

Short Letter by Joseph b. Abraham to Ben Yijū.Aden - India, approx. 1135 - 1138.

University Library Cambridge T. - S. 10 J 9, fol. 24.

The upper lost part of the letter was carefully separated by the receiver along a folding. The rest preserved is 22 cm high and 20 cm broad. Brown paper, darkened by stains. On the backside, the sender had written only the address. The address in Arabic letters is preserved. On the part lost, there was certainly written the address in Hebrew characters, for Joseph b. Abraham used to write it either in Hebrew alone, as in Nos. 51 and 54, or in the two scripts, as in Nos. 49 and 227. In addition, an address has to appear, of course, on the top of the backside, so that it can be read, when the letter is folded, for in those times no envelopes were used. Here, however, as said, the top is lost.

On the free space on the backside, Ben Yijū wrote drafts for answers on two legal questions addressed to him. On the margin of the recto, he wrote two lines concerning a third legal problem. See No. 224, printed as 72x^{-c} after 72x^{-b}.

The letter obviously was sent a year after No. 219 (following here, as 55x) and one before No. 53, see the Introduction to No. 51, p. 51/4, and here the note to l. 6, approximately between 1135 and 1138. Despite its shortness, it contains a number of new ~~and~~ interesting details, see the Commentary.

C o n t e n t s

Beginning lost.

- A. Acknowledgement of various smaller consignments and one of cardamom. (ll. 1-5)

- B. Note stressing the urgency of the immediate dispatch of copper vessels ordered. (ll. 5-10)
- C. Request to keep consignments for the sender's son separated from his own. (ll. 10-11)
- D. Short note about the balance of a previous account. (ll. 12-13)
- E. Notification of the dispatch of two consignments of presents (altogether eleven) for the receiver. (ll. 13-20)

T r a n s l a t i o n

A ((And I praised God for this and asked Him to give you more))

(1) of all the best in His mercy, so God will.

There arrived, my master, what you have kindly send^d, (2) namely a basket with pepper and ginger, another basket with Manjal-turmeric, in which there was also a little ginger, and 3 Qas^ca-bowls- (3) - may God reward you well and satisfy your needs and may you never cease to bestow kindness on me.

However, the waterskin with limon and mango (4) arrived spoiled and stinking and I had to throw them away.

There arrived also the cardamom. I took (5) one fourth from the Sheikh Maqmūn and he took three quarters.

B You mentioned, my master, (6) that you let the copper vessels ordered make from the scrap. By God, do not postpone it (7) this year, for the matter is urgent. Please do not defer anything with regard to the copper vessels, the sendings which (8) I had ordered (lit.: mentioned to you), my master, for all

this is very urgent. Please, my master, have a look (9) on my previous letter from last year, and do not defer any of the ^{shipments} ~~sendings~~ of the copper vessels, (10) by God, and oblige ((me by)) this deed.

C The copper vessels ordered for (((the sake of apprenticeship))) my son (11) should be marked separately, and please do me a favor and do not mix his account with mine.

D For the balance of my account please buy some betel-nut, and in case it is not to be had, (13) pepper in one or two baskets, in order to save freight and ^c customs duties in Aden.

E There was sent to you, (14) my master, for your esteemed household what has no value or importance, namely (15) an Alexandrian maqṭa^c, a goat-wool fūṭa - on which your name is marked - 15 sheets of Talḥī-paper (16) - big ones -, a brazilwood box with sugar, one with raisins and one with soap - ^{large} ~~big~~ boxes (17) marked: "Yijū, sender Joseph".

I sent you also five raṭl costus, half a raṭl (18) antimony, an ounce ^{of} ladanum, half a raṭl vitriol and half a raṭl mastic. These commodities are in a mazza. (19) All this is forwarded to you through the ^{kh} ~~ḥ~~ ḥāḥodā (ship's owner) Maḥrūz - may God ordain him welfare.

May my master receive for his honored (20) self the best greetings. And
Peace be to my lord.

Verso. Address (in Arabic letters, see above p. 55/1). Right side:

1) To the presence of my master Ibrāhīm (2) b. Yijū, the Israelite.

Left side:

(1) His servant Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm

C o m m e n t a r y

1 The sentence is complemented according to No. 24, l. 3; No. 27a, l. 4; No. 92, l. 12, where the same phrase occurs.

2 As is explained in l. 13, smaller quantities of the Oriental spices, when packed in baskets - and not in leather-bales - were free of charge for the freight and the customs duties in Aden. They were obviously regarded as personal goods of the carrier. Cf. No. 56, l. 20.

basket - Ar. zanbīl; this Persian word, although not noted by the dictionaries of Hava and Dozy, is commonplace in Yemen, cf. Stace, English-Arabic Vocabulary, p. 17: "round and open basket", and Egypt, cf. S. Spiro, Ar.-Eng. Dict., p. 208: "large native basket". Cf. above No. 51 verso, line 12; No. 219 (55x), l. 16: "Indian basket" for carrying copper; No. 191, l. 1 for pepper, as here.

