

71, 72, and 240(72x-a)

Three letters from ^{sh}Yēṣū^cā b. Jacob Kōhēn of ^{Dh}Ḍū Jibla in Yemen to Ben Yījū,

71 and 240(72x-a) addressed to Aden, 72 to a place in inner Yemen

1150-1153

No. 71 University Library Cambridge 10 J 14, fol. 2

No. 72 University Library Cambridge 10 J 13, fol. 6

No. 240(72x) Jewish Theological Seminary New York, E. N. Adler Coll. 1822, fragm. 75

No. 71 24 x 9, 5 cm. Very dark-brown, thin, but rather woolly paper.

No. 72 24 x 12, 5 cm, i.e. same length as the previous letter, but different breadth

This page is smoother than that of No. 71, which may be due to a better state of preservation, indicated also by the fact that the writing in No. 71 is much fainter than in No. 72.

No. 240(72x-a) 9, 7 cm broad, i.e. the sheet was cut like No. 71. Of the length, 23, 7 cm have been preserved on the right margin and 20, 5 on the left. As at least five lines are missing at the beginning, this sheet was longer than the two previous letters. The paper also is different: light-greyish, very thick and woolly. The upper part, which contained also the address, was irregularly torn away, but the identity of the sender can be fixed with certainty by the very characteristic handwriting, which is identical in these three letters.

Above, No. 62 recto, a certain resemblance between the script used by the writer of that document, who once belonged to the rabbinical court of Aden, and that of our ^{sh}Yēṣū^cā was noted. However, the latter writes far more beauti-

fully. His characters are unusually large, with a tendency to being oblong and are similar to those used in copying books. The particularly long necks of the ls occurring in the first line of a page are a decoration used in Bible and other manuscripts.

The sender of our letters is no doubt identical with ^{sh}Yeṣū^a, one of the three sons of Jacob Kḥēn of ^{Dh}Ḍū Jibla, mentioned in Nos. 37 and 38 as complaining about Maḍmūn, the representative of the merchants of Aden. The identity is established ~~not only~~ by the names of the man, his father and his family, as well as his domicile, see No. 72 margin, l. 4. No. 72 is also in conformity with Nos. 37 and 38, in so far as we learn from it that the writer did not entertain personal relations with the Maḍmūn family, although their father once had deposited his money with M.'s brother.

Although No. 240(72x-a) does not mention the name of Ben Yijū expressly, there is little doubt that the letter was addressed to him. We find our sender in correspondence with him in Nos. 71 and 72; here, he asks whether he should rent a house for him; in No. 71, he writes details about the house rented; Ben Yijū praised Maḍmūn for favors bestowed on him, see No. 41, p. 4; this is referred to here, No. 240, l. 23ff.; finally, the very fact that this letter, sent ^{the} from inland of Yemen to Aden has reached the Cairo Geniza, is best explained by the assumption that it was carried there by an India traveller, who had sojourned for some time in Yemen and afterwards disposed of his correspondence in the Geniza; so far, we know only of one person who had done so to a very considerable extent: Ben Yijū.

The sequence in time of the three letters can be fixed according to the following considerations. No. 240 was written when Maḍmūn was alive, but some time after Ben Yijū's arrival in Aden, for it seems that B.Y. had already visited ^{Dh} ~~ḍ~~ Jibla, as even the children of the two men knew each other, No. 240 margin, l. 2, and B.Y. had had already opportunity to write to Yeṣū^{sh}ā about Maḍmūn's benevolence. Considerable time must have elapsed between No. 240 and No. 71; in the former, the sender inquires whether B.Y. wants to come to his town, in which case he would rent a house for him, while in the latter, he reports about that house, after B.Y. had already gone back to Aden. No. 72 contains an announcement of Maḍmūn's death, which occurred in 1151 or early in 1152. At that time, B.Y. was neither in Aden nor in ^{Dh} ~~ḍ~~ Jibla. Thus, the chronology of the three documents may be fixed as follows:

No. 240 comes first, 1150. No. 72: 1151/2. No. 71, considerably later than No. 240, may precede or follow No. 72.

These short letters are not without interest in various respects. In No. 72, l. 7, Ben Yijū is addressed as "Head of the Congregation." It is not difficult to surmise where B.Y. assumed that office during his comparatively short stay in Yemen. Above, No. 38, ll. 7-8, we learn^{ed} about Jews from three different towns, who had settled in ^{Dh} ~~ḍ~~ Jibla, the new capital of Yemen. According to all we know about the communal life of the Yemenites - and, as a matter of fact, most Jews - we can assume as certain that each of these three groups formed a separate congregation. To these was added another, led by Ben Yijū, and most probably consisting of Tunisian merchants, who were on their way back from India, but hesitated to return to their homeland owing to the

Norman occupation of most of the coastal towns of Tunisia. These merchants were looking for a place to settle down, cf. No. 68, ll. 19ff., and some of them, including Ben Yijū, tried the newly founded town of ^{Dh} ~~Dū~~ Jibla, a natural choice.

