

and the boys,²⁷ to all our friends, to the freedman,²⁸ and Maḥāsin ("Favors").²⁹

Written on the 22nd of Iyyar, while the express caravan³⁰ is on the point of leaving.

43-44 TROUBLES IN ADEN, SOUTH ARABIA

43 FORCED CONVERSION OF THE LOCAL JEWS, BUT BUSINESS AS USUAL August 1198

Only the lower part of this interesting letter, still containing 59 lines, has been found thus far. The events described in its first section were preceded by a long period of crisis. Muslim religious propaganda had become extremely aggressive, while the Jews feverishly expected the immediate coming of the Messiah, and a simple-minded, pious man had indeed declared himself messiah and found followers.

In this period Moses Maimonides wrote his famous "Yemenite epistle," or rather epistles, in order to strengthen the faith of his brethren, but also to unmask the futility of their expectations.¹

Things came to a head when the eccentric nephew of the great Saladin, al-Malik al-Mu'izz Ismā'il, ruled Yemen (1197-1201). He had the audacity to style himself "caliph," although a caliph sat on the throne of the Abbasids in Baghdad at that time. His unorthodox

²⁷ Meaning the children of his sisters.

²⁸ The family had brought with them a slave whom they liberated, but who remained in the household.

²⁹ Probably also a factotum in the extended family of Maimonides.

³⁰ Text *kj'r*, which I take as Turkish *kaçar*, "running," designating either special couriers or an express caravan, which would carry only mail and light, but precious goods, such as pearls.

¹ Scientific edition by Abraham S. Halkin, with an English translation by Boaz Cohen, New York, 1952. Halkin, following others, thought that the "Epistle to Yemen" (as he calls it) was written in 1172.

ways are also evident in the forced mass conversions described in our letter, for Islam regards such conversions as illegal and invalid.

Mosseri Collection, L-12.²

A. FORCEFUL CONVERSION OF THE LOCAL JEWS

[. . . to] Aden. Immediately after his arrival [he was brought before the caliph?], who said to him: "Become a Muslim, or you will cause the death of [your] brethren." [. . .] He cried bitterly, but there was no other way for him [. . .] except to embrace Islam. Before his arrival in Aden, all those who were with him on the mountains had *apostatized*;³ the physician (known as) the Efficient, and everyone on the mountains apostatized; only the Jews of Aden remained. But the elder Maḍmūn⁴ accepted Islam on Wednesday, the first of Dhu 'l-Qa'da.⁵ On Friday, the third, the bell (of the market-crier) was rung: "Community of Jews, all of you, anyone who will be late in appearing in the audience hall⁶ after noon, will be killed." None of the Jews remained, all went up to the audience hall. Moreover, he (the caliph) ordered that anyone returning to the Jewish faith would be killed. Thus all apostatized. Some of the very religious, who defected from Islam, were beheaded.

B. THE FOREIGN JEWS

As to us, do not ask me what we felt, witnessing horrors the like of which we had never seen.

But with us God wrought a miracle and saved us, *not through our might and power*, but through his grace and favor. For when we went up with them to the audience hall, the foreigners assembled separately, and the caliph was consulted about them. God put these

² *India Book* 348. The part dealing with the forceful mass conversions was edited, with omissions, by Bernard Chapira, "Lettre de Maimonide aux Juifs du Yemen," *Cahiers Juifs*, vol. 2, 3d year (1935), p. 58.

³ The Heb. term used here, and in the Geniza in general, is *pāsha'* (not *rāsha'*, as in Chapira's text; see n. 2), lit., "to renounce one's allegiance." See *Med. Soc.*, II, 300.

⁴ Maḍmūn b. David, the head of the Jewish community, who wrote no. 44, below. See *ibid.*, n. 1.

⁵ Corresponding to August 25, 1198.

⁶ Ar. *manḡar*, in Yemen a room on the upper floor, open to the fresh air.

words into his mouth: "No foreigner should be molested."⁷ He ordered that everyone should pay a third of the poll tax.⁸ We disbursed this and he dismissed us graciously, thank God. This is the upshot of what happened. But, by the great God, I am really not able to convey to you even part of what happened, for witnessing an event is one thing and hearing about it—quite another.

C. NEW IMPOSITIONS ON VISITORS TO ADEN

The merchants were outraged by the new impositions promulgated. Finally, however, God, the exalted, helped. (The caliph) had ordered that 15 out of 100 dinars should be taken from everyone both at arrival and departure, but God helped, and he ordered that this Kārim⁹ should remain unchanged with no rise in tariff. But everyone coming later would have to pay 15 out of 100 dinars from all goods, and also from gold and silver, from wheat and flour,¹⁰ in short, from everything. Such will be the earnings of anyone coming here next year.

D. PRICES IN ADEN

Pepper, a sack—sold for 52, later went down to 45

Cinnamon, a sack—45

Brazilwood obtained different prices:

Good Āmiri, a sack—18

Middle quality—16

End pieces (*tr'f*), a sack—16

The long variety, a sack—18

Indian Indigo, a piece—70 din.

Clove—not to be had; the mediocre—45

the [. . .]—44, 10 (mann, or double pound)

⁷ This shows that, at that time, the Jewish India traders must have been still of considerable importance for the economy of Aden.

⁸ The poll tax of the non-Muslims was to be paid at their permanent residence. Thus, this imposition was illegal. But the travelers were content to buy their religious freedom with this price.

⁹ This use of the term Kārim in the meaning of the totality of India travelers operating during one year is very remarkable. See S. D. Goitein, "New Light on the Beginnings of the Kārim Merchants," *JESHO* 1 (1958), 175-184, where the previous literature on the topic is cited.

