

Statements by two Yemenite merchants about consignments sent by Ben Yijū
from India and mostly lost

Almost certainly 1145

University Library Cambridge 18 J 2, fol. 14

32x14 cm.

Thick, light-greyish paper. On the frontpage, beneath l. 22, about 10, 5 cm of the height remained blank and obviously had been destined for another statement, which was, however, written on the verso in the midst of the page.

The two statements certainly were written by the two merchants themselves and both betray typical Yemenite hands. However, the first is of the cursive type, such as Nos. 52 and 70, while the second, with its unusually big and strong letters, resembles Nos. 71-2. The first has also a particular form of $\frac{1}{2}$ ^{sh}, similar to that noted above, No. 51/1 for Joseph b. Abraham of Aden, and an exceptionally long w, comparable to that in No. 35, ll. 10-11 (written in Egypt).

Maḡmūn b. Sālim, the writer of the first statement, was in spring 1153 a member of the rabbinical court of Aden, see No. 36 verso margin, l. 12. However, as his very erratic spelling, his after-thoughts, ll. 1, 2, 10, and his clumsy and awkward sentences show, he was not practiced in drawing up written statements. Neither was his companion, Abraham b. Fayyūmī, a merchant mentioned in our papers several times as staying in India, see No. 28, l. 29; No. 199 (29x) verso, l. 1.

Fortunately, we have another source for the occurrences so imperfectly described in these statements, namely a passage in the letter No. 58, ll. 10-26. From the two documents, the following details emerge:

Ben Yijū, whose family name is spelled by Maqmūn - Yi^{sh}ū, and by Ben Fayyūmī - I^{sh}ū, sent from India consignments of pepper and ginger in a ship called gazāla ("gazelle"). Its owner bore the name Ba^{sh}īr, ll. 2 and 6, while its captain ~~evidently~~ was Makī b. Abu 'l-Ha^{sh}l ("the one experienced with terrors"), l. 19.

The "Gazelle" was accompanied by a smaller ship, described as a ḡaffāra.^{sh} As we have seen in No. 56, ll. 25 and 28, it was by no means exceptional that a Nāḥodā should send out a ^{larger} ~~bigger~~ boat accompanied by a smaller. A ^{one} ḡaffāra was most probably a decked galley, see above No. 29, l. 12, ^{and} ~~which~~ was to protect the bigger ship against pirates, but carried herself a certain amount of freight. When an attack occurred, the mariners would throw a part of the cargo overboard, in order to increase the mobility of the galley. Such an instance is reported in No. 236, ll. 9-10, with reference to an attack of Indian pirates on the Fam al-~~ḡaur~~^{Khawr}, the entrance to the gulf of Broach and Cambay, and a similar ^{disaster} ~~misadventure~~ occurred here, see No. 58, l. 16. After the losses incurred by the attack, the ships returned to a harbor on the Indian coast and it was there that the two Yemenite merchants - no doubt old acquaintances or friends of Ḥalaf b. Isaac - made their statements.^{Kh} Copies of the statements or quotations from them certainly were forwarded

to the Adenese merchants concerned, as the literal allusions to them in No. 58 prove (cf. there e.g. l. 14 with No. 62, ll. 9-10). This fact provides us also with the date for No. 62. For as No. 58 was sent almost certainly in 1146, see the Introduction *ib.*, our statements, which are repeatedly referred to No. 58 as written in the previous year, must be dated 1145.

The formal depositions of the Yemenite merchants had been necessitated by the fact that prior to the departure of the "Gazelle," Ben Yijū had sent with Abū ^cAlī b. Ṭayyib, see No. 51, l. 11, slightly different statements about the consignments forwarded to ^{kh}Ḥalaf. In those letters, l. 2, it was certainly stated that ginger belonging to ^{kh}Ḥalaf was sent in the ^{sh}saffāra, while in No. 62, ll. 21-2, it is emphasized that none destined for him was carried in that galley. Only during the night preceding the departure of the ships, the merchants made their final arrangements, which were described in memoranda, carried in two copies, one in the "Gazelle" and another in its accompanying galley; however, owing to the confusion during ^{ca}the attack by the pirates - or perhaps in a stormy sea - both copies got lost. Thus, the two merchants had to verify the facts from the ^{sh}ḥatmī, the list of passengers and wares kept by the captain, ll. 11-20. It seems certain that the ships did not return to the port, from which they sailed and where Ben Yijū lived, for otherwise Ben Yijū himself could have made the enquiry.

On reading Nos. 58 and 62, first, I had the impression that the two accounts meant to say that the "Gazelle" was lost altogether, and that the main consignment carried for ^{kh}Ḥalaf, two and three quarters of ^{a bahār of}ginger, had

gone, see No. 58, l. 19 and No. 62, ll. 7 and 21. However, this is ruled out by the express words of No. 62, l. 14. Thus, we have to assume that ^{kh}Halaf was right in surmising that Ben Yijū forgot to mention that consignment in his letter, to which No. 58 was the answer, see ib. l. 16, or with other words, that he reported only about the disaster which befell the ^{sh}ḡaffāra, while he did not find it necessary to report about the goods carried in the main boat, which obviously were saved.

T r a n s l a t i o n

(1) This is what I testify, //I//, Maḡmūn b. Sālim, namely that Abraham b. Yi^{sh}ḡū wrote (2) the letters a few days before //he settled the the account// with the ^{kh}Nāḡodā ^{sh}Baḡīr and we, (3) namely I, Maḡmūn b. Sālim and the Sheikh Abraham b. Yi^{sh}ḡū, handed them over to Sheikh (4) Abū ^cAlī, the Egyptian, b. Ṭayyib after one or several days.

