper, to be sold in 'Aydhāb for customs expenses and freight, and also 100 Qaṣṣī robes for customs in Suwākin¹⁸ and other places. All this belongs to the partnership.

I am asking you now, relying on your favors, when this shipment, God willing, safely arrives, to kindly take delivery of one-half of the aforementioned bales and sell them for me for whatever price God will apportion and grant.¹⁹ After the price is agreed upon, turn everything into gold and silver—nothing else²⁰—and distribute it among various merchants, coreligionists, or others, if they are known as reliable,²¹ and send it on.

surmised recipient of our letter) as commuting between al-Mahdiyya and Sicily (Bodl. MS Heb. c 28 [Cat. 2876], f. 60). See *Med. Soc.*, 1, 332, n. 27.

¹⁵ Not "illustrious." He was one of the many minor luminaries of the India trade. See also below.

¹⁶ They were in charge of the actual transport.

¹⁷ See the introduction and *ET*¹ under "Karam (Banu al-)." For al-Awḥadī, Löfgren, *Aden* (see n. 5, above), *passim*, always has al-Muḥammadī.

¹⁸ Another Sudanese port, still operating.

¹⁹ A Muslim trustee of the merchants would do the same service for Bilāl's share. But the final profits would be pooled together, as proper in a partnership.

²⁰ No merchandise, such as Lebdi carried with him on his way to Aden and India. See no. 36, above.

²¹ This does not mean that non-Jews were regarded as generally unreliable, but the Jewish merchants between Spain and India, as far as they were of consequence, formed a kind of closed club, known to each other, certainly at least to the trustees of the merchants.

D. INSTRUCTIONS TO THE RECIPIENT AND AN
ORDER FOR HOUSEHOLD GOODS

Leave some money in the hand of the aforementioned Abraham, son of the Reliable Claimant, and if he has need for it, give him a loan of 100 mithqāls²² in partnership with me, from which he might derive profit. Buy for him what he wishes²³ and let me know in your letter what you have bought for him.

I also ordered him to buy for me a wickerwork basket with china:²⁴ bowls, dishes, and cups, also for 4 mithqāls good rose marmalade, such as one prepares for the household. I gave him a memo, and please have him act accordingly.

On my own account I sent with him sixty bags of Sēli (Ceylon) cinnamon, each bag weighing 100 pounds, which makes a total of twenty bahārs.²⁵ Kindly take delivery of one-half of this, too, and sell it for your servant for any price God, the exalted, may apportion. Please keep the account for this apart, since it is for me personally.²⁶

(Here the manuscript breaks off. A short marginal note is incomplete and not connected with the text translated above.)

38 DAY-TO-DAY BUSINESS WITH INDIA

From Aden to the Malabar coast of Southwest India

1139

The writer of this letter, Khalaf b. Isaac b. Bundār, was a cousin of Maḍmūn b. Japheth (Ḥasan)—see no. 37—and closely cooperated with him. His correspondence, much of which has been preserved, is a valuable source for the India trade around the middle of the twelfth century. It shows that a very lively traffic connected India with the West; because of the tremendous risks the quantities

²² Egyptian dinars.

²³ The Maghrebi merchant was not familiar with the Cairene market.

²⁴ Ar. *ghadār*, which could mean also fine pottery. Real china naturally came from the East and was sent by Maḍmūn to Cairo (*India Book* 33).

²⁵ Here the bahār is taken as weighing 300 pounds, which was indeed the standard at that time and place. But see no. 38, n. 2, below.

²⁶ And not in partnership with Bilāl. The other half of the cinnamon probably went farther west, e.g., to Palermo or al-Mahdiyya.