Obviously, that trial was not successful. B.Y. left for Aden, No. 71, and after the death there of his only son, settled in Cairo. When we find him there again at the head of a small congregation, see the Introduction to No. 73, we may safely assume - and that assumption is corroborated by the names of some of the members - that he was followed to Cairo by some of the traders who had been with him in India and Yemen.

71

C o n t e n t s

- A Preamble, consisting mostly of rhymed Hebrew prose (ll. 1-15)
- B Communication that everything was all right with B.Y.'s house in the sender's town (ll. 15-28)
- C Conclusion and greetings (l. 28 - margin)

T r a n s l a t i o n o f B-C

- B (15) I ^{your slave} ~~(lit. the property of His Presence)~~ (16) let you know - may God make your ^s ~~property~~ ⁱ permanent - (17) that when you parted from me, I went to the house (18) and found the hand-mill and the dura-crusher in it. I locked (19) the house up, left it, and entrusted Sheikh ^y Husain with the care (20) for the house, which he was prepared to do. (21) Qais, however, was angry and said: 'Both (22) the implements and the rent ^{and} were lost.' In fact, I (23) let you

know that Sheikh Husayn^y cashed (24) the entire rent and that you have not suffered any loss (25) from the house. Therefore, when he (obviously, Qais) comes to Aden and talks (26) to you about this matter, do not accept (27) his words (as true), nor be distressed or (28) worried by them.

C If you have (29) any business or service, honor your servant (30) with it. To you, my master (31) and proprietor and to my lord Perahya - m(ay) G(od preserve him) - the best greetings.

And Peace.

Margin: Kindly do not cease writing to the servant of your ^{honor} ~~Presence~~ - may I never be deprived of you.

C o m m e n t a r y

18 hand-mill - Ar. mathan. A sketch of a Yemenite hand-mill in Rathjens,
von Wissmannsche ^S Madarabien, Reise Band 3, Hamburg 1934, p. 120.

dura-crusher - Ar. marha, a common word in Southern Yemen denoting a smaller hand-mill for the crushing of peeled dura. The peeled dura grains, after having been steeped in water overnight, are being crushed in the marha, until they become a liquid used for the preparation of lhūh, a flexible flat-cake forming one of the main dishes of the population, cf. details in S. D. Goitein, Jemenica, p. 136, No. 1004. While the hand-mill normally is built on a fixed platform, the marha is transportable.

locked up - text: rbt, normally meaning to tie, to bind. As the door is fastened with a leather string, one says in Yemen, urbut al-bāb, "Tie up

the door." Perhaps, the writer intended to say al-bāb and wrote erroneously al-bait.

19 entrusted, etc. - Ar. zakkan (a shadda is written on the top of the word). This is Yemenite speech. 'ant muzakkan bifulān' - you are responsible for so and so (e.g. that he should not escape). 'zakkin bilada^o ind fulān' - entrust the clothes to so and so. In documents, they write: zknt w drkt (zukkint wa udrikt) I have taken upon myself full responsibility (Goitein, ^{S.}Asaf Jubilee Volume, Jerusalem 1953, p. 200, l. 15 of the document published there, dated 1678). Cf. also Goitein-Habshush, Travels in Yemen, p. 45,6; 112,23.

20 which he was prepared to do - literally: the man did not say anything but 'well' - a common way of expressing consent in Yemenite speech.

21 ^YQais - It is doubtful whether this person was Jewish. I have never heard the name used by Yemenite Jews, nor is it common today in Yemen among Muslims. It was mentioned to me as a family name among Muslims.

21 was angry - text: hrd, most probably pronounced hirid, as today.

22 implements - text: āla. This is in Yemen the legal term for everything movable in a house, e.g. a newly wed woman quarrels with her mother-in-law and the judge ^happroached decides that the husband has to leave his father's house and provide his wife with a house of his own. The formula used is: an tuhat^{dh}tir^{dh} bait wa^l āla, "You have to provide a house with its implements."