For the strange habit of mixing two commodities in one receptacle, which is attested here twice and found also below 208 (60x), ll. 35-6, see No. 85, l. 20 ^{kh} under ḥulṭa.

Manjal-turmeric - The word is Indian, see Sir George Watt, The Commercial Products of India, p. 445. This plant, Curcuma longa L., is cultivated in different varieties. The rootstocks of one, which is fairly soft, is used as a condiment, being one of the indispensable ingredients in curries; the other is harder and employed mainly for dyeing purposes (Watt). In our documents, both varieties are mentioned. Here, certainly the condiment is intended, while with

^uhurđ, below No. 85 margin, ll. 5-6; No. 193, l. 17, the dye is meant. Up to the present day, the Yemenite village women dye their faces yellow with this ^uhurđ, while all Yemenites color and season with it the soup.

Qaṣ^oa-bowls - See above No. 26 verso, l. 28. These large bowls, from which the whole family used to eat, were made of good wood, such as found in India.

3 The mangofruit of the Mangifera Indica L., cf. G. Watt, pp. 764-6, was described in detail by the Moroccan geographer Idrisi (1100-1166), see India and the Neighbouring Territories..by The Sharif al-Idrisi, ed. S.Maqbul Ahmad, Aligarh 1954, p. 20. According to him - and the same is true today, cf. Watt l.c. - the mango was made into pickles with vinegar and took in Indian diet the place of olives in Mediterranean countries. From Idrisi it seems that the mango was not eaten in the West. In our documents, this - together with 219 (55x), l. 15, which contains the order executed here - is the only instance of mango exported to the West - and it was not successful. However, the way in which the order is given in No. 219 shows that such orders must have been a matter of routine and ^{the} Italian Varthema describes in 1510 the mango under its Arabic name amba (^oanba), see Watt, l.c., and also Otto Spies,

5 The merchandise was sent to Maḍmūn perhaps not in his capacity of representative of the merchants, but because he had ordered the greater part of the sending; cf. No. 91, l. 55.

6 scrap - Ar. kusāra. The reference is certainly to the broken or old vessels enumerated in No. 219 (55x). For although such vessels are mentioned in several letters, No. 219 was devoted solely to an order of new copper vessels and to the

ones
 sending of old ~~and~~ in considerable quantities. In addition, only there are found the details about an order of mango, see above l. 3, and the writer's wish to keep his son's account apart, see here, l. 11 and No. 219, l. 18.

do not postpone it - Ar. lā tu^hallifhu. The same use in No. 60, ll. 43-4.

9 my previous letter - No. 219 is intended, see l. 6.

10 The words are restored according to No. 14, l. 57, where a similar phrase occurs.

apprenticeship - Ar. ta^clīm. The father wants his son to become a merchant by his own right. The writer deleted the word perhaps because it appeared to him as not clear enough or - because the young man stood at his father's side, while he wrote the letter, and argued that he was already an accomplished merchant.

12 in case it is not to be had - Ar. in lam yattafiq, the same phrase as above No. 51 verso, l. 6, where cardamom was ordered. It is interesting to note that such staple goods as cardamom or betel-nut were supposed not to be available at a reasonable price in a port on the Malabar coast of South India. On the other hand, pepper never seems to have lacked.

14 for your esteemed household - i.e. as a present; the same phrase in No. 219 (55x), margin, ll. 1-2.

maqṭa^c - See No. 53, l. 9.

a goat-wool fūṭa - In No. 67, l. 19, the same present goes from Aden to India. In No. 1, l. 10, it is sent from Cairo to Aden as a merchandise to be sold.

Talḥī-paper - Cf. No. 54, l. 24, where 12 sheets, not designed as ^{large}big, were included in the list of Joseph's presents.

16 a brazilwood box etc. - Cf. No. 53, l. 9.

17-8 costus...antimony - See No. 51 verso, l. 11.

ladanum - Ar. lādan, a word used already by the Assyrians and appearing in the Mishna under the form lōṭem. Herodot III, 112, quotes it as an Ar. word. The ladanum is a resin excreted by various bushes found in Asia Minor, Cyprus, Crete and the isles of the Aegean Sea, especially Cistus ladaniferus L. and Cistus creticus L. It was highly appreciated owing to its pleasant smell and its use for the treatment of ailments of the stomach and the eyes. Daumas, *Le Sahara algerien*, Paris 1845, says that rich people used to give ladanum as a present, see Dozy, *Supplément I*, 524a, Meyerhof-Maimonide, *Glossaire de matière médicale*, No. 208, I. Loew, *Die Flora der Juden I*, 362-3.

vitriol - See No. 51 verso, l. 11.

mastic - See *ib.*, l. 12.

mazza - Cf. *ib.*, l. 11.

19 Maḥrūz - See No. 54, l. 23.

20 And Peace be to my lord - In this form the Hebrew phrase appears only here.

However, the reading (yhy, i.e. y^hhē or y^hhī) seems to be sure.