

208(60x)

Letter by Ḥalaf b. Isaac, Aden, to Ben Yijū, Jurbattan, India

Month of Elul (30 July - 27 August) 1147

T. - S.

TS, Misc
~~University Library Cambridge, Boxes 25, fragm. 103~~

46x11, 5 cm

In accordance with the constricted breadth of the sheet, Ḥalaf's script is here far smaller than e.g. in Nos. 56 or 59a-b, cf. the Introduction to No. 60. Another peculiarity of this letter is the slight rise of the lines, i.e. their end is somewhat higher than their beginning. Between ll. 32-53 the lines are also curved and their beginnings recess very slightly, with the effect that the margin at the bottom is wider than at the top. Obviously, Ḥalaf wrote this letter placing the paper on his knee or the palm of his left hand, while the other letters had been done with the paper spread on a writing-pad or misnada, cf. E. W. Lane, *The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, ch. IX, p. 214.

Nothing was written on the backside, except the address, nor was it used by the receiver, for here, as in No. 60, although not as strongly as there, the ink is shining through.

The paper is only slightly damaged. The hole in ll. 40-1, as the text shows, was in existence before the writing of the letter, a very rare case.

C o n t e n t s

A. Three verses from the Bible as wishes for a good journey. (ll. 2-4)

- B. Acknowledgement of letters and expression of good wishes, (ll. 5-15)
- C. Explanation that sender's previous letters had not arrived, because the two ships, in which they were sent, perished. (ll. 15-28)
- D. Announcement that addressee's brother, Mevassēr, was well, but had not come to Aden, (ll. 28-30)
- E. Note about forty dīnārs sent - obviously to Ben Yijū's family - by Maḡmūn, the representative of the merchants in Aden, (ll. 30-34)
- F. Acknowledgement of a consignment of three wooden bowls, ginger and a basket containing ^{smaller} (usually quantities of) pepper and ginger. (ll. 34-39)
- G. Reassurance that the delay in the sending of fresh betel-nuts was not Ben Yijū's fault, as merchants coming from India confirmed, (ll. 39-42)
- H. List of presents and household orders forwarded, (ll. 42-51)
- I.-J. Greetings and date, (ll. 51-58)

T r a n s l a t i o n

A (1) In Y(our name), O Me(roiful).

(2) When you walk, your step will not be straitened; when you run, you will not stumble. (3) The Almighty will be your defence and you will have plenty of silver. (4) For the Lord will be your strength and He will keep your foot from being caught.

B (5-15) There arrived the letters, etc. (A combination, with variations and additions, of the introductory phrases used in Ḥalaf's letters,

Nos. 56-60. See the notes.)

C. (15) I noticed your remark, (16) my master, that I wrote you so little last (17) year, and wish to inform you that I sent letters (18) with Sheikh Abū ^o Abdallah b. Abu 'l-Katā'ib, (19) and a consignment as well, to you from me, in the (20) Jurbattan ship, the ship of the Sultan. You know, (21) my master, what happened to it. Thus, both the letters (22) and the consignment ^{entrusted} ~~confided~~ to him were gone. In the ship (23) in which Sheikh Abū Zikrī b. al-^vŠamī travelled (I sent) letters to notify you (24) about the consignment sent with Sheikh Abū ^o Abdallah b. Abu 'l-(25) Katā'ib. However, to this ship, too, happened what you know. For I enquired about you, (27) my master, and learned that your house and your children were in (28) Jurbattan. Therefore, I sent the things with the above mentioned.

D. (29) As to your brother Mevassēr - he is well, but has not arrived. (30) I shall act in this matter, as advised.

E. As to (31) the forty dīnār transmitted by Sheikh (32) Maḍmūn through Abū Naḡr b. Elisha (33) - I have no knowledge about this and am not informed whether he received something ⁽³⁴⁾ or not.