Now, (5) when there remained only one night until the sailing, we all made the account with the ^{kh}Nāḡodā ^{sh}(6) Baḡīr on one place. There were listed for Sheikh Joseph b. Abraham (7) and Sheikh ^{kh}ḡalaf b. Isaac in the boat "Gazelle" five and a half bahār (8) ginger, value twenty two mitḡāl, and the freight (9) would be taken by the ^{kh}Nāḡodā ^{sh}Baḡīr from the ginger, for he insisted (10) to take for it gold //as his freight//. There remained for them eleven mitḡāl, (11) constituting one third of their assets.

In the ^{sh}ḡaffarā, there was written down for them one bahār (12) less two qīrāt pepper, free of freight.

Only the baḥār were

There were not saved for Sheikh (13) Abraham b. Yiṣū of eleven bahār ginger in the Yaffāra (14) but ~~two bahār~~, not more. There remained, however, the merchandise, both ginger and pepper, (15) which had been in the ship. In the Yaffāra, there ~~was~~ ^{were} saved of pepper only (16) three bahār belonging to Abraham b. Yiṣū, and one less (17) two qīrāt for Sheikh Joseph b. Abraham and Sheikh Halaf b. Isaac.

(18) I verified this from the ṣatmī of the ship, which was kept by (19) Sheikh Makī b. Abu ^{l-}Haul, for the memos in the (20) ship, as well as those in the Yaffāra, were lost.

(21) No ginger, belonging to Sheikh Joseph or Sheikh Halaf was carried in the Yaffāra, (22) not a little and not much.

This is what I testify, I, Maḍmūn b. Sālim.

Verso:

(1) Abraham b. Iṣū had eleven (2) bahār ginger, from which its freight was to be deducted. Of these, (3) there were saved in the Yaffāra two bahārs free of freight. (4) The rest was in the ship "Gazelle."

Written by Abraham (5) b. Fayyūmī, who is chosen (6) by his love.

C o m m e n t a r y

For the general understanding of the contents, see the Introduction.

1 I testify - Ar. naṣhadu, lit. "we testify", cf. ll. 18 and 22. This is not a Magribī form, but "the plural of modesty," used by the Yemenites up to the present day, cf. Goitein-Habshush, Travels in Yemen, Jerusalem 1941,

p. 78, ~~29~~^ξ. The plural of modesty is used in all tenses, as l. 18 here shows.

2 the letters - to Joseph b. Abraham and to Ḥalaf.

a few days - ~~ⲧⲏⲧⲏⲗ~~ ⲃⲓⲛⲏ B'YM 'CDH, which intends to render Ar. bi'ayyamin ^oidda. The writer knew that the Tanwīn was expressed by an Alif, but regarded it as a part of the following word. See ~~ⲧⲏⲧⲏⲗ~~ ξ.

4 Abū ^oAlī carried the letters with him to Aden.

one or several days - Ar. yaum wa'ayyām, either a mistake for au ayyam, or meaning the same.

For qad, detached from its verb, see ~~ⲧⲏⲧⲏⲗ~~ ξ.

5 The Yemenites (and others) often omit the l before the so-called sun-letters, because it is not pronounced, see also ll. 6, 12, 17, and verso, l. 3. However, there is no consistency in this matter; in our document that l is mostly written, as indeed Yemenites do today. See ~~ⲧⲏⲧⲏⲗ~~ ξ

with - Ar. ma^oā, as spoken and often written in Yemen today, see Goitein-Habshush, p. 94.

6 listed - Ar. tubbīta or tabata, the former being preferable, as the word here is parallel to kutība, "written down" in l. 11.

7 five and one-half bahār for the two partners makes two and three-~~fourths~~ ^{quarters} for one, cf. No. 58, l. 13.

The partners has assets to the amount of thirty-three mitqāl, cf. l. 10, one-half of which being seventeen and one-half, cf. No. 58, l. 19.

8-10 The freight used to be paid either at dispatch, cf. No. 26, ll. 40-9;

verso, ll. 11-4, or after delivery, cf. No. 67, l. 25 ff. In any case, before the ship sailed, it was stipulated, from which item the freight was to be paid. As this document shows, the stipulation made was of great practical importance: Ben Yijū, after having lost most of his consignment which was carried in the Ṣaffāra, was freed from paying for the rest, see verso, l. 3.

9 janb for janb, as pronounced. Ben Fayyūmī writes correctly janb, verso, l. 2.

11-12 one bahār less two qīrāt - See the notes to No. 58, l. 23.

free of freight - Because it had been stipulated that the freight was to be paid from the ginger, see ll. 8-10.

18 Ṣatmī - See above, No. 26, l. 50, where the word is spelled satmī.

19 Makī - Concerning the writing of this rather rare name, see C.

Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, Weimar 1898, I, p. 406, note 1, with a reference to T. Noeldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans*, p. 336, note 1. Brockelmann himself, in various places, spells Makī, see Supplementband III, p. 493 and 644.

Verso 2: from which its freight was to be deducted - i.e. after arrival, see above, ll. 8-10. Ar. haraja nauluha min janbiha, its freight was, or is, deducted. However, if freight already had been paid by Ben Yijū, there would have been no point in stating, l. 3, that the two bahār saved were free of charge.

5-6 For the rather rare epithet, see No. 58, address in Ar. letters.