

58 and 59a-b

Letter, mainly about shipwrecked goods, from Halaf b. Isaac, Aden,

to Ben Yijū, India

almost certainly 1146

No. 58: University Library Cambridge T.-S. 18 J 4, Fol. 18

No. 59a: University Library Cambridge T.-S. N. S. 21

No. 59b: University Library Cambridge T.-S. 8.19 verso

No. 58:15, 5 cm broad, 41, 5-42, 5 cm long. Clean, light-brown paper.

Written with great care and in unusually big and elaborate letters, by the same clerk who wrote most of No. 60. Cf. the Introduction to No. 56. At the bottom, the paper was unevenly cut (with scissors) so that the right edge of the page is by a cm longer than the left. As the whole letter was done with utmost care, it seems that this uneven cutting of the lower edge was done purposely ^P ^{it was} and perhaps regarded as smart. The backside bears only the address written in both Hebrew and Arabic (facing each other upside down).

No. 59a corresponds to No. 58, ll. 13-36.

No. 59b corresponds to No. 58, ll. 36-49.

The two fragments look very different, owing to their different state of preservation. They are, however, parts of one and the same letter, the original written by Halaf himself, which was also sent on to Ben Yijū. As is wellknown, for reasons of safety, several copies of the same letter were forwarded in different ships, see Vol. I, ch. "Sea-travel and Transport."

The paper of the two fragments originally was light-greyish, but has become in No. 59a very dark and woolly. The breadth is 16 cm; of the height, in No. 59a, 16 cm have been preserved on the right edge and 15 on the left; in No. 59b, the height is 14 cm.

There are astonishingly few differences between the texts of the original and the copy, mostly errors by the boss, silently corrected by the clerk - silently, for the corrections do not appear in the original itself. See No. 58, ll. 20, 26, 30, 36, 43, and 46. This letter was certainly written in 1146. See the Commentary on l. 35.

Ben Yijū, the receiver of our letter, used the blank backside of 59a for writing on it in a very large and clear hand a Hebrew religious poem by the Spanish Jewish poet, Isaac b. Ghiyāth (b. 1038, d. 1089). It is a so-called Rešūt for Nismat, a poem recited by the leader of the congregation before the beginning of the main service on Saturdays or holydays, see I. Davidson, *Thesaurus of Mediaeval Hebrew Poetry*, New York 1929, II, 473.* These poems did not constitute an integral part of the service, but were chosen by the Reader according to his taste. We may imagine that one of the India traders had with him a Dīwān, or collection of poems, by that author and that Ben Yijū copied out for himself that poem with the intention of using it, while leading the community prayer.

On the backside of No. 59b (which appears on the manuscript T.-S. 8.19

*I regarded the poem as a fragment, as it was written on a piece of paper forming the middle part of a sheet. I learned, however, from Professor J. H. Schirrmann the true facts.

as recto), Ben Yijū wrote the accounts following below as No. 63.

Concerning the date of our letter see the note to p 35

C o n t e n t s

- A. Acknowledgement of letter and good wishes (ll. 1-10)
- B. Statement, illustrated by quotation^s from the addressee's letters of the preceding year about a shipwrecked Yaffāra, carrying ginger and pepper. (ll. 10-26)
- C. Explanations with regard to a consignment of cardamom handled by the Kārdār, an untrustworthy merchant, cf. above 51.D. (ll. 26-34)
- D. Announcement that the addressee's brother had arrived (from Sicily) in Egypt. (ll. 34-36)
- E. Acknowledgement of a consignment, which arrived from India via Zabīd, northwest of Aden. (ll. 36-39)
- F. Details about presents and orders for Yijū's household. (ll. 39-46)
- G.-H. Greetings and a P.S. request to send some cardamom. (ll. 46-48-49)

T r a n s l a t i o n

- A (1) In Y(our name), O Me(rciful).
- (2) The letter of ^{your honor,} ~~the "presence"~~ of the most illustrious Sheikh, my master, has arrived, may God prolong your life (3) and make permanent your honored position, rank, highness, loftiness, excellence, and ascendancy.
- (4) May He never deprive your dwelling-place and court of any good. May He prostrate in weakness (5) those that are envious of you and humiliate your enemies. May all your affairs (like ^{your} ~~this~~ letter) arrive at their destination successfully.

your letter

I read ~~it~~ (6) and understood it and was happy to learn about your wellbeing and your satisfactory state. Then I praised God for this (7) very much and asked Him to give you more of all the best in His mercy.

I noticed, (8) my master, your kind enquiry (about my wellbeing) and concern - May God concern Himself with bestowing favors upon you (9) and may He avert from you the misfortunes of this world. May He unite us, after the completion of your ~~tasks~~ ^{affairs, soon}, quickly, (10) not belatedly, in His might and His kindness, which is (a) sufficient (guarantee).