F. There arrived what you, my master, kindly sent, namely the three (35) wooden bowls, the waterskin with ? , the ginger, and the basket (36) with pepper and ginger. I received all this and thank you, (37) my master, for your kindness and trouble in this matter. (38) May God reward you and satisfy your needs, and (39) may I never miss you.

G You asked to be excused for having been unable (40) to get hold of new betel-nuts. My master (41) is certainly excused, for all the travellers told the same story.

H I sent (43) with Sheikh Abū °Alī, Ibn al-Hallā (the son of the silver-smith) to (44) Manjarūr (Mangalore) two bottles of sugar, two bottles of raisins, and a bottle (45) of almonds, total five bottles. The bottle with almonds was made full (46) with sugar, for it was not completely full; therefore, I added the (47) sugar. I sent you also with the above (48) mentioned half a raṭl vitriol, half a raṭl chewing gum, (49) ten sheets of (white) paper and a raṭl costus. (50) I could not get hold of arsenic. Otherwise, I would have sent it to you.

I Please, my lord, (52) receive for your honored self the best greetings from me, (53) and to my lords, your children - my God let you enjoy their being alive - (54) and to Sheikh Bama the best greetings; (55) and your servants, my children, send you (56) and your children the best greetings. And Peace.

J (57) Written in the month of Elūl of the year (58) 1458 of (the era of)
^D
the documents.

Verso. Address, right side:

(1) To the presence of the most illustrious Sheikh (2) Abū Ishāq Abraham, s(on of) R(abbi) (3) Perahya, known as Ibn Yijū.

Left side: His servant and the property of his hands, (2) Ḥalaf b. Isaac,

(3) G(od's) s(pirit) m(ay give him peace).

C o m m e n t a r y

2-4 Ben Yijū had expressed, in his letter to Ḥalaf, his intention to travel from India to Aden, see No. 57, ll. 23-4. The Biblical verses quoted here are used as wishes for a good journey. See above, No. 52, ll. 2-7.

2 Proverbs, ch. 4, v. 12. $\gamma\text{-}\tau\text{-}\gamma\text{-}\delta$ is spelled in the official text without ~ .

3 Job. ch. 22, v. 25.

4 Proverbs, ch. 3, v. 26. Used for the same purpose above, No. 52, l. 2, where also $\gamma\text{-}\delta\text{-}0\text{-}0\text{-}\gamma$ is spelled plene, unlike the official text.

11-2 In addition to the polite phrases known to us from previous letters, Ḥalaf uses here two Hebrew expressions to describe his gladness at the receipt of B.Y.'s letter: It was like water on a thirsty land (cf. Proverbs ch. 25, v. 25 and Psalm 143, v. 6) and I was like one that finds much spoil (cf. Psalm 119, v. 162).

16 I wrote you so little - Obviously Ḥalaf intended first to write mukātaba, which he changed afterwards to kutubihi, the reference being to abduhu.

I take this phrase as meaning that B.Y. had not received any letters from Ḥalaf that year. For, as we learn here, l. 23, and indeed everywhere in our documents, owing to the great risks of sea travel, the India merchants used to refer in their letters to all the sendings going out to one correspondent overseas. Normally, the ships heading for one port set out together; therefore, each year, there was only one opportunity to send letters to one

destination. It may be, however, that Ḥalaf had sent a short letter (of course in a number of copies) to another port on the Indian coast, with which B.Y. was connected, e.g. in addition to Jurbattan (ll. 20 and 28), to Mangalore or to Fandarīnā, see l. 44 and No. 56, l. 24 respectively.

18 About this ship's owner, see No. 53, l. 21, and No. 26, l. 17.

20 the Jurbattan ship - I.e., the ship, whose port of destination was J. About the identity of this place, which, so far, has been found only in our document, (cf. also l. 28), see vol. I, s.v.

the ship of the Sultan - while in documents from the Mediterranean, ships owned by a Sultan or a Qā'id (military leader), are very frequently mentioned, for the Indian ocean we have so far only the reference here and in No. 207(149x), a letter written by Ḥalaf in 1139 or 1140. As there, too, shipwreck is alluded to, the two letters must refer to different ships.

