

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 elder<sup>15</sup> Abraham, son of Abu 'l-Ḥasan, known as son of the Reliable Claimant, and through both,<sup>16</sup> in partnership with the illustrious sheikh Bilāl b. Jarīr al-Awḥadī<sup>17</sup> and eight bales of pepper, to be sold in 'Aydhāb for customs expenses and freight, and also 100 Qaṣṣī robes for customs in Suwākin<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> After the price is agreed upon, turn everything into gold and silver—nothing else<sup>20</sup>—and distribute it among various merchants, coreligionists, or others, if they are known as reliable,<sup>21</sup> and send it on.

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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.

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

<sup>16</sup> They were in charge of the actual transport.

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

<sup>18</sup> Another Sudanese port, still operating.

<sup>19</sup> 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.

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

<sup>21</sup> 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 mithqāls<sup>22</sup> in partnership with me, from which he might derive profit. Buy for him what he wishes<sup>23</sup> 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:<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>

(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

<sup>22</sup> Egyptian dinars.

<sup>23</sup> The Maghrebi merchant was not familiar with the Cairene market.

<sup>24</sup> 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).

<sup>25</sup> 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.

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

sent in each ship for each individual merchant were comparatively limited in size; losses were borne with remarkable equanimity; and a spirit of friendly cooperation prevailed between Jew, Muslim, and Hindu (also Christian, of course, although rarely mentioned), and between the free merchants and the bond-servants who served as their agents. Three of these slaves, acting as business agents, one with an Arab, one with a Persian, and one with a Hindu name, appear in this letter.

The recipient, Abraham b. Yijū, is the most important single figure of the India papers preserved in the Geniza. At least seventy items were addressed to him or emanated from his hands, including one which he might have written in his youth while still in his native city, al-Mahdiyya, Tunisia, namely, a poem in honor of the Jewish judge of that city, Labraṭ II b. Moses II (grandson of Labraṭ I b. Moses I, who wrote letter no. 33, above). The preservation of so much material related to one merchant finds its explanation in his life story. After a sojourn of at least seventeen years in India and an additional three in Yemen, he returned to Egypt and married his daughter and only surviving child to his nephew, who later became a judge with little interest, we may assume, for the mercantile and industrial exploits of his father-in-law (and even perhaps his poetical creations). Thus these carefully kept writings, which had been spared by the termites of India for so many years, then traveled by sea all the way from India to Aden, from there to a Sudanese port, then through the desert, and finally on the Nile down to Fustat, were heedlessly thrown away one day into the Geniza chamber. Nor did they remain there undisturbed. Most of the larger pieces are fragmentary, and the total of the material preserved clearly makes the impression of being only a small remnant of the original collection. Yijū was a calligrapher, as were several prominent correspondents of his, such as Khalaf b. Isaac, the writer of our letter. Merchants with a poor hand, such as Maḍmūn, usually had their letters copied by professional clerks. The synagogue compound, where the Geniza was located, also contained a school, and the schoolmasters, always eager to provide their more advanced pupils with examples of well-styled and beautifully written business letters, certainly plundered Yijū's files for generations. Yet what we do still have is priceless.

Khalaf's letter is translated here in full, because it is a comparatively short example of a completely preserved letter going from Aden to India. The calculation of the date is based on a comparison with several details found in other letters, to explain which would take us too far afield. Likewise, practically all the persons and ships mentioned here recur elsewhere. References to such occurrences are made only when they require comment.

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter Collection, TS 24.64,  
*India Book* 56.

#### A. INTRODUCTION, THE BEGINNING IN RHYME

In (Your) name, O Merci(ful).

The letter of your excellency, the illustrious elder, has arrived, [may God prolong your life /] and make permanent your honored position, and rank / highness, and loftiness / ex[cellence, and ascendancy / ]. May he never deprive your dwelling-place and court of any good. / [May he bestow] upon you that which is most suitable of all he usually confers. / May he subdue those that are envious of you and crush your enemies, / and may all your affairs be completed successfully.

I was glad when I looked at your letter even before I had taken notice of its content. Then I read it full of happiness and, while studying it, became joyous and cheerful. For it was reassuring for me to learn from it about your well-being and your satisfactory state. Then I praised God for this very much and asked him to give you more of all the best in his mercy.

You mentioned, my master, that you were longing for me. Believe me that I feel twice as strongly and even more than what you have described; may God decree our coming together in the near future in complete happiness through his mercy, if God wills.