B You explained, my master, (11) that there was saved for your servant in the ^hsaffāra pepper, half a bahār, of big measure, less (12) a farāsila. However, you did not mention anything about the ginger, which was carried in that boat, (13) namely three bahār ginger, less one quarter, for my master mentioned this in his letter (14) last year, and that the ship's owner insisted to take the freight only from it. (15) This is what your letter of last year says, and that the loss incurred (16) by throwing overboard (a part of the cargo) was distributed on the whole cargo. Now I do not know whether my master forgot (17) to mention this in his letters or what the matter is. For in your letters from (18) last year, which are preserved by me, you explained that the proceeds from the silk, after (19) the expenses, were seventeen mitqāl and one half. You bought me three bahār less one quarter ginger (20) for eleven mitqāl - the price being four mitqāl for one bahār. The balance in my favor: six (21) mitqāl and one half. Of this, there was deducted one mitqāl, a balance due from the

purchase of iron last year. (22) There remained a balance in my favor of five mitqāl and a half. For this you bought pepper, half a bahār (23) of big measure, less one qīrāt. This is what you wrote about the ^hṣaffāra last (24) year, your letter is still with me.

Furthermore, my master, please find out what is due to me from the distribution. (25) For the total proceeds buy me what God - may He be exalted - assigns, (26) pepper, or something else, and forward it with one of the first ships coming out.

C Concerning (27) the cardamom handled by the Kardār - may God curse him - I talked with somebody (28) and he explained to me that the cardamom actually was on your account and we had nothing to do with it. You had (29) made a transaction with the Kardār, in which your share was lost, whereupon you charged us with it. (30) However, your servant - and others as well - send you consignments relying on you that you buy merchandise which needs no (31) bartering or advancement, but a definite article, which, if it is to be had, is bought, and if not, is left; (32) for I do not write, while sending you a consignment: "please advance me money for a certain merchandise," but: (33) "please buy me what God assigns and grants, and send it on." However, the decision lies with you (34) in all matters.

D There arrived this year the Sheikh Abū Ishāq b. Joseph and reported (35) that your brother Mevassēr had arrived in Egypt and that he wished to come to you. Please take notice of (36) this.

E As to "the salted" and the wooden bowls sent with Maḍmūn b. Sālim: (37)

While on sea, he boarded a ship of Fadiyār, but left everything in the ship (which had carried him from India). So far, (38) there arrived from Zabīd only three wooden bowls, one for Sheikh Maḍmūn, one for Sheikh (39) Joseph, and one for me and the mōja-wood destined for me, nothing else.

F I sent you (40) what has no importance, namely a bottle of sugar and one of raisins for the children - may God, the exalted, (41) keep them with you.

You asked me, my master, to buy arsenic for a dīnār. However, it is not to be had now in the town, (42) nor is ladanum. However, I bought you for a dīnār paper, (43) thirty sheets.

There was forwarded to you also half a raṭl antimony, half a raṭl chewing gum, and half a raṭl vitriol. (44) This is from your servant and has no value. As to the dīnār for the paper, please add it to my account (45) which resulted from the ginger and pepper saved in the ^hṣaffāra and buy what (46) God helps you to (and send it) in one of the ships heading (for Aden). There is no need, my master, to give you advice.

G Receive, my lord, (47) for your honored self the best greetings from your servant, and give the best greetings to my lords, your two ^{children} ~~ways~~, (48) and greetings to Sheikh Bama.

H If you could buy some cardamom, (49) please send it together with what you happened to buy. And Peace.

Verso. Address, right side:

To the presence of the most illustrious Sheikh, my master Abū Ishāq (2)

Abraham son of h(is honor), g(reatness and) h(oliness) R(abbi) Perahya,
m(ay he rest in) E(den) son of Yijū.

Left side:

His servant, who is grateful for his beneficence, (2) Ḥalaf b. Isaac,
 may he be spared of being robbed of you.

The address written in Arabic adds "the Israelite" on both the right
 and the left sides. The name of the sender is preceded by the words:

"His servant, who is chosen by his love."

C o m m e n t a r y

1-10 The elaborate proem is a combination of the phrases ^{found also} ~~known to us~~
^{on} ~~from~~ Ḥalaf's Nos. 56 and 57, with some variations and additions. Thus,
 the words "after the completion of your ^{affairs} tasks," l. 9, obviously indicate
 that Ben Yijū had mentioned in a previous letter that he could not come
 out from India, because he had still urgent business there.

11-26 This passage finds its full explanation through No. 62, see the
 Introduction there and the Commentary for details.

17 letters - Same reading in No. 59, ll. 4-5. In ll. 15 and 24,
 Ḥalaf speaks about one letter, received from Ben Yijū a year before.
 The seeming contrast is to be explained by the fact that Ben Yijū's
 letter, as usual, was forwarded in various copies, all of which had been
 kept by Ḥalaf.