23 Abū Zikrī b. al-Šāmī is no doubt identical with Zecharia or Abū Zikrī, son of Sār Šālōm b. al-Šāmī. His father is mentioned on his way from Aden to Cairo in No. 22, l. 6 and ib. margin, l. 6; he himself travelled home to Egypt in the Kārim, No. 221 margin, l. 2, and was on his way from Yemen to Alexandria in No. 152, ll. 19-20, see also the fragmentary No. 188, l. 2. In spring 113², he signed the document No. 20 in Fostat.

28 Before, Ḥalaf had sent his letters and consignments to Mangalore, see No. 219(55x), or Dahbattan, cf. No. 56.

29 Mevassēr - Cf. the notes to No. 52, l. 16. Obviously, B.Y. had asked Ḥalaf to send some money to his refugee brother.

31 This seems to mean that B.Y. had asked the representative of the Aden merchants to transmit to Mevassēr, who was at that time in Egypt, forty dīnār. Maḍmūn obviously was absent from Aden at that time, while it was perhaps not good to inquire about such delicate things from clerks. In No. 237 (30x-b), l. 15, we find that B.Y. had asked Maḍmūn to send twenty dīnār to his other brother Joseph, who was a refugee from Tunisia in Sicily.

32 This Abū Naḡr b. Elisha must have been a busy traveller. Here we find him on his way from Aden to Egypt in 1146 or 1147. In 1149, he did again the same journey, see No. 68, ll. 9-10. He must have been a prominent man in Alexandria, for the famous Spanish Hebrew poet Yehuda Halleḇi, while coming through Alexandria in the fall of 1140, dedicated to him a poem, in which he condoled with him upon the death of a slave girl and apologized for being unable, owing to a sore eye, to visit him and express his sympathy in person (Diwan, ed. H. Brody, Berlin 1894, p. 40-1. Slaves, as is wellknown, were regarded as members of the family, see the note to No. 56, l. 74). About this Abū Naḡr, see also No. 131, ll. 7-8; about his son, No. 215 verso, l. 12.

35 wooden bowls - See No. 26 verso, l. 28; No. 57, l. 16; No. 58, l. 36.

? - The reading of the word is not clear. I read first 'LLDST, which makes no sense. It might be also 'LLDS or 'LLDM, which also defy identification, so far. In No. 55, l. 3, limon and mango were carried in a water skin.

35-6 The ginger mentioned first was a separate sending certainly of a considerable size; that forwarded in a basket together with pepper (as Ḥulṭa or "mixture") was dispatched in that form in order to save freight and customs duties, see No. 55, ll. 2 and 13.

39-41 Cf. No. 60, ll. 16-20, where cardamom was not to be had at B.Y.'s place. The testimony of "all the travellers" proved that B.Y. had not been remitting in his efforts for his Adenese correspondents.

43 Ḥallā' is the common word for silversmith in Southern Yemen, while in Central Yemen and most other Arabic countries, the usual word is sā'ig'. The word could be used here also as a family name.

44 Manjarūr - See No. 57. In this line, Ḥalaf omitted three times a letter.

42-50 All the presents and household goods mentioned here have occurred in the previous letters. Cf. especially No. 57, ll. 16-9, where also the same quantities were sent.

49 (white) paper - Ar. bayāḍ, which occurs only here. As we have often had opportunity to state that the Yemite letter writers some times use brown and some times white (now greyish) paper, it stands to reason that with bayāḍ a particularly white paper is meant.

51 ff. - The greetings as in the previous letters. A novelty is introduced by the regards sent by Ḥalaf's children. The same in No. 235 (91x), margin.

55 your servants - Ar. mamlūkak, in the singular, perhaps because Ḥalaf had first in mind to send greetings in the name of one son only.

57-8 Date - See the note to No. 57, l. 26.

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Printed, as 61 (30x), above pp.