

Thank God (29) I am well and healthy—may I never miss God's favor (30) under your auspices {alt. tr.: thanks to your auspiciousness}!⁹ However, on the day I disembarked, I was so ill (31) that I did not expect¹⁰ to stay alive, and I wrote those letters¹¹ (32) only out of duress. *But He acted for the sake of His name, and on the fifth day [Margin] I recovered.*¹²

⁹ Arabic *bisa'adatika* = *bisa'adatika*, cf. Dozy, *Supplément*, 1:654. {Cf. 518, n. 30.

¹⁰ Arabic *mā ḥisābī*, an expression I have not seen elsewhere.}

¹¹ Most probably letters of despair asking for help.

¹² {Cf. Jer. 14:7, etc.; 2 Kings 20:5.}

III, 47 Letter from Moses b. Joseph Yijū to His Brother Peraḥyā, Fustat

Alexandria {probably June 29, 1155}

TS 10J 14, f. 16

In a letter from Alexandria, Moses informs Peraḥyā that lac (certainly given to him by his uncle Abraham) did not sell there. He would travel to Fustat accompanied by two Spanish friends who had just disembarked from a ship arriving from Denia. Greetings are sent to many acquaintances in Fustat, most of them probably refugees from North Africa.¹

{Note that according to III, 42, the goods that Abraham Ben Yijū brought with him from India to Egypt included lac. Moses Yijū seems to have written in haste, and as in III, 46, his Arabic is somewhat substandard (as is his Hebrew). Due to its interest for the study of Judeo-Arabic, I call attention here to one phenomenon. In line 15, he writes *ilā 'l-murabba'at/l al-'attārīn*, 'to the Square of the Perfumers.' *Murabba'at al-'attārīn*, appears regularly in our papers (and is used by Moses in III, 46, there with *t* for *tā marbūṭa*). It is clearly in the construct. The added def. art. *al* before the first noun in the construct is a common feature in Judeo-Arabic.² *Al-murabba'at/l al-'attārīn* accordingly = *murabba'at al-'attārīn*. Vestiges of the *tanwīn an* (here marked */l*), irrespective of the case ending required in classical Arabic, are common in Judeo-Arabic and other Arabic dialects, as we know thanks to the researches of a number of scholars, especially Joshua Blau.³ The *tanwīn* has not been identified in the construct, however. It is difficult to assume that here it is merely the result of a slip of the pen, since the writer uses the same formation in lines 17–18, *ba'da muddat/l 'asharat ayyām*, lit., 'after a period of ten days.' It is not clear how this formation is to be explained, whether as a hypercorrection or whether the writer twice (!) inadvertently drew two lines (*/l*), rather than one (*/*), which he uses once in the text to mark *h* as *tā marbūṭa* (here he spells *mr̥b'h/l*, *mdh/l*). Blau has noted the *tanwīn an* in the construct in Arabic dialects of Uzbekistan, but he attributed this to the influence of Persian in its Tāgik form.⁴ He also found the phrase *bekalill/ziti*, 'with a little oil,' in a Middle Arabic Egyptian text in Coptic characters, presumably from the thirteenth century but discounted the possibility that it

¹ {For this document, only this description is preserved among Goitein's papers.

² See Blau, *Grammar*, 40–41.

³ See Blau, *Emergence*, 167 ff.

⁴ See Blau, *ibid.*, 201.

expressed the construct.⁵ In light of the appearances of the *tanwin* in the construct twice in our Judeo-Arabic text, the explanation of this formation elsewhere should perhaps be reconsidered.

This letter fits well, as placed by Goitein, after III, 46, dated April 14, 1155, and before III, 48, written in the summer or fall of 1156. Moses refers here to two days, Tammuz 24 and 26, the first the day Perahyā's letter arrived, the second the day Moses wrote his answer. In 1156, Tammuz 24 fell on the Sabbath, and it is unlikely that Moses received mail on that day. Accordingly, I tentatively suggest that Moses wrote this letter June 29 (= Tammuz 27), 1155.

Translation

[A. Opening; offense at remark on inadequate correspondence]

(1) To my dear brother—may God give you long life, protect you and guard you, (2) not deny you His superior gift of success, be for you a guardian and protector (3) in all your affairs, avert from you anything that troubles you and keep away whatever (4) distresses you! This is to inform you—may God give you life!—that your esteemed letter (5) arrived on the 24th of Tammuz.⁶ You blame me in it for (6) not having responded to your letters. My brother, did I not (7) send you, a pair of detailed letters concerning my circumstances and what I (8) endured? This was good for me,⁷ because the boats did not get through,⁸ (9) and the boat from which we disembarked is held up at al-Kanā'is.⁹ (10) Why, my brother, do you cause my heart pain and distress me more, by saying (11) to me, "You care little about me"? The moment I heard¹⁰ these words (12) I almost expired.

