

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, *nahās*), 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.

## C. VARIOUS ORDERS, ESPECIALLY FOR BRONZE VESSELS

The re(d) betel-nuts arrived, as well as the two washbasins<sup>5</sup>—may God give you a good reward. Please do not send me any more red betel-nuts, for they are not good. If there are any white, fresh betel-nuts to be had, it will be all right.

Please do not send me anything either betel-nuts or any other goods you acquire for me, in partnership with anyone, but specify each person and every item of merchandise.<sup>6</sup>

I am sending you a broken ewer and a deep washbasin,<sup>7</sup> weighing seven pounds less a quarter. Please make me a ewer of the same measure from its copper (or bronze, *ṣufr*) for it is good copper. The weight of the ewer should be five pounds exactly.

I am also sending 18 1/4 pounds of good yellow copper (*ṣufr aṣfar*, hardly "brass") in bars and five pounds of Qal'ī "lead"<sup>8</sup> in a big mold and a piece of Egyptian "lead" (in the form of) a shell. Please put the bars, the "lead," and what remains from the manufacture of the ewer together and have two table-bowls for two dishes made for your servant, each table-bowl being of seventeen *fil(l)*,<sup>9</sup> of the same form as the table-bowl you sent me; they should be of good workmanship.

<sup>5</sup> Ar. *jaḥna*, from which Spanish *jofaina* is derived.

<sup>6</sup> The Yemenites whose mores I studied are indeed very much opposed to partnership. (See Goitein, *Jemenica*, p. 39, no. 201.) But larger business was conducted in partnership. See no. 27, sec. B, above.

<sup>7</sup> Ar. *ḥarnīb*, from Greek *ḥhernīps*, "gourd," regularly found in the lists of trousseaux.

<sup>8</sup> I put "lead" in quotation marks, for "Qal'ī lead" was a regular term for tin in the Muslim East (see *Et* s.v. *Ḥalī*). Bronze is an alloy of tin and copper. The writer uses Ar. *naḥās* and *ṣufr* indiscriminately for copper, bronze, and brass, and for bronze or brass vessels. Even "yellow copper" (*ṣufr aṣfar*) here seems to be copper rather than brass, for brass is hardly traded in bars, at least when coming from the West. Richard Ettinghausen drew my attention to M. Aga-Oglu, "A Brief Note on Islamic Terminology for Bronze and Brass," *JAOS* 64 (1944), 218ff., who arrives at similar conclusions while discussing Islamic literary sources.

<sup>9</sup> From *India Book* 65 it is evident that the *fil(l)* was 1/100 of a *ḥarāsila*, an often-mentioned Indian weight, which is given by Hinz (*Masse*, p. 9) as approximating 10-12.5 kg., and by O. Löfgren (*Aden*, glossary, p. 49; see no. 37, n. 5, above) as 10-17 kg. Thus a *fil(l)* would weigh at least 10 gm. The word might be connected with the Persian small coin *pul*.

## D. DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF A LAMP ORDERED

Make me a nice lamp from the rest of all the copper (*ṣufr*). Its column should be octagonal and stout, its base should be in the form of a lampstand with strong feet. On its head there should be a copper (*naḥās*) lamp with two ends for two wicks, which should be set on the end of the column so that it could move up and down. The three parts, the column, the stand and the lamp, should be separate from one another. If they could make the feet in spirals, then let it be so; for this is more beautiful. The late *Abu 'l-Faraj al-Jubaylī* made a lamp of such a description. Perhaps this will be like it.<sup>10</sup>

## E. ADDITIONAL ORDERS

This year, I did not succeed in sending gold<sup>11</sup> or silk. Instead, I am sending currency,<sup>12</sup> 20 Malikī dinars, old dinars of good gold. Please pay with it the price of the labor of the coppersmith and for the rest buy me a quantity of "eggs" (a kind of cardamom) and cardamom, and if this is not to be had, anything else which God, be he praised, makes available. And, please, send everything with the first ship sailing.

Please buy me two washbasins of middle size, somewhat larger than those you previously sent me, and a large washbasin, which holds two waterskins of water, measuring two *siqāyas*.<sup>13</sup>

## F. PRESENTS SENT

I am sending you some things of no importance or value, namely two *ruba'iyas*<sup>14</sup> of white sugar; a bottle, in a tight basket, entirely<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> This lamp is similar to the "lampe d'usage domestique" (no. 39.85.2), which was kindly shown to me by Mlle. LeScour in the storeroom of the Musée de l'Homme, Paris, sect. Asie. It was acquired in Dindigul, north of Madura in southern India, not very far from where the recipient of this letter lived, but was made centuries after his time.

<sup>11</sup> Meaning Egyptian dinars.

<sup>12</sup> Ar. *sabīb*, meaning Adenese currency, Maliki dinars.

<sup>13</sup> "A measure, particularly for water or wine," Francis Johnson, *Dictionary, Persian, Arabic, and English*, London 1852, p. 705a; Wahrmund, *Wörterbuch*, 1, 908b; but I was unable to find an exact definition.

