

On the backside, Ben Yijū wrote accounts, see
No. 223 (printed after No. 72).

Letter from Joseph b. Abraham, Aden, to Ben Yijū in Zabīd (Coastal
Plain, South-West Yemen)

appr. 1150

University Library Cambridge, T. - S. 12.235

27 x 18 cm.

Same paper and hand as in No. 51, see the Introduction ib. Very
much damaged by holes. About two thirds of the text effaced, obviously
by water.

The letter is written in Aden, as the references to persons, ll.

20-21, and places, ll. 13 and 15, prove, and is addressed to Zabīd, verso,

l. 2. About this town see above No. 28, l. 45-7. From there, or rather its

sea-port ^{h y} Ġulāfiqa, see No. 63, ll. 1-4, one travelled to India direct

without touching Aden, although it was on the way, see No. 28, l. 47. Thus

the reference to pepper, margin, l. 3, in a letter sent to a town lying

to the North-West of Aden is to be explained, cf. ib. Thätelaboratament-

Consignment
ioning of a ~~senting~~ of almonds, l. 25 and margin, ll. 16-17 is quite puzzling.

For Zabīd, of course, is nearer to the almond growing districts of Yemen

than Aden, see A. Grohmann, Suedarabien als Wirtschaftsgebiet, I, 229. However,

in those years Zabīd was mostly in the hands of the Abyssinian Banu ʿl-

Najjāb, who were at war with the various other rulers of Yemen, cf. ^{EI} ~~Encyclop.~~

~~of Islam~~ s. v. Zabīd, ^{and} Sulaiḥids, ^{EI², s. v.} and Karam, Banu ʿl-.

Thus it stands to

reason that it was easier to supply that town with luxury fruits growing

around Ṣanʿā from Aden, and, as we learn from our letter, margin, ll. 16-17,
even there only limited quantities arrived.

In margin, ll. 8-10, Joseph announces ^{54/2} that a letter had arrived from him and would be forwarded together with our No. 54.

A comparison of the passage margin, ll. 11-18 with 11.22-3 shows that this letter was sent, after the sailing season, overland from Aden to Zabīd. In the Mediterranean countries it was also common to send letters by messengers by land, while the persons and merchandise mentioned in those letters travelled by sea, cf. No.120, ll. 3-6. Our letter was damaged by water, when Ben Yijū sailed from Yemen to Egypt, or - God knows when.

The time of this letter can again be fixed through a reference to Ben Yijū's brother ^{Mevassēr} Mevassēr. In 1148, ~~he~~ still lingered on in Egypt, No.57, ll. 10-14, although he had expressed before the wish to join his brother out in the East, No.58, ll. 34-6. In 1149, Ben Yijū, after his arrival in Aden, invited him to come, see No.68. In our letter, we find B.Y. in Yemen. Thus, it is highly probable, that we have here a letter, from Mevassēr in reply to No.68, for in No.73 B.Y. writes, that Mevassēr had come to Yemen and had proved a complete failure. It cannot be inferred that our letter was written between 1132 and 1149, the years of B. Y. 's stay in India, under the assumption that he returned temporarily to Yemen, for the whole tenor of Nos. 68 and 73 clearly indicates that B.Y. was not in contact with his brothers during all that time. The most adequate date for our letter is therefore 1150.

This assumption is corroborated by the references to another person, Al-Faḥfālī, l.11 and verso, ll. 1-2. The word means "The Betel-nut merchant" and has become a family name. Ali b. Mansūr al-Faḥfālī was a ship's owner; Maḥmūd, the representative of the merchants in Aden, made him his proxy for

affairs in Manjarūr on the Malabar coast of India, No.199 (29x) verso ll.

ll-3. Ben Yijū sent with him pepper from India, No. 30, ll. 9-10.

However, his ship was wrecked and lost, No.133, l.17 (before 1149, because that letter was written - although not sent - by our B.Y.). This disaster

explains perhaps the not very dignified behavior of al-Faḥfāḥ here.

On the backside, Ben Yijū wrote accounts, obviously in Zabīd or some other inland town of Yemen. See No. 223, printed as 72x-6 after 72va.
C o n t e n t s

Only about one third is legible.