⁵ See Blau, "Autonomy," 39–40.

⁶ Since the year was probably 1155, this would be equivalent to June 26.

⁷ I.e., I was fortunate to be able to do so, an attempt to translate the Arabic *wa-kāna dhālika li-khayr bi*.

⁸ Arabic *al-marākib lam ta'di*. For a similar phrase, see 217, n. 4. The boats were apparently unable to continue the journey to Alexandria because travel was not safe, due to the raids by the Norman fleet; see page 725.

⁹ Rās al-Kanā'is, an oft mentioned port in West Egypt; see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:331. I assume that Moses traveled from there to Alexandria (about 150 miles to the east) by land.

¹⁰ I am uncertain if this means that Moses read the letter aloud or if this is merely an idiom.

I swear by these lines¹¹ that what caused me (13) to delay (or: withhold)¹² my letters to you was only my compassion for you and because of what you said (14) about sending my letters with Sheikh Abū Naṣr.¹³

[B. Hiding from the tax authorities; discrimination in work and deprivation]

I am not (15) able to travel to the Square of the Perfumers,¹⁴ because I am afraid of (16) the (tax) office.¹⁵ The 'ralliers' took 13 dirhems.¹⁶ (17) I am staying with a Jewish man, whose acquaintance I made (18) ten days after my disembarking from the boat, because from the day I disembarked I worked (19) at the place of an *Ishmaelite*.¹⁷ As soon as he realized that I was a Jew, he would not let me work (20) at his place.¹⁸ So I started (working)¹⁹ at the place of that Jew in a house adjoining²⁰ the (21) synagogue. I work on the loom. This keeps me impoverished, every day (22) two and a half dirhems!²¹ But I realized the 13 dirhems.

¹¹ For this oath, see 684, n. 26.

¹² Arabic *wkrt* = *wakhkhartu* = *akhkhartu*. For *verba primae hamzatae* passing into *primae waw*, see Blau, *Grammar*, 82. Cf. II, 59, line 16, *uṣl*, verso, line 5, *'uṣl* = *aṣl*. There is a line over *w* in *wkrt* that seems to be *ḍamma* (*u*), but perhaps a diacritic or *shadda* over *k* was intended.

¹³ Moses wanted to spare his brother the painful details of his travails and also abided by Perahyā's request to send mail specifically with Abū Naṣr, who apparently did not travel much to Fustat. Abū Naṣr is also mentioned below, verso, line 3. The well-known Abū Naṣr b. Elisha of Alexandria, who did other favors for the Yijū family, is probably intended; see III, 15, line 32 and 624, n. 16.

¹⁴ Where Perahyā was residing in Fustat with Abu 'l-Fakhr Ibn al-Amshāṭī; see the introduction to III, 46 and the address below.

¹⁵ Arabic *diwān*.

¹⁶ The 'ralliers,' *hushshār*, were the executive arm of the poll tax office, which functioned like police. See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:370. On Moses' difficulties in paying the poll tax, cf. III, 46, line 24.

¹⁷ *Yishmā'el*, a Muslim (or: Arab), also in III, 49v, line 18, IV, 76, margin, line 5.

¹⁸ On the surface, this passage seems to describe an anti-Semitic incident. Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:286, 588, n. 47, adduces it as proof that Jews wore no distinguishing clothing and speculates that the Muslim realized that Moses was Jewish, when he failed to appear for work on the Sabbath.

¹⁹ For Arabic *raja'*, 'start,' see Blau, *Grammar*, 329.

²⁰ Arabic *bi-lisq* = *bi-lisq*.

²¹ An unskilled laborer earned about 2½ dirhems a day. See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:95; Ashtor, *Prix*, 223 ff.

