

filled with raisins; and in a *mazza*¹⁶ a pound of Maghrebi kohl, a pound of costus,¹⁷ a pound of vitriol,¹⁸ half a pound of litharge,¹⁹ three ounces of 'ilḳ gum,²⁰ and five sets of Egyptian paper; furthermore, in a little basket seven molds of "kosher"²¹ 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*²² for the children and two network veils dyed with carthamus.²³ Please accept delivery and forward them to the Sheikh *Abu 'l-Surūr b. Khallūf al-Ṭalḥī*,²⁴ 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!*

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

¹⁷ 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.

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

¹⁹ Served as an eye powder. Very frequent.

²⁰ 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).

²¹ 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.

²² A sari-like piece of clothing.

²³ A yellow color.

²⁴ 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,²⁵ 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,¹ 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 cabin² on that ship, and that they had already

²⁵ Genesis 41:39.

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

² 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.

loaded their goods, and that they would sail immediately after the holiday. A line before, he announces that he and his friends had arrived safely in 'Aydhāb at the middle of the Muslim month of Ramaḍān.³ All these chronological details make it almost certain that the travelers arrived in 'Aydhāb on or around April 24, 1141, and that our letter was written on May 16, three weeks later.

The main part of the letter is to be understood thus: a company of Muslim and Jewish traders sold part of their goods in 'Aydhāb, or rather, exchanged them for the products of the East. Since sailing time was near, the party split into two: the Muslims made their purchases in the pepper and brazilwood bazaars and the Jews in the lac bazaar, or took cash for their goods. This arrangement was made only for expediency's sake. The Jews, of course, traded in pepper and brazilwood as eagerly as the Muslims.⁴ Our very letter makes mention of a shipment of brazilwood which Maḍmūn had sent to the writer from Aden to 'Aydhāb, and which he now forwarded to Fustat. There, the representative of the merchants would take receipt of all the shipments and distribute their proceeds to all those who had invested in that business venture.

British Museum Or 5566 D, f. 6, *India Book* 152.

A. THE TRAVEL

My boy and delight of my eyes, may God prolong your life, keep and protect you, and not withhold his support from you. I have written several letters to you from Qūṣ⁵ and also from 'Aydhāb before this one, in which I communicated some of my yearning for you and longing after you. May God in his grace and favor unite us under the most joyful circumstances, for he is generous and bountiful.

I am writing this letter on Friday, the 8th of Sivan. I am traveling in the boat of al-Dībājī. May God grant a safe passage in his mercy.⁶

³ ENA 4020, f. 8, *India Book* 153, ll. 7-10. For Ramaḍān see no. 42, n. 21, below.

⁴ On brazilwood see no. 1, n. 9, above.

⁵ See no. 10, above.

⁶ The casual way in which this boat is introduced shows that the seasoned trader had traveled in it before and that the family back home knew all about it.

B. PURCHASES IN 'AYDHĀB

Please take notice that I acquired 330 pounds of lac⁷ out of the pepper, brazilwood, and lac available here in 'Aydhāb, for they sold the brazilwood and the pepper to the Muslims and took the price, but assigned to the Jews the lac and some cash ("gold"). I have not left cash for other shipments.⁸ Two dinars went for packing, canvas, and ropes, [. . .] one-third for a sari, as a gift, and two-thirds [. . .].⁹ One dinar was taken by the elder Abu 'l-Faḍl b. Abu 'l-Faraj al-Dimyāṭī¹⁰ for the expenses for the lac. He carries the lac, a copy of the account, and the list of the distribution (to the partners). He will deliver all this to my lord, the illustrious elder Abū Zikrī Judah, the Kohen—may God make his honored position permanent.¹¹ He will kindly sell everything and deliver his share to everyone; he will send the balance to you, and you will also deliver his share to everyone. He also will send you the account.

C. SHIPMENTS FROM ADEN

Likewise, my lord, the illustrious elder Yaḥyā b. Sar Shālōm ("Prince of Peace"),¹² may God make his honored position permanent, carries for you the shipment sent to me by the illustrious elder Maḍmūn, (*may his*) *Ro(ck) kee(p him)*, consisting of two bales of brazilwood, weighing two bahārs¹³ and 70 pounds, two bales of cowrie shells, measuring 1 *mudd*,¹⁴ five manā¹⁵ of ashbāh wood,¹⁶

⁷ The prices of lac fluctuated wildly. Taking the average I assume the writer intended that 330 pounds would bring 100 dinars in Fustat.

⁸ The writer took his main goods with him to Aden. See below.

⁹ A word is omitted here erroneously.

¹⁰ Family name derived from the Egyptian seaport Damietta.

¹¹ One sees how intensely conscious of social rank those merchants were. Compare this with the way in which the carrier of the writer's goods mentioned before, was introduced.

¹² Heb., Isaiah 9:5, a name with messianic connotations.