<sup>14</sup> The weight of an Adenese "quarter" was about 10 kg.

<sup>15</sup> Because sometimes the bottles were filled half with raisins and half with sugar. These were presents for the children.

filled with raisins; and in a *mazza*<sup>16</sup> a pound of Maghrebi kohl, a pound of costus,<sup>17</sup> a pound of vitriol,<sup>18</sup> half a pound of litharge,<sup>19</sup> three ounces of 'ilḳ gum,<sup>20</sup> and five sets of Egyptian paper; furthermore, in a little basket seven molds of "kosher"<sup>21</sup> cheese; five packages altogether. Furthermore, all the copper (*naḥās*) sent by me is in a canvas. This makes six packages. I wrote on each: "*Abraham Yijū*, shipment of Joseph," and sent the whole together with the 20 dinars with the Sheikh *Aḥmad, the captain, son of Abu 'l-Faraj*.

Furthermore, in a bag there are two linen *fūṭas*<sup>22</sup> for the children and two network veils dyed with carthamus.<sup>23</sup> Please accept delivery and forward them to the Sheikh *Abu 'l-Surūr b. Khallūf al-Ṭalḥī*,<sup>24</sup> as well as the letter destined for him. His name is on the bag.

My lord mentioned that there remained from last year copper to manufacture two bowls for drinking water. Kindly send them with the other copper.

Altogether there are seven packages with the bag of *Abu 'l-Surūr al-Ṭalḥī*.

May my master receive for his honored self the best greetings. And *upon you be peace!*

<sup>16</sup> Probably an earthen vessel. Denotes today in southern Yemen the clay receptacle for the water of the water-pipe used by the poor.

<sup>17</sup> This plant, the root of which has been used for fumigating since antiquity, is indigenous to Kashmir in northern India (see Sir George Watt, *The Commercial Products of India*, London, 1908, p. 980). That costus should repeatedly appear in lists of presents sent from Aden to the Malabar coast of India shows that the traffic between these two regions, separated by an ocean, was at least as lively as between northern and southern India. Costus was exported from Aden to the West in commercial quantities.

<sup>18</sup> Used as an eye salve (Maimonides-Meyerhof, pp. 68-69, no. 140).

<sup>19</sup> Served as an eye powder. Very frequent.

<sup>20</sup> Probably extracted from the Mediterranean pistachio tree. The chewing of the gum was intended to make the breath fresh and fragrant (Maimonides-Meyerhof, p. 148, no. 301).

<sup>21</sup> The term "kosher" was used in Europe, not in the East, where they said, instead, *ḥalāl* (Ar.), "religiously permissible." Then, as today, cheese was traded in molds and came in this form from Sicily and other places to Alexandria, from where it was exported to Aden, and from there to India.

<sup>22</sup> A sari-like piece of clothing.

<sup>23</sup> A yellow color.

<sup>24</sup> Probably called thus because he traded in Ṭalḥī paper (sent by Joseph as a present to Yijū in *India Book* 54).

(Address. Right side:)

*To the honor of my lord, the light of my eyes, and the ornament of my neck, my m(aster) a(nd) l(ord) Abraham, the wise and the prudent,<sup>25</sup> son of his h(onor), g(reatness) and h(oliness) ma(ster) Peraḥyā, (may he) r(est in) E(den), Yijū.*

(Left side:)

*He that loves you and is proud of your good name, Joseph b. Abraham, . . .*

#### 40 A FATHER WRITES TO HIS SON IN ALEXANDRIA FROM THE SUDANESE PORT 'AYDHĀB

Probably May 16, 1141

Nahray b. 'Allān, the writer of this letter, was an India trader repeatedly mentioned as being on his way east- or westward at the time of Maḍmūn, representative of merchants in Aden, and Abū Zikrī Kohen, the latter's counterpart in Fustat (see nos. 10 and 37, above), both also referred to here. Nahray's father, 'Allān b. Nahray, was domiciled in Alexandria,<sup>1</sup> and so, as the content of our letter shows, was his son, who, as usual, bore the name of his grandfather.

The exact date of the letter can be calculated on the basis of the following considerations. It was written on Friday, the 8th of Sivan, that is, a day after the Jewish holiday of Pentecost (Shavuoth), and the writer reports that he is embarking on the ship of al-Dībājī ("the brocade dealer"). Another India trader writes from 'Aydhāb that he will be traveling together with Nahray b. 'Allān and another friend in one cabin<sup>2</sup> on that ship, and that they had already

<sup>25</sup> Genesis 41:39.

<sup>1</sup> Mentioned as such in letter no. 26, above (Bodl. MS Heb. c 28 [Cat. 2876], f. 34) in the section not translated.

<sup>2</sup> Ar. *biliḳ*, a Malayan word, not exactly a cabin, but a place in a ship screened off by mats, where the merchants kept their wares, cooked, and slept. Frequently mentioned in the India papers. See Dozy, *Supplément*, 1, 108b.