C o n t e n t s

A Preamble in Hebrew, similar to that of No. 71 (ll. 1-13)

- B Announcement of the death of Maḍmūn b. Japheth. (11. 13-29)
- C Greetings and request to send a note about the addressee's future movements (11. 29-margin)

T r a n s l a t i o n o f B-C

B (13) I was informed of the death (14) of the lamented master and lord Maḍmūn, the Mordecai of our time, (15) the eminent pillar, the Nagid (Prince) of the land of Yemen, the leader (16) of the congregations, the pride of the communities, m(ay) h(is soul) b(e bound) i(n the bundle of) l(ife) t(ogether with the) r(ighteous) and p(ious), (17) son of h(is honor), g(reatness and) h(oliness), our master and teacher Japheth, m(ay he rest in) E(den of the) P(aradise).

I learned this (18) from other people, not from a letter which reached me (19) nor one from my master (....), nor one from (20) my lords and masters, my master and teacher Halfon, m(ay his Rock preserve) h(im), and my master (21) and teacher Bundār, m(ay the Allmerciful) ke(ep him), the sons of our teacher Maḍmūn, m.E.P. (22) But there arrived a letter from the two brothers to friends of mine, (23) which, however, I have not read. For you - may (24) God made your honored position permanent - know that their correspondence with the lamented - may God (25) favor him with His preference - was one thing and mine another. However, (26) I wrote to his two sons that their letters (27) should reach the most beloved servant of their father (namely, Ben Yijū) (28) informing you of his death, for you were one of his most beloved (29) servants.

C To you and to all encompassed (30) by your care, the best greetings.

Kindly send me

Margin

Dh

an esteemed letter notifying me whether you will come to ḥ Jibla or travel on the sea.....

C o m m e n t a r y

14-16 These epithets are partly official titles and partly honorific by-names quite frequently found as, e.g. the expression "Mordecai of our time," cf. J. Mann, Jews in Egypt, etc., p. 420.

19 nor one from my master - Obviously something is lacking, as the writer can hardly mean to say that he has not received the tidings of Maḍmūn's death from the addressee. Nor is it feasible to complement min kitāb (((ittasala))), "a letter addressed to." For, it would be strange to assume that Ben Yijū had asked the writer to read the letters addressed to him.

24-5 mimman qaddama 'llāhu laṭīfahu - The same eulogy over a dead person in ms. T-S16.250, l. 28, published by S. D. Goitein, Eretz-Israel IV (Jerusalem 1956), p. 151a; laṭīf stands here for laṭīf al-makān, "qui jouit d'un grand faveur," Dozy, Supplément II, 532b; qaddama here in the sense of "to prefer," Dozy II, 315b.

The very involved sentence seems to mean that Maḍmūn addressed the writer only on official business and did not entertain with him a correspondence on personal matters. Their correspondence refers to the writer's friends.

26 I wrote - The subject of kātaba being mamlūk, while the subject of

liyattaṣila is ahbabu, defined in l. 28 by mutāla^catahu. The writer's syntax is somewhat shaky. He obviously wants to say that he had informed Maḍmūn's sons of B.Y.'s whereabouts, so that they could write to him directly.

Margin

The rest of the letter contains a medley of wishes, among them the wish of compensation for a loss, which obviously refers solely to Ben Yijū's bereavement of Maḍmūn and not to any material losses. After greetings to B.Y.'s children, the writer concludes: "may He strengthen their arms wayumahhīl lahu qurabahu and make strong his relatives" - a phrase not found by me so far elsewhere.

Address

The writer's predilection for Hebrew rhymed prose induces him to begin the address of this letter, which is exclusively devoted to the announcement of M.'s death, with the words: "May this letter reach in speed and joy..."

240(72x)

C o n t e n t s

- A End of preamble (in Ar.) (ll. 1-6)
- B Inquiry about the wellbeing of Sheikh Abū Sa^cd, son of Rabbi Netan'ēl, the writer's paternal uncle, and Sheikh Abu ^cAlī b. Abū ^cAmr of Ceylon (ll. 6-10)
- C Request to be notified whether Ben Yijū would come "to the mountains" or remain in Aden (ll. 10-19)
- D Greetings (ll. 19-21)

- E Reference to B.Y.'s report about Maḡmūn's kindness (ll. 21-28)
- F Greetings from one Pairūz, the writer's children and Ḥasan "to all"
(margin, ll. 1-3)

C o m m e n t a r y

- 7 Abū Sa^cd - It is highly probable that this man is identical with the India traveller of the same name, No. 133 verso, l. 9 (in Broach, India), as we find him in Ben Yijū's company in Yemen, No. 223 (72x-b), l. 1, and afterwards in Egypt, see the Introduction to No. 73.
- 9 Abū ^cAlī of Ceylon is almost certainly identical with the goldsmith Abū ^cAlī, who went to Ceylon according to No. 32, l. 27. As he is expected here to be in Aden, he must have been out in Ceylon about ten years at least.
- 10 "the mountains," Ar. al-