#### B. SHIPMENTS FROM INDIA

I took notice, my master, of your announcement of the sending of "refurbished" iron<sup>1</sup> in the boat of the *nāḳhodā* (shipowner) Ibn

<sup>1</sup> Because of the perennial wars between Christians and Muslims, the Jews did not trade in iron in the Mediterranean. In the India trade, however, iron was a staple commodity rarely absent from any larger shipment leaving India. Four types are mentioned; "refurbished" translates *muhdath*, lit., "renewed."

Abi 'l-Katā'ib. The shipment has arrived and I received from him two bahārs and one-third, as you noted.<sup>2</sup>

The nākhodā Joseph<sup>3</sup> arrived from Dahbattān<sup>4</sup> in the ship of Ibn al-Muqaddam and I received two basins, two ewers, and two basins for candlesticks from him.<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, I took delivery from my master, the illustrious elder Maḍmūn, of 30 raṭl cardamom from your bag and paid the customs duties for it, as you had written.

As to the covers,<sup>6</sup> which remained with you, my master, kindly send them.

However, my lord, I have not received a thing of the betel-nuts mentioned by you, for you wrote that you sent them with Jawhar, the slave-agent of Ḍāfir, but he has not arrived this year.

#### C. SHIPWRECK

As to your shipment, my master, forwarded from Fandaraynā<sup>7</sup> in the ship of Fatan Swamī<sup>8</sup> through the Sheikh Abu 'l-Ḥasan b. Ja'far:

His smaller ship arrived and I took delivery from it of one and a quarter and an eighth bahār of pepper, as was stated in your

<sup>2</sup> The *bahār* contained 300 pounds (see no. 37, n. 25, above). But the bahārs of different products sometimes differed in weight. See Hinz, *Masse*, pp. 8-10.

In *India Book* 26, Khalaf received 2 1/4 (not 2 1/3, as here) bahārs of iron. I observed similar phenomena elsewhere in the India trade. Should we assume that they had quotas for certain products such as iron?

<sup>3</sup> Certainly Joseph b. Abraham b. Bundār, another cousin of Khalaf active in the India trade. As the next selection, no. 39, shows, Joseph was especially interested in Indian bronze vessels.

<sup>4</sup> A port on the Malabar coast (still existing, under the name Valarapattanam), repeatedly mentioned, because Abraham Yijū had his brass factory there. See Muh. Husain Nainar, *Arab Geographers' Knowledge of Southern India*, Madras, 1942, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> These basins, called here *ṭest sham'*, but today in Yemen *maghras*, serve as lampstand, flower vase (when turned upside down), and drinking cup.

<sup>6</sup> The covers of bronze vessels, often referred to. Obviously the vessels were standardized, so that covers could be ordered separately.

<sup>7</sup> Present day Pantalāyini, south of Cannanore, often mentioned since pepper was exported from there. See S. Maqbul Ahmad, *India and the Neighboring Territories, etc.*, Leiden, 1960, p. 83.

Note that one Jew sends a shipment to another with a Muslim on a Hindu ship. The same here, sec. H, and *India Book* 28, etc.

<sup>8</sup> Indian Pattani-svāmi, "Lord of the mart," chief of merchant guild in a port or market-town (communicated by Professor A. L. Basham).

memo to my master, the illustrious elder Maḍmūn, as well as of a bahār of *amlas* ("smooth") iron.

The bigger ship, however, arrived near Berbera,<sup>9</sup> when its captain got into trouble with it until it was thrust against Bāb al-Mandeb,<sup>10</sup> where it foundered. The pepper was lost completely; God did not save anything of it. As to the iron, mariners were brought from Aden, who were engaged to dive for it and salvage it. They salvaged about one-half of the iron, and, while I am writing this letter, they are bringing it out of the Furḍa (the customs house of Aden) to the storehouse of the illustrious elder, my master Maḍmūn b. al-Ḥasan. All the expenses incurred for the diving and for transport will be deducted from whatever will be realized for that iron and the rest will be divided proportionally, each taking his proper share.

I regret your losses very much. But the H(oly one, be) he b(lessed) will compensate you and me presently.

#### D. HOUSEHOLD GOODS ORDERED

As to the household goods ordered by you, my master:

You asked me to buy a frying pan<sup>11</sup> of stone in a case. Later on, its case broke, whereupon I bought you an iron pan for a *niṣāfi*,<sup>12</sup> which is, after all, better than a stone pan. I also bought you glassware for a niṣāfi: goblets, bowls and cups, namely sixty-eight goblets, ten bowls, and five cups; with the basket, which cost a qīrāt, it made exactly one niṣāfi; furthermore, five green bottles with their baskets for 11 qīrāt, the total being a dinar and 11 qīrāts.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> A town in the Somali Republic, Africa. The neighborhood was proverbial for its dangers for seafaring, but the town itself seems to be known only from literary sources over a hundred years later than the references in the Geniza. See *El'* 1, 1172, s.v. Berbera. See no. 79, below.