[C. No market for lac; travel plans and conclusion]

As to [Verso] (1) the lac, no one is buying or selling (it) in the city.²² There has arrived a ship (2) from Dāniya,²³ which had in it all commodities, including silk, mercury and tin.²⁴ (3) I believe that maybe it²⁵ will sell to newcomers. I shall leave it with Sheikh Abū Naṣr²⁶ (4) and come,²⁷ God willing, with Ibn Bārūkh and Ibn Shabrūt.²⁸ If you (5) inform me of any request that fits your needs, I'll buy it for you. You (6) did not write me in detail about your situation, and you left me anxious²⁹ about it. (7) Please (send) a detailed letter.³⁰ *May your well-being increase forever! Amen neṣaḥ* (8) *selah. May they bestow on you well-being!*³¹ *This letter was written on the* (9) *27th of the month of Tammuz.*³² *May salvation be near!*

[D. Postscript on recto, further greetings]

[Margin] For your noble self best greetings, and for whoever is embraced by your care best greetings, *first and foremost the two esteemed brothers, they and their children.*³³ *May the God of Israel bless them, guard them and keep*

²² On the difficulty of selling the lac, see further Moses' letter to Abu 'l-Fakhr in III, 47a.

²³ The Arabic spelling of Denia, Spain.

²⁴ On ships arriving in Alexandria directly from Denia, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:212, 213, 318; Ashtor, *Muslim Spain*, 2:184, 386, n. 326, where this document is cited and shipments of Spanish silk from Denia are mentioned. Udovitch, "Time," 550, however, doubts whether there was a direct shipping line between Denia and Alexandria.

²⁵ The lac.

²⁶ See above, recto, line 14.

²⁷ To Fustat.

²⁸ As noted in the introduction to this text, according to Goitein, these men arrived on the ship from Denia, but this is not stated explicitly. This is likely to be the same Ibn Bārūkh that Perahyā and Moses Yijū met in Messina, Sicily, and who spoke of travel to Egypt: III, 43, line 19. Ibn Shaprut (here spelled as in Arabic Shabrūt) is a well-known Spanish Jewish name, thanks to the famous tenth century Ḥisdai Ibn Shaprut.

²⁹ Arabic *mu'allaq al-qalb*. See III, 30, line 10, where the same expression appears.

³⁰ Arabic *wa-'asā kitāb*, etc. For *(wa-) 'asā* meaning 'please,' see 426, n. 68. Additional examples of the construction found here, *(wa-) 'asā* followed, by a noun in accusative, with no connecting verb, appear in III, 48v, line 15; IV, 21, line 25 (both, as here: *wa-'asā kitāb*); IV, 23, margin, line 3 (*wa-'asā ḥarfayn*); IV, 37, line 2 (*wa-'asā waṣīya wa-raqbba*). On omitting the word for sending, see 620, n. 38.

³¹ Prov. 3:2.

³² Apparently, June 29, 1155.

³³ In all likelihood this refers to Abu 'l-Fakhr Ibn al-Amshāṭī and his brother (see III, 47a, line 2), who, of course, extended their protection to Perahyā Yijū and not vice versa, as written here. On Abu 'l-Fakhr Ibn al-Amshāṭī, see pages 95–101.

*them! May He fulfill in them the verse "Your sons will succeed your ancestors!"*³⁴ I greet them with the best, [Top] most excellent greetings. Also for my lord Sheikh Abū Sa'īd³⁵ and his children and mother best greetings. And for my lord Sheikh Abū Riḍā Isaac and his children (and) Sheikh Abu 'l-Makārim best greetings.³⁶ *And peace.*

[E. Double address]

[Verso] (1) This letter should be delivered to (2) Fustat—may God protect it!—to (3) the store of Sheikh Abu 'l-Fakhr³⁷—*may he live until the coming of the messiah!*—[Left side] (1) the perfumer *b. R. his honor*, (2) *my lord and master Abraham*—(3) *may he rest in Eden! May he have life and peace!*³⁸ *Amen.*

[In the opposite direction] (1) This letter should be delivered to my esteemed brother (2)—may God give him long life!—(3) *Perahyā son of his honor, my father* (4) *and master—may he live until the coming of the messiah!*—*b. R. Perahyā—may he rest in Eden!*

(1) (From) His brother, who longs (2) for him, Moses. *May salvation be near! Ame[n].*

³⁴ Ps. 45:17.

³⁵ In III, 47a, margin, regards are sent to Abū Sa'īd al-Rāṣūy, his brother and their mother.

³⁶ The names of persons to whom greetings are sent are fairly common. Abu 'l-Makārim is also greeted in Perahyā's letter to a member of the Ibn al-Amshāṭī family (TS 8 J 27, f. 8) and seems to have been a member of that family as well; see pages 110–11.

³⁷ Ibn al-Amshāṭī, with whom Perahyā was staying. See recto, line 15.

³⁸ Cf. Prov. 3:2. The preceding blessing is for his deceased father.