23 qīrāt - Above, l. 12, in the same connection farāsila is used,

while No. 62, ll. 12 and 17, mentions only qīrāt. The latter term denotes in general 1/24. Thus, the large bahār must have been composed of twenty-four farāsila, as opposed to the small bahār, which comprised twenty. This conforms with the ratio of 1, 2:1, found for the relation of the large to the small bahār at that time in Aden, see above No. 26, l. 4, Commentary.

24 the distribution - See above, l. 15 and No. 236, l. 10.

26 coming out - Ar. mutahalliṣa, for which Ḥalaf wrote erroneously mutahassila (actually he had left the /1/ out and put it afterwards in the wrong place), Cf. Dozy, Supplément I, 392a: "venir auprès de." Thus, our word corresponds to al-wāṣila in l. 46.

27-34 This highly interesting passage contains important information about the business practices of the Indian trade. A merchant in Egypt or South Arabia might ask his correspondent in India (a) to barter for him a certain merchandise against the one sent to India, cf. No. 2, l. 5; No. 7, l. 8; No. 9, l. 14; and here, l. 30-31. This was called mu^oāraḍa, a term not found by me so far elsewhere. He might ask him also (b) to advance him money and buy for it a specified commodity, cf. No. 2, l. 8. In these two cases, as we learn from here, the merchant who gave the order had to bear the losses incurred in the course of the transaction. However, when a merchant sent wares or money to India and asked his correspondent to buy him any merchandise which he deemed fit, the latter could not charge the former for losses incurred, when e.g. a customer of his proved unreliable.

Clearly, No. 54 verso, ll. 3-6, refers to the same incident.

27 Kardār - See above No. 51, l. 13 and No. 64a, l. 2.

34 *Abū Ishāq*, father of Isaac, is a honorary epithet, nunya, for a man called Abraham. Our *Abū Ishāq* almost certainly is 58/9 identical with Abraham b. Joseph, the friend of the *Yijū* family, mentioned in No. 68 verso, l. 1.

33 the decision lies with you - Ar. anta aulā, sc. bira'yika of. No.

54 verso, l. 5.

35 This is the first intimation of the arrival of Ben Yijū's brother
or was brought as prisoners
from Sicily, whereto the family had fled from Tunisia, to Egypt. As No.

208 (60x), l. 29, which was written in 1147, reflects the immediate

response of Ben Yijū to this information, our letter certainly was written one year earlier, namely in 1146.

36 "the salted" - Ar. mālīḥ, cf. Dozy, *Supplément II*, 611a "des choses confites au sel;" Johnson, *Persian-Engl. Dict.* "salted fish" and "the pickles" mentioned in the Commentary to No. 55, l. 3.

Maḍmūn b. Sālim - About this Adenese merchant, see the Introduction to No. 62. He had travelled from India on a ship which was going to Ḡālaifiqa, the seaport of Zabīd in South-West Yemen. On the high sea - it must have been very quiet at that time - he personally boarded another ship, one belonging to Fadiyār, see above No. 53, l. 13, which was heading for Aden, while the merchandise (and presents) carried by him went on to the port of Zabīd.

38 wooden bowls - qisā^c, for which the boss had erroneously written in No. 59b qis^cā^c, an error which was obviously due to the fact that the plural of qas^ca could be spelled either qs^c or qs'^c. About these bowls, see No. 26 verso, l. 28.

39 mōja-wood - perhaps *artemisia moxa* or common mugwort, one of the chief specialities of Chinese medicine, cf. H. Chimin Wong and Wu Lien Teh, *Chinese Medicine*, Shanghai 1936, p. 45. I learn from Dr. Derk Bodde of the University

of Pennsylvania that moxa is a Japanese word.

The combustible cones of this plant are applied on the skin at ear-tain spots and ignited. As the smouldering fire burns into the skin, a blister is raised. Its effect is similar to counter-irritation or cauterization, but more painful. Early Portuguese navigators carried it to the West. The treatment with moxa was as common in China as cauterization with iron in the Middle East.

41 may God keep them with you - Ar. yabbishum ^oalaika. Owing to the great mortality, such wishes were very common. As a matter of fact, they were not fulfilled, as far as Ben Yijū was concerned. His ^{only son} ~~son~~ ~~was~~ ~~born~~ ~~in~~ ~~Yemen~~ ~~on~~ ~~the~~ ~~way~~ ~~back~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~West~~, where Ben Yijū arrived accompanied by one single daughter, see

No. 73.

42 ladanum - Cf. No. 55, l. 14.
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43 antimony - Cf. 51 verso, l. 11.

chewing gum - Ar. gamm, see No. 55, l. 18.

vitriol - Cf. No. 51 verso, l. 11.

46 (and send it) - omitted by both the boss and the clerk.

Address, left side; may he be spared, etc. - Ar. wuḡiya ^oadamahu, for the more common: mā ^oadimtuhu.

chosen by his love - Ar. ḡaflyyū wuddihī. This rare phrase also in the signature of another Yemenite, No. 62 verso, address.