<sup>10</sup> Up to the present day the name of the straits between the southern tip of Arabia and Africa. But in ancient times it was also the name of a place on that tip and this is what is intended here.

<sup>11</sup> Called here *ṭājin*, which is Greek *teganon*, but referred to in *India Book* 60, which deals with the same matter, with the good Ar. word *miqlāt*. A Yemenite stone named *ḥaraḍ* is used for its manufacture and believed to give a specific, tasty flavor to the food.

<sup>12</sup> Half a Maliki dinar. See no. 37, n. 5, above.

<sup>13</sup> As indicated by the low price, all this must have been local glass, as the one manufactured in Lakhaba near Aden (*India Book* 61). Finer glass was ordered via Egypt.

As to the small pots, I could not get any separate, only in sets. The wheat has been made ready for dispatch to you by my master, the illustrious elder Maḍmūn.<sup>14</sup>

#### E. SILK SENT INSTEAD OF GOLD

I sent to you five mann<sup>15</sup> of good silk on my account, for I saw that my master, the illustrious elder Maḍmūn, had sent some to Ben 'Adlān and to others and it was reported in his (Ben 'Adlān's) name that it is selling well in Malabar. Therefore, I thought it was preferable to send, instead of gold, merchandise which might bring some profit. Thus, kindly sell it for me for whatever price God, the exalted, apportions and grants, and buy me whatever God, the exalted, assigns and send it to me in any ship, without any responsibility for any risk on land or sea. If there is an opportunity to buy betel-nut or cardamom, kindly do so, but you, my master, need no instructions, for you are competent. Indeed, I cause you trouble every year; but, you, my master, do excuse me, as it has always been your habit, past and present.

#### F. REQUEST TO INTERVENE WITH A MUSLIM NOTABLE

Moreover, my master, last year, I sent to the captain Mas'ūd, the Abyssinian, 30 Egyptian mithqāls, to buy whatever God, the exalted, would apportion. When, however, he arrived at your place, the well-known misfortune befell him. He informed me that he had bought me two bahārs of pepper, which he carried with him, and that there remained for me 17 1/4 mithqāls, which were deposited with my master, the illustrious Sheikh Abu 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Ja'far. Therefore, I, the captain Mas'ūd, and Bakhtyār, the slave-agent of 'Alī b. Ja'far, went to the illustrious Sheikh 'Alī b. Muḥammad Nīlī ("the indigo merchant") and he (Mas'ūd) reported the matter to him, whereupon I received a notification from Nīlī to 'Alī b. Ja'far about it. When you meet him, kindly greet him for me and ask him to buy

<sup>14</sup> The staple food of southern India was rice, not wheat. Wheat, which was frequently sent to Abraham Yijū, was needed for religious purposes. Grace was said over bread, not over rice.

<sup>15</sup> Approximately 10 pounds. Silk was traded in standard quantities of 10 pounds, costing 20 Egyptian dinars.

me for this sum what God, the exalted, apportions and to send it in any ship without any responsibility for any risk on sea or land, in this world or in the world to come.<sup>16</sup> I do not need to give you instructions on how to approach him: "a hint is sufficient for a wise man."

May my lord receive the best greetings for his honored self and convey the best and most plentiful greetings in my name to my master, the noble scion,<sup>17</sup> and all whom your care embraces, and Bama.<sup>18</sup> *And Peace.*

#### G. PRESENTS SENT

(Margin:)

I sent what has no importance or value, namely a bottle of sugar and a good Abyssinian hide.<sup>19</sup> On the hide, there is written "Yijū" from outside and from inside on various places. Favor me by accepting this and excuse me, as has been your habit, past and present, and best greetings to you and sincerest regards and salutation. *And Peace.*

(Verso:)

I also notify you, my master, that the basket with the glassware and the five bottles are with the nākhodā<sup>20</sup> Aḥmad, the nākhodā of the ship of the Fadiyār; on all of them there is written Yijū in Hebrew script. The hide and the bottle of sugar are with the elder Abu 'l-Ḥasan al-Maḥallī, and the silk is with the elder Abū 'Alī b. Ṭayyib. Please, my master, take delivery of all this, which is in the Fadiyār's ship—may God ordain its safety.

<sup>16</sup> This religious formula is not specifically Islamic. It is found in Heb. and Aram. Geniza documents.

<sup>17</sup> The recipient's only son, who died on the way home.