¹⁰ Meaning that even from the provisions of the travelers 15 percent had to be turned over to the ruler of Aden.

Celandine¹¹—not to be had

New camphor—8 1/2 a mann

The odoriferous woods are of middle quality and expensive.

The price of the copper was—¹²

Copper in fragments,¹³ first—72, later—85;

in bars—70; later it attained 90

Tin—70

Corals—11

Antimony (kohl) of Shalwadh,¹⁴ a sack—17

of Madrid,¹⁵ a sack—25

The "gray" perfume,¹⁶ a sack— . . .

Cinnabar¹⁷—10 (mann) 18

Mercury—10 (mann) 17

Please take notice of this, my lord.

E. CONCLUSION

I asked God for guidance and am traveling home in the boat of Ibn Salmūn, the same in which I made the passage out.¹⁸ May God bestow safety upon it. My brother Abū Naṣr¹⁹ will be traveling with me. I am kissing your hands and feet.²⁰

¹¹ Or swallowwort (which is an English rendering of the Greek word), a plant of the poppy family, serving as a tonic. See Maimonides-Meyerhof, p. 120, no. 241.

¹² Up to this point, our lists show goods imported from India or other eastern countries, which would be carried to Cairo and other places west. Here begins the list of imports from Spain and other western countries, which had been brought by these merchants.

¹³ See no. 14, n. 7, above.

¹⁴ A locality in Spain. Yāqūt 3, p. 316, says that kohl was produced there from lead.

¹⁵ Reading doubtful.

¹⁶ Ar. *al-ḥib al-shayba*. Maimonides-Meyerhof, p. 10, no. 11, and Dozy, *Supplément* 1, 808a, probably refer to another product. I have not seen this expression elsewhere.

¹⁷ Since Roman times a precious export of Spain.

¹⁸ In the language of the India traders *daḥhal*, to enter (namely, the Indian waters), designates the way out, and *ḥharaj*, to come out (from the Indian ocean), means going home.

¹⁹ No identification possible. My India card index, still incomplete, notes twenty-five persons of this name.

²⁰ One kisses the hands of a senior relative and the feet of a judge. The writer might have been a relative of the judge Isaac b. Sāsōn, who was the

(A P.S. of four short lines, referring to several of the goods mentioned before, is too much effaced to attempt translation.)

44 MURDER OF THE SELF-STYLED CALIPH AND RETURN OF JEWISH LIFE IN ADEN

July 1202

The sender of this letter, Maḍmūn b. David, was the head of the Jewish community of Aden. He is referred to in TS 8 J a, *India Book* 183, ll. 4-8, as the Adenese counterpart of Abraham Maimonides, the head of the Jews in Egypt. Thus he is identical with the Maḍmūn of the preceding selection.¹ The Hebrew equivalent of Maḍmūn, which means "protected by God" was Shemarya, and under this name, namely, Shemarya b. David, "the Nagid (leader) of the Land of Yemen," he appears both in Hebrew literature and in Geniza documents.²

The aforementioned letter, TS 8 J a, contains also the name of the recipient of our letter, *al-Muwaffaq*, "the Successful," a title which had become a proper name. He had another title *Amin (al-Dawla)*, "Trustee (of the Government)," the like of which would be given to a Jewish representative of merchants. The two titles are contained in the untranslatable honorific epithets of the introduction, so characteristic for the artificial style of this late period.³ Fortunately, the main text of the letter is in straightforward language.

As far as I am able to read between the lines, the Jews were permitted to return to their religion only after the murder of the self-

Jewish chief judge of Cairo and a close associate of Maimonides, but also very active in the economic field. See next selection.

¹ No. 43, n. 4, above. Maḍmūn I b. Japheth (d. 1151; see no. 37, above) probably was his great-grandfather.

² TS NS J 242, *India Book* 311; TS 6 J 2, f. 10, *India Book* 310. The famous Spanish Hebrew poet Judah al-Harizi dedicated to him his masterpiece, *Tahkemoni* (or, rather, a copy of it). See Mann, *Jews in Egypt*, II, 338.

³ For instance, instead of the title Trustee of the Government, the introduction has: "Your Trusteeish Excellency."

styled caliph. This is clearly alluded to in the remark that the Feast of Weeks was celebrated "in the proper way," which makes no sense in normal times. The writer did not mention the change of religion expressly because his action of leading the community into even temporary apostasy, although eminently reasonable, was religiously not without blemish. The P.S. of the writer's namesake, perhaps a cousin, is even more outspoken.

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter Collection, TS 28.11⁴

In the name of the Merciful.

A

Your servant Maḍmūn, son of David, (may the) s(pirit of) G(od) g(rant him rest),⁵ sends regards to his high and lofty excellency . . .⁶

B

I received your distinguished letter in which you report about the trouble you had with the pepper carried with you. God knows that my intention in this matter was only to be useful to you. God, the exalted, will support you and grant you success. Amen, Amen.

C

I should like you to share this with your servant: the troops killed al-Malik al-Mu'izz, who claimed to be caliph. He is succeeded by al-Malik al-Nāṣir Ayyūb, the son of the Sultan Sayf al-Islam,⁷ who is still a boy, and his Atabeg (guardian and regent) is the Sultan Sayf al-Dīn Sunqur.

⁴ Ed. D. H. Baneth in *Epstein Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem, 1950), pp. 205-214, with an excellent introduction and most instructive notes. With one exception, deviations from Baneth's interpretation are not noted expressly.

⁵ For this blessing see *Med. Soc.*, II, 551, n. 14.

⁶ Eight lines of introduction.

⁷ "The victorious king, Job, the son of the Sword of Islam," a younger brother of the murdered "caliph." The Sword of Islam was a brother of the famous Saladin.