

II, 45 *Letter from the Scribe of the Yeshiva to Joseph b. Abraham*

{Cairo, ca. 1128–39}

ULC Or. 1080 J 182

Draft of the first two pages of a letter to Joseph b. Abraham entered into the record book of the Jewish High Council of Jerusalem (then domiciled in Cairo). See II, 54.¹

{The letter is written by the 'Scribe of the Yeshiva,' in Hebrew, mostly in rhymed prose. Its arcane florid style, with veiled allusions to biblical (and other literary) passages, renders much of the text unintelligible to the uninitiated. The writer's predilection for poetry is reflected in his style. He was not Nathan b. Samuel, judge and scribe of the Palestinian Yeshiva relocated in Cairo (dated documents 1128–53), who was also a poet,² since the handwriting hardly resembles his.³ In these two pages elaborate blessings are showered on Joseph. Both he and his father bore the titles *hemdat ha-yeshivā* and *zeqan ha-qehillōt*, 'delight of the Academy' and 'elder of the congregations,' titles undoubtedly conveyed upon them on the occasion of the receipt of generous gifts, which they sent the Yeshiva in Egypt.⁴ The writer apologizes profusely for not having written to 'the beloved elder' sooner. It is likely that this letter itself was occasioned by a gift sent by Joseph.}

¹ {Only this description and a draft of the transcription remain for this document in Goitein's papers.

² See Fleischer, *Diwān*.

³ See the note to II, 44, line 30, where 'the Scribe of the *Rayyis*,' mentioned there as recipient of a gift sent by Joseph b. Abraham, is identified as probably being Nathan b. Samuel. Under Maṣliāḥ Gaon there were a number of scribes attached to the Yeshiva at the same time. 'The Scribes' of the Yeshiva are mentioned twice in the letters of thanks in II, 54. Similarly, in DK 192* Maṣliāḥ sends greetings from the 'the Scribes' of the Yeshiva. In a letter of consolation to a Rosh Yeshiva, probably Maṣliāḥ, over the death of his mother, the writer sends greetings to the "Head of the Yeshiva of the Pride of Jacob [...] and its scribes," etc. (ENA 3130, f. 5, ed., Fleischer, *Diwān*, 194).

⁴ For Abraham's gifts to religious dignitaries in Egypt, see II, 11a. For Joseph's, see the introduction to II, 43, 44. Abraham is referred to as 'Elder of the Congregations' in the postscript to II, 11a.}

{II, 45a *Letter from Joseph b. Abraham to Sulaymān b. Abū Zikrī Kohen Denying Misappropriation of a Deposit*

Aden, Oct. 31, 1152

ENA 4045, f. 9

This interesting document, which I have identified and added to Goitein's collection, provides supplemental data on the business activities of the Adenese merchants and their associates, who were active in the India trade. A number of issues remain to be clarified, and the edition is still tentative.

The top and bottom of the letter are torn away, and the names of the writer and addressee, written on verso, are missing. But it is clearly in the handwriting of Joseph b. Abraham. As with other letters sent to Abraham Ben Yijū, the verso contains liturgical selections (for Passover and Pentecost), and at an earlier stage of my research, I had assumed that he was the addressee. However, a careful examination of the handwriting on verso indicates that it is definitely not his. Besides, the addressee's travels reconstructed below can hardly be reconciled with Ben Yijū's biography.

Having assumed that the recipient of the letter copied the prayers on verso, I compared the handwriting there with that of Joseph's other correspondents enumerated in the introductory note to chap., sec. F (page 407). While none of these matched, other liturgical selections, written in the same hand as those on the verso of II, 45a and evidently copied from the same prayer book, were found on the blank spaces on the verso of the following letters: II, 32, II, 61 and V, 11. No. V, 11, was written by Joseph b. Abraham to Abū Zikrī Kohen b. Joseph. Maḍmūn b. Japheth wrote II, 32, and Goitein convincingly identified the anonymous recipient as Abū Zikrī. The anonymous writers of II, 61 were convincingly identified by Goitein as Ḥalfon and Bundār the sons of Maḍmūn and the recipient as Abū Zikrī's son Sulaymān. The yet-unidentified copyist of the prayer book evidently had access to Sulaymān's archive (the handwriting is not his) and made use of the blank spaces on his and his father's letters. Until matching liturgical selections are found on a letter written to someone else, it is logical to assume that II, 45a was written to either Abū Zikrī or his son Sulaymān. At first blush one might suggest that V, 11 (written to Abū Zikrī), on whose verso were written parts of the Additional Prayer of Passover, was the top of the same letter, whose continuation—after a break—comes in II, 45a, where on verso later portions of the Passover liturgy appear.