¹³ Ca. 600 pounds.

¹⁴ This cannot be the regular Egyptian *mudd*, which comprised about 2.5 liter, or about 5 pints, but was probably similar to the Jerusalem *mudd* which contained about 100 liter. See Hinz, *Masse*, p. 46.

¹⁵ Ar. *manā*, same as *mann*, about 2 pounds. Clearly spelled *kms t'mn'*, which proves that this twelfth century merchant with a good style and script already pronounced as modern speakers of Arabic do: *khames-tamnā* for *khamsat-amnā*.

¹⁶ A costly odoriferous wood (see Dozy, *Supplément*, 1, 725a), often mentioned. A manā cost 4 dinars in 1097. See *India Book* 19, l. 12.

and half a manā of old camphor.¹⁷ Furthermore, ten Qaṣṣī robes for the expenses.¹⁸ I asked him to make an account and, after deduction of customs and other expenses, to sell whatever he may deem appropriate and then inform you and await your instructions, whether you¹⁹ would sell all these shipments or only part of them. As to the cowrie shells, if you think it best to send them to Spain,²⁰ do in all matters what God puts into your mind. May he choose the best for you and me in all matters.

D. THE FAMILY

Receive the blessing of God for yourself and your boys, may God keep them and give you brothers to them. Regards to your mother, your wife, your maternal uncles and their sons, and regards to the sons of my maternal aunt. In several letters I had asked you about letters which I had forgotten to take with me, but you never replied to my queries. If you find them, keep them, for they contain accounts.

I need not impress on you to take good care of your mother, your wife, and your little ones; may God keep you for them and unite me with you.

E. LAST MINUTE THOUGHTS

Know, my son, that this voyage will not bring much profit, unless God, the exalted, ordains otherwise.²¹ I asked him for guidance and resolved to send 100 dinars from the proceeds of my goods with the ship of the elder Maḍmūn, may God keep him, to whatever place it might sail.²²

¹⁷ A man of old camphor cost from 80 to 100 dinars. See *India Book* 193*v*, l. 16 (ca. 1130), 213, margin (ca. 1170).

¹⁸ About these robes and the method of paying customs dues and other expenses with their proceeds, see no. 37, sec. A, above.

¹⁹ I believe this is a slip of the pen and the writer intended to say: whether *he* should sell it. In Ar. this is only a difference between *t* and *y*.

²⁰ Cowrie shells served as amulets and ornaments for children and donkey saddles in the Muslim West, and in the Middle Ages also as an eye powder, in pulverized form, of course. See Maimonides-Meyerhof, p. 63, no. 127.

²¹ During the weeks in 'Aydhāb the writer had opportunity to collect business intelligence from the merchants returning from India and Aden.

²² About this ship see no. 37, sec. B, above. It was built about ten years before and the family knew about it from previous travels of Nahray b. 'Allān

I have already instructed you to take one-tenth from all that will be received, after having put aside 15 dinars, leaving them until I come, and use them for whatever God may make profitable.²³ *And peace! (May your) [life be prolonged].*

(Address:)

(To) my son, the delight of my eyes,

'Allān b. Nahray (*may his) e(nd be) g(ood).*

(From) his father, may I be his ransom.

(In Arabic characters:)

[To Fustat],²⁴ to the elder Abu 'l-Barakāt b. Ḥārith.

Please forward [to Alexandria, to 'Allān b. Nahray].

From his father may he (!) be his ransom.

41 AN INDIA TRADER ON HIS WAY HOME

Abraham Yijū, after arrival in Aden, writes to his brothers and sisters "in al-Mahdiyya or anywhere else in Iḥrīqiya" (Tunisia and neighboring districts)

September 11, 1149

This moving letter is remarkable for more than one reason. Yijū (see nos. 38 and 39, above) had been out of touch with his brothers and sisters for many years, as is emphasized in several

(cf. n. 6, above). The writer seems to say that this time he would not travel to India himself but make his purchases in Aden and send an agent to India with 100 dinars. Maḍmūn's ship was new and probably particularly seaworthy. See no. 37, introduction, above.

²³ The son's share appears to be surprisingly small. He is still regarded as his father's employee. I assume provisions had been made by the traveler for the household expenses of the entire family.

²⁴ The lower right-hand corner is torn away, but the instruction "please forward" shows that the letter was sent to Fustat with the request to forward it to Alexandria. Besides, the letter was addressed to a prominent merchant in Fustat known from at least five letters in the *India Book* alone. His father Ḥārith ("Ploughman," rare among Jews) bore the title "the elder of the congregations"; he himself is found in Spain in 1130 (*Tarbiz* 24 [1955], 145), and signing documents in Fustat around 1143 (TS 20.5, TS 12.706), where he calls himself of course with his personal name Abraham, not his honorific byname Abu 'l-Barakāt ("Blessings").