- A. Acknowledgement of B.Y.'s letter. (ll. 1-4)
- B. (Sundry items lost). (ll. 5-11).
- C. Details about iron salvaged from a ship grounded near Abyan, east of Aden, and other losses. Fragmentary. (ll. 12-21)
- D. Description of five presents sent. Incomplete (ll. 22-27).
- E. Note about the low price of pepper. (Margin, ll. 1-6).
- F. Conclusion (Margin, ll. 6-7).
- G. - K. Post-Scripta.
- G. Arrival of a letter from B.Y.'s brother. (Margin, ll. 8-10).
- H. Details about a sending of almonds. (Margin, ll. 11-18).
- I. Arrival of iron (from India) as well as some of the iron salvaged (see above C) (Margin, l.18 - verso l.1)
- J. - K. Measures to be taken with regard to two merchants of doubtful reliability (Verso, ll. 1-6).

T r a n s l a t i o n

- (11) Al-Faufalī has not arrived..
- (12) The K(uḥī?) iron, wh(ich was sent in the ship of)
- (13) Ibn al-Muqaddam; the ship (foundered) off the coast of Abyan..
- (14) The pepper and a part of the ir(on was lost. The iron) which (was salvaged)
- (15) is being detained in the Furḍa and I do not know, how much will be realized for us
- (16) of it, or if there will be realized anything at all....You, my master, mentioned.....that my share in it was
- (17) one bahār and a quarter.....
- (18) will be saved, if God will. Let's await what will arrive of it. This will be only after the sailing of the ships.
- (19) Whatever will be realized, is profit.
- (20) Should there be anything realized from the Kārdāl.....Please make an effort
- (21) in this matter. Likewise in the matter of the "eggs", whatever will be realized.....if God will.

D

- (22) ^{There was sent} ~~I forwarded~~ to you, my master, in the ship of Sheikh Maḍmūn ^{with} through the ^{kh} Nāḥodā
- (23) Maḥrūz - may God ordain his safe arrival - What has no importance, namely a maqta^o for

- (24) your boy and a set of ṭalḥī paper, of the number of 12 ^{sheets} ~~leaves~~, a bottle of wine,
- (25) a ruba^cīya soap and a ruba^cīya raisins. Please accept all this.
- (26) The maḡta^c and the paper are wrapped in a piece of cloth, on which is your name.

Likewise on

- (27) is your name..... ((may) my master ((send me))

Margin

- E (1) this year something, (2) as I am used to profit by your favor (3) through purchases for me. However, the pepper was (4) this year cheap and did not return (5) the capital. It is better not to risk one's (6) possessions and to get broke.

- F Please accept, my master, (7) best, plentiful greetings for your honored self.

And Peace.

- G (8) There arrived a letter from your brother (9) and I ^{am} forwarded ^{ing} it to you with this letter.

(10) And Peace.

- H (11) I beg to inform you, my master, that the ship (12) had sailed and could not be ^seen for some days, then it came back (13) safe - may God be thanked - and (14) the aforementioned goods were forwarded to you (15) except the almonds, for they were spoiled. I tried to get (16) others for you, my master. However, no raisins arrived in the town until the departure

(18) of the people.

I The iron arrived. (19) I took 123 raṭl (20) and the Sheikh Halaf^{Kh}
his share, (21) while Sheikh Maḍmūn took the rest for you.

Verse

(1) Likewise, something of the shipwrecked iron was salvaged for us.

J Al-Faṭfalī^w (2) absconded to Zabīd. When he arrives at your place,
take from him for me the "eggs" or their equivalent.

K (3) Likewise, my master mentioned, that the Kārdāl did not pay him any-
thing. However, (4) you did not pay me for six miṭḡāl goods purchased
from him. You, my master, know (5) that you paid to the Kārdāl (.) at
your own initiative. Now, if you would send me something, it would be
nice. However (6) I leave the decision entirely to you.

And Peace.

Address (Right side)

(1) To the "presence" of the most illustrious Sheikh ((my m(aster) and t(
eachr))) Abraham, son of his h(onor), g(reatness and) h(oliness) (2)....

Perahya.. Yijū - may God perserve his honored position.

(Left side)

His servant, who is grateful for his favors (2) Joseph b. Abraham, G(od's)
s(pirit) g(ive him peace).