<sup>18</sup> Yijū's slave and business agent, a respected member of his household. In another letter (*India Book* 57), Khalaf calls him "Brother Bama." Bama, as I learned from Professor A. L. Basham, is vernacular for Brahma.

<sup>19</sup> Probably for the dining room. See *Med. Soc.*, I, III.

<sup>20</sup> Nākhodā means literally "master of the ship" (in Persian) and usually designates its owner. But here it designates the man in command of the finances and other matters related to the passengers, i.e., the purser. The proprietor of this frequently mentioned boat was a Hindu, and the name, like Fattan Swamī (n. 8, above), was in reality a title.

May God, the exalted, unite me with you *in his mercy and compassion. And Peace.*

(Address, right side:)

To his excellency, the illustrious elder, my master Abū Ishāq Abraham, *son of his h(onor), g(reatness and) h(oliness), R(abbi) Perahya, the scribe,*<sup>21</sup> son of Yijū; may God preserve his prosperous state.

(Left side:)

His servant, who is longing for him, Khalaf, son of Isaac; (*may he be rememb(ered) for R(esurrection).*)<sup>22</sup>

### 39 THE INDIAN BRONZE FACTORY OF ABRAHAM YIJŪ

*A letter from Joseph b. Abraham, Aden*  
Late 1130s

Joseph b. Abraham b. Bundār, a cousin of Maḍmūn (no. 37, above) and Khalaf (no. 38), appears in most of his letters as a trader in products of the Indian bronze industry, although other Indian items, such as iron, spices of all descriptions, and textiles, are not absent from his correspondence. Abraham Yijū (see no. 38, introduction, above) ran a bronze factory in India, accounts of which have been preserved. From the West, that is Spain-Aden, copper, tin, and old bronze vessels were sent to India, while new or repaired vessels would return from there. Some of the items ordered here might have been for the use of friends or the writer's own household.

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter Collection,  
TS 12.320, *India Book* 51.

#### A. LOSSES AND ARRIVALS

In (Your) name, O Merci(ful).

The letter of your excellency, the illustrious elder, my master, has

<sup>21</sup> Thus Abraham had learned his beautiful handwriting from his father.

<sup>22</sup> This rare blessing is still used by the Yemenite Jews.

arrived. It was the most pleasant letter that came / and the most delightful message that reached me. / I read and understood it, etc. (another three lines).

You, my master, may God make your honored position permanent, wrote that you kindly sold the silk and sent goods for its proceeds and that you sent them in the ships of *Rāshmit*.<sup>1</sup> I learned, however, that *Rāshmit's* two ships were lost completely. May *the H(oly one, be) he b(lessed)*, compensate me and you. Do not ask me, my master, how much I was affected by the loss of the cargo belonging to you. But the Creator will compensate you soon. In any case, there is no counsel against the decree of God.

All the "copper" (vessels, *naḥās*), which you sent with Abū 'Alī,<sup>2</sup> arrived, and the "table-bowl" also arrived.<sup>3</sup> It was exactly as I wished—may God give you a good reward and undertake your recompensation (for only he is able to do it adequately).

#### B. EXCOMMUNICATION OF A TARDY DEBTOR

You, my master, mentioned that you approached the *kārdāl*<sup>4</sup> gently in order to get something for us back from him. Perhaps you should threaten him that here in Aden we excommunicate anyone that owes us something and does not fulfill his commitments. Maybe he will be afraid of the excommunication. If he does not pay, we shall issue an official letter of excommunication and send it to him, so that he will become aware of his crime.

<sup>1</sup> For *Rāmisht*, a shipowner often mentioned in the Geniza papers. He died in 1140. See S. M. Stern, "Rāmisht of Sirāf, a Merchant Millionaire of the Twelfth Century," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1967) pp. 10-14.

<sup>2</sup> Abū 'Alī b. Ṭayyib al-Miṣrī (of Fustat), a Jewish India trader, introduced to Abraham Yijū as a novice in *India Book* 53, returning from India here, and again setting out eastward in no. 38, sec. G, above.

<sup>3</sup> Ar. *zirkhuwān*, repeatedly mentioned in the Geniza papers, but otherwise unknown, is defined by the writer in *India Book* 219 as "a bowl (*marfa*'), decorated with network, which we call z." The word *marfa*' is still used in Yemen for (a) a drum made of copper, (b) a large bowl.

<sup>4</sup> For *kārdār*, "manager" (Persian). This affair is dealt with in greater detail in other letters. Our writer was a member of the rabbinical court in Aden. Ban as punishment for defaulting debtors already noted in the Talmud, Mo'ed Qaṭan 17a.