

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* 193v, 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 Ifrīqiya" (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").

Geniza letters. The particularly strong upsurge of family attachment felt here had its source in the dire fate that had befallen Yijū's homeland, details of which must have reached Aden when he arrived there from India. The Normans, under King Roger II, had ravaged and occupied al-Mahdiyya and Sfax in 1148. Yijū's relatives, if alive at all, were now captives, or, at best, refugees. Indeed, we find them in Sicily, and not in their native country, as is expected here, and in a completely destitute state (see sec. C and no. 75, below). Now, Yijū's long years of toil in India made sense: the riches accumulated by him could put his relatives on their feet again.

There was another, more intimate, aspect involved in this relationship of Yijū with his family. His wife certainly was an "outsider," not, as usual, a cousin, or other more remote relative. Nowhere, not even here, is a reference made to her in his letters. In *Med. Soc.*, II, 20, I suggested that the (probably beautiful) Indian slave girl Ashū, whom Abraham Yijū manumitted in Mangalore on October 17, 1132, with so much ado, might have become his wife and the mother of his children. Now returning to the West and the social climate of his youth, he hoped that at least his daughter would marry into the family. In a later letter, sent from inland Yemen, he again emphasized that many were seeking her hand, but that he had only one wish: to have her married to her cousin. This wish was fulfilled: the Firkovitch Collection in the State Library of Leningrad has preserved a detailed list of her trousseau. She married her cousin, the writer of letter no. 75, below, in the summer of 1156, seven years after the writing of the letter translated here.

Abraham speaks in this letter to his brother Mevassēr ("Bearer of good tidings," a name with messianic undertones), because the latter had already visited Egypt and thus given a sign of life of himself. But the letter is in the first place addressed to the elder of the two, to Joseph, a father of three sons, while Mevassēr, as the extant correspondence shows, was unmarried.

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter
Collection, TS 10 J 10, f. 15, *India Book* 68.¹

¹ Ed. J. Braslawsky, *Zion* 7 (1942), 135-139. Since the editor had at his disposal only one item from Yijū's hand, while we have today over seventy, it is

A

My brother, I do not know what to write; so strong is my longing and so ardent my yearning. I ask God to unite us all presently in the best of circumstances.

This is to announce to you, my brother, that I have set out from India and arrived safely in Aden, may God protect it, with my belongings,² life, and children well preserved. May God be thanked for this. "*O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness and for his miraculous deeds with the children of men.*"³

Now I wish to let you know that I have enough to live on for all of us. May God, the exalted, let this money be a living for me and my children and be sufficient for you as well.

B

I have to reproach you, my brother, that you got as far as Egypt and did not come to Aden. I sent you to Egypt, with a shipment of my master, the elder Maḍmūn,⁴ civet perfume worth 40 dinars, about fifty ounces of weight, carried by the elder Abū Naṣr b. Eli-sha⁵—may he be remembered with blessings. Afterward, I learned from the elder Abū Zikrī, the Kōhēn Sijilmāsi,⁶ the brother-in-law of my master, the elder Maḍmūn, that the civet arrived duly in Miṣr (Fustat); however, as they did not find you there, my brother, they forwarded it to you to Sicily with a trustworthy Jew called Samuel, himself a Sicilian. I hope it has reached you.

natural that many of his readings, translations, and interpretations need qualification. No reference is made to these corrections.

² The writer mentions his belongings first, because the aim of his letter was to invite his refugee brothers to share them with him.

³ Psalm 107:8, 15, etc. Always said after safe arrival.

⁴ See nos. 37-40, above.

⁵ A prominent India trader from Alexandria.

⁶ This is Judah b. Joseph ha-Kohen, the recipient of nos. 9 and 37, above. He was called Sijilmāsi (our letter has erroneously Silijmāsi) also in some other letters, probably because his father, or perhaps even he himself once had made the long voyage to the distant desert entrepôt Sijilmāsa in southern Morocco.

C

I also met the elder Sulaymān Ibn Gabbay [. . .]⁷ and he told me that you have been reduced to one single loaf of bread; therefore, I ask you, my brother, come to me under any circumstances and without delay; “*come down to me, do not tarry,*” “*and I will sustain you there.*”⁸ I have a son and a daughter, take them and take with them all the money and riches—*may God fulfill my wishes and yours for the good.* Come quickly and take possession of this money; this is better than strangers taking it.

D

Also, find out who is the best of the sons of my brother Joseph or the sons of your⁹ sister Berākhā, so that I may marry him off to my daughter. After your coming here, we shall live in Aden or Fustat or Alexandria, if it will not be possible for us to go to al-Mahdiyya or to Ifriqiya, namely, to Tunis or Qayrawān.¹⁰ Everything, of course, is in God’s hand.

E

Please convey the best greetings to your brother Joseph and to his children in my name, and say to him: “Your brother Abraham says to you: By God, I shall not grudge you a thing; this money, which I have here, is at your disposal.” Likewise, greet my sister Berākhā and her children and tell her the same.

I heard that Ma’mar, Yumn’s husband died,¹¹ but was not sure

⁷ *Gabbay*, “Almoner,” is a common Jewish family name today, but is rare in the Geniza. It is likely that this Sulayman Ibn Gabbay is none other than the merchant bearing this name who accompanied the Spanish Hebrew poet Judah ha-Levi on his voyage to Egypt in 1140. See S. D. Goitein, “A Letter to Judah ha-Levi on the Collection of his Poems,” *Tarbiz* 28 (1959), 345.

⁸ Genesis 45:9-10. Joseph sending a message to his father Jacob.

⁹ In sec. E he speaks of “my sister” and “your brother.”