C o m m e n t a r y

11 Al-Faṭfalī^w - See Introduction and verso 1.1.

12 Kuṭī iron - Cf. No.63, 1.2.

13 Ibn al-Muqaddam - The same ship No. 56, 1.17, No.63, 11.3-5. See

After the loss of this ship, Ibn al-Muqaddam acquired a new one.

above No.26, *l.*48, where a sending goes to India on a ship of the father of this man, *and below No. 60, l. 53.*

Abyan - Originally name of the district (Miḥlāf) of Aden, cf.

Yāgūt, Geogr. Dict. I 110, l. 10, O. Löfgren, Aden in Mittelalter

21 ult. However, here no doubt the town Abyan, east of Aden, is intended.

14 The restoration of the line is based on what follows here and on the striking parallel in No.56, l.28-34.

15 Furḍa - The custom-house of Aden, cf. No.20 B, l.18.

18 After the sailing of the ships. In No.56, l.34 the writer remarks that the salvaging was done while he was writing his letter, at the time of the end of the summer season. Here obviously the custom officers were busy and could not attend to the assessment of the salvaged iron, before the ships were dispatched

L. 15detained - Ar. muhayyar, common in this sense both in Central Yemen,

cf. S. D. Goitein, Travels in Yemen, Jerusalem 1941, p.84, and in

Aden, see E. V. Stace, Engl. - Ar. Vocabulary, London 1893, p.47 b.

Dozy, Supplement I 344 b; empêcher.

20 Kārdāl - See below verso, l.3.

21 "eggs" - Probably a variety of cardamon, see No.51, l.13.

23 Mahrūz - *Mahrūz wa' ḥawāḍir, see ch. II h, above*
~~About this Adenese merchant and ship's owner see the introduction to No. 133.~~

23 maqta^c - About this cloth see No. 53, l.9.

24 Ṭalḥī paper - Cf. above No. 26 verso, l.31 and No. 55, l.14.

Margin

3-6 The writer obviously asks not to buy for him pepper, which shows that Ben Yijū either was setting out to India again, or that he had there the appropriate business connections.

5 better - Ar. aḥyar. Same form No. 56, l. 50 (Yemenite); No. 68, l. 17, (Magribī). See Dozy I 416 (modern) ^{Egyptian} and J. Fück, 'Arabiya, Paris 1955, pp. 116 and 172.

6 possessions - Ar. raḥl, literally "sending", i.e. the total of merchandise and money sent to a country or acquired there. Cf. No. 51, l. 9; No. 53 verso, l. 18.

to get broke - Ar. WYKSR (wayuksar), cf. modern inkasar, S. Spiro, Ar.-Engl. Dict. of ...Egypt, 376 and kasara al-qādī al-tājir, "the judge declared the merchant bankrupt" (literally: "broken"), Dozy, Supplement II 465 acc. to Muḥīṭ al-Muḥīṭ. See also No. 58, l. 29.

8 your brother - see the Introduction.

18 B.Y. had bought or ordered that iron, while he was still in India.

20 Ḥalaf - b. Isaac, the well known Adenese merchant, see Chapter V, section 3.

21 B.Y.'s share was brought to the ware house of Maḍmūn, the representative of the merchants.

Verso

- 1 Al-Faufalī - see the Introduction
- 2 absconded - Ar. ḥaraṭ (or perhaps the word was pronounced ḥiriṭ),
Obviously a word from the merchants' jargon; cf. No.131, l.17
kunnā muḥriṭin "we fled". The root ḥrṭ has in its I and VII,
Conjugations various meanings, from which the sense intended here
could be derived. So far, however, I have not found the latter
in any other source. In Southern Yemen, yḥruṭ means to trick
people.
- 3 Kardāl - See above No.51, l.13. Ben Yijū had ordered from him
merchandise and paid for it with Joseph b. Abraham's money; however,
the man did not deliver. For the technique of business it is inter-
esting to note that it was not clear, who had to bear the loss. In
No.64 A and E, Ben Yijū actually pays back similar losses incurred
from the Kārdār (this is the correct form, see above No. 51, l.13),
while in No.58, ll.27-9, complaint is made that B.Y. charged his
customers for money spent in transactions with that man (who perhaps
had a monopoly in a certain field (cardamom))

Address - G(od's) s(pirit) g(ive him peace) - Hebr.

See above No. 36 verso margin, l.11; No. 57, Address, left side, l.3.
The phrase is taken from the Bible, Isaia 63, v.14. It is interesting

to note that Joseph b. Abraham uses a number of different eulogies
both for the defunct father of his business friend and his own father.