

Short Memorandum containing an order of copper vessels
from Joseph b. Abraham, Aden, to Ben Yijū, Mangalore, India

approx. 1134 - 1137

University Library Cambridge 8 J 7, fol. 23

This is not a proper letter, but a memorandum handed over to the merchant who carried the scrap copper to India and who is mentioned in line 2. Therefore the document does not contain any polite phrases at the beginning and no greetings at the end. The name of the sender is written above the text and not, as usual in letters, on the ~~backside~~ *reverse side*.

Our memorandum preceded No. 55 by a year and was referred to in it; see No. 55, l. 6 and 9 and the Introduction to No. 51, p. 51/4.

C o n t e n t s

- A. Specification of disused copper vessels sent to the addressee. (ll. 1-6)
- B. Order of vessels described in detail. (ll. 6-15)
- C. *Reference to shipments*
~~Intimation of similar sendings~~ and orders on the separate account of the sender's son. (ll. 15-21)
- D. List of four presents sent to the addressee. (margin, ll. 1-2)

T r a n s l a t i o n

- (1) In Y(our name), O Me(rciful) His servant Joseph b. Abraham, m(ay he

rest in) E(den)

A (2) I sent to the Sheikh Abraham, the son of Peraḥya Yijū, through the Sheikh Maḥmūd, the Muslim, (3) the merchant, in the ship of the ^kMaḥodā (ship's owner) Maḥrūz to Manjarūr - may God ordain ^{it safely} ~~him welfare~~ (4) a bag ~~of (i.e.)~~ containing copper (naḥās), namely 4 pieces of scrap and a brass tray, all this weighing forty one (5) raṭl and a half, and a long boiler, in a package by itself, weighing 12 raṭl. Total weight (6) fifty three and a half raṭl.

B If God keeps it safe and it arrives, please let make for me (7) a tray of the same measure as the one sent to you and also a bowl (marfa^o) decorated with ^{wicker} ~~network~~, (8) which we call ^{-kh} zīr-ḥuṣṣān ("table-jug") and which should fit with the tray in such a way that when (9) a water-skin is above it, any water dropping from it should fall on the tray. (10) The ^{wicker} ~~network~~ ^{decorated} should be like (plaited) ^{Kh} ḥūzarān-straw and the weight of the ^{table jug should be} ~~zīr-ḥuṣṣān~~ about eight raṭl, a little more (11) or a little less. The weight of the tray should be about four raṭl.

Furthermore, a (12) small candlestick, weighing about 3 raṭl, made in the form of steps; and a small ṭīl, whose (13) mouth should be one span and a half, not more, and whose 'SPD'R should be of fine workmanship.

As to the remainder of the copper, (14) please sell it and pay with it the craftaman, and for the rest buy me a little (15) fresh betel-nut, or, in case it is not to be had, cardamom or mango.

C There was sent (16) to your presence also an Indian basket with nineteen ^{excellent} raṭl brass, four pieces (17) of scrap and a basin. In this, I was asked by

my son to be him of help; however, I ask you kindly (18) to keep his account separate; it should not enter my account.

Please let make out of it for its sender (19) a basin and a ewer, both small, a small marfa^c-bowl with nice ^{bamboo wicker} ~~Huzarān~~ network. (20) He wants it for a dish on a table.

As to the remainder of the copper, please sell it (21) and use it for the payment of the craftsman. For the remainder buy him a little betel-nut or cardamom.

Margin:

There was dispatched to your presence for your esteemed (2) household what has no importance and no value, namely a bottle of raisins and a rubā^c iyya of almonds and another of soap and an embroidered kerchief.

C o m m e n t a r y

2. The exact details seem to be superfluous in a memorandum sent with the bearer. However, it was common usage to send copies of such communications through other persons or even on board other ships. For this purpose, of course, it was necessary to provide complete information about addressee and bearer. Ma^yimūn is characterized as a Muslim, because this name was common also among Jews, cf. Maimonides, which means some of Maimon or Ma^yimūn; ^{over} ~~more than~~ a dozen Jewish persons bearing that name are mentioned in the Geniza papers.

~~the son of - here in Aramaic (bar), as was usual with regard to learned~~

~~persons.~~

3 the merchant - as all the persons with whom merchandise was sent to India were merchants, this appellation (tājir) must have some special connotation. See vol. I, Index, s.v.

^{See}
Mahrūz - ~~cf. No. 54, l. 23 and the Introduction to No. 153.~~

Manjarūr - Mangalore on the Malabar coast, ~~see vol. I, Index, s.v.~~ ^X

4 copper - As was explained above No. 51/11, the writer uses the word copper in a general sense, comprising also the meaning brass or bronze.

→ scrap - Ar. fajar, cf. Dozy, Supplément II, 242b fajara, "morceau," where, however our form and exact meaning are not given. See below l. 17. In No. 55, l. 6, scrap metal is called kusāra, with reference to our letter.

→ a brass tray - Ar. ma^{sh}ṣara sufr. The word ma^{sh}ṣara seems not to be registered in the Arabic dictionaries, but is common place in the spoken Arabic of Yemen. A very good picture of such a tray, its size and use, is to be seen in Hugh Scott, In the High Yemen, London 1942, opposite p. 130. As the picture shows, those trays are very large; their main task is to protect the carpets, which cover the ground, from being spoiled by water, which may fall down from vases with flowers, etc., and in particular from the charcoals of the waterpipes assembled on them. Those trays are often covered with inscriptions and are preserved in well-to-do families for hundreds of years. The Yemenite Jews use them more as a table from which the whole family eats. This usage seems to be alluded to below, l. 20. However, as the connection with the "table-jug," l. 8, indicates, obviously the ma^{sh}ṣara too served at the time of the

writing of our letter in general as tray from which meals were taken in company.

5 boiler - Ar. gumqum. This word has two different meanings. Mostly, it denotes a flask for rose-oil and in this sense it is common in our documents and in general use up to the present day, cf. No. 50, ll. 20-1. Here it means "a cucumber-shaped vessel used for warming water" (Steingass, Pers.-Engl. Dict.) or "copper-boiler" (Hava).

7 bowl - Ar. marfa^c, cf. No. 51, l. 12.

9 The meaning is this: the tray should be so large that no drops should fall on the carpets, while water was being poured from a water-skin into the "table-jug."

10 Hūzarān - This word, too, seems not to be listed in the dictionaries. In southern Yemen, it denotes the plant from which the straw skullcaps are made which most men wear there beneath their other headgear. These Hūzarān caps are of a very fine texture, which, imitated in brass or bronze, would indeed make a beautiful ornament.

12 made in form of steps -

- 15 cardamom or mango - See No. 55, l. 3 and 4.
- 17 a basin - Ar ṭast, see No. 53, l. 4.
- 18 to keep his account separate - see No. 55, ll. 10-1.
- 20 dish - Ar. sahn, which is smaller than the ma^{cy}sara, but serves the same purpose of a dish for the whole family. See above. However, while the sahn is put on a low table, the ma^{cy}sara rests permanently on a tripod or a construction similar to that seen on the picture mentioned above, l. 4.

Margin:

- 2 rubā^ciyya - About 10 kg. See above No. 24, l. 21 and No. 51 verso, l. 10.
- embroidered - See No. 50 verso, l. 5 and 20, where various embroidered fabrics are ordered from Cairo for Aden, and ib. l. 18, where obviously an order is given to embroider the sender's name on a piece of fine cloth.