¹⁰ Interesting is the emergence of the town of Tunis, which was of little importance in the eleventh century, and the revival of Qayrawān. In a few more years the whole region came under Almohad domination and was uninhabitable for non-Muslims.

¹¹ Ma’mar (or Mu’ammār), “Long-lived.” Yumn, “Happiness, Good Luck.” She must have been another sister of Abraham Yijū, for Abraham’s granddaughter was also called by this name (*India Book* 80, top, l. 12), presumably because she had no offspring of her own.

about it. If it is true, may God comfort you all; however, by these lines, it is hard for me to write words of consolation on the death of anyone.¹²

Convey to my brother-in-law Marwān,¹³ son of Zikrī, (*may he rest in E(den)*), Ibn Biḥār¹⁴ the best greetings in my name—may God keep him alive and preserve him for you—and likewise to Abu ’l-Barakāt b. Qayyōmā the best greetings.

F

By God, and again by God, do not delay your coming here, take this dirhem, which I have earned, and buy and sell with it, if God will—saying less about this would have been enough. Would I try¹⁵ to write all that is in my heart, no letter could contain it and no epistle could comprise it.

Written on the 7th of Tishrī, may God let you partake in the blessings of the month, of the year 1461 of the Documents (September 11, 1149).

G

Kindest regards to the cantor Moses, son of the cantor Abraham,

...

(Margin:)

And Peace. And to my brother, his children and his wife special greetings. Likewise, to my sister, her husband Marwān, her sons and her daughter, special greetings. And to the daughters of my paternal uncle, their sons and their daughters greetings. To my maternal aunt and her ch[ildren] greetings. *Peace be upon you and peace on your house.*

¹² Abraham was shaken by the terrible news from his native country, to which he had intended to return, and was in general a tired man.

¹³ This name of the founder of the second Umayyad dynasty was in use among Jews in Syria and Spain, countries formerly ruled by the Umayyads. See no. 14, n. 22, above.

¹⁴ “The Seas,” “An Ocean of Bounty,” a family name still popular in many different forms with North African Jews.

¹⁵ Ar. *ghazayt* for *ghazawt*.

H

I gave instructions that my letters to you should be in the hands of the elder Abraham b. Joseph, . . . Ibn al-Baqqāl ("Grocer")—may God ordain his safe arrival. And, by God, come as quickly as possible to Aden.

And kiss the soil¹⁶ before my lord, *our teacher* Labrat, the *Dayyān* (*Judge*), *son of his honor, our master and teacher* Moses, the *Dayyān*—*may he rest in the garden of Eden* (and convey to him) the best greetings; and to all my friends *of my age class*, the best greetings. *And Peace.*

I

I heard what happened to the coastland of Ifrīqiya, Tripoli, Jerba, Qarqanna, Sfax, al-Mahdiyya, and Sūsa. No letter, however, from which I could learn who died and who remained alive, has arrived. By God, write exact details and send your letters with reliable people to soothe my mind. *And Peace.*

(Address, right side:)

This letter shall reach my dear brothers—may God prolong [their lives]—Joseph and Mevassēr, the sons of Perahya, . . . Ben¹⁷ Yijū. God may recompense him that will be concerned to make an effort to transmit it into their hands, *and from the Lord he will receive good reward.*

Convey and get remuneration.

This is a deposit entrusted.

(Left side:)

Their brother, who is longing for them, may God unite him with them, Abraham, son of Perahyā, . . . Ben Yijū. To al-Mahdiyya, if God will, or anywhere else in Ifrīqiya.

¹⁶ Used in reference to a judge, Muslim or Jewish. Yijū had no doubt studied under Labrat II (see no. 38, introduction, above), and was himself an accomplished talmudical scholar, as is evident from the many learned notes written by him on the reverse sides of letters received in his office.

¹⁷ I leave here "Ben" (instead of "Ibn"), because Ben Yijū, especially in the French spelling Benichou, is still common among Jews of North African origin, of whom Paul Benichou, the author of *Morales du Grand Siècle* (6th ed., 1948) is particularly well known.

42 LETTER TO MOSES MAIMONIDES FROM
HIS BROTHER DAVID
WHILE ON HIS WAY TO INDIA

Ca. 1170

Tender love between brothers is one of the most attractive traits of the Geniza correspondence. (Several examples are included in my forthcoming book *Mediterranean People: Letters and Documents from the Cairo Geniza, translated with Introductions and Notes.*) This is what Moses Maimonides writes about eight years after his brother David drowned in the Indian Ocean.

The greatest misfortune that has befallen me during my entire life—worse than anything else—was the demise of the saint, (may his) m(emory) be b(lessed), who drowned in the Indian sea, carrying much money belonging to me, to him, and to others, and left with me a little daughter and a widow. On the day I received that terrible news I fell ill and remained in bed for about a year, suffering from a sore boil, fever, and depression, and was almost given up. About eight years have since passed, but I am still mourning and unable to accept consolation. And how should I console myself? He grew up on my knees, he was my brother, he was my student; he traded on the markets, and earned, and I could safely sit at home. He was well versed in the Talmud and the Bible, and knew (Hebrew) grammar well, and my joy in life was to look at him. Now, all joy has gone. He has passed away and left me disturbed in my mind in a foreign country. Whenever I see his handwriting or one of his letters, my heart turns upside down and my grief awakens again. In short, "I shall go down to the nether world to my son in mourning" (Genesis 37:35).¹

The letter translated below shows David in his relationship to his elder brother. The complete absence of any formal language as accepted in the epistolary style of the epoch even between closest relatives, shows the degree of intimacy prevailing between the two brothers. On the other hand, the authority of the firstborn was paramount. It was he who directed the movements of his younger

¹ *Responsums and Letters by Maimonides* (Heb.), Leipzig, 1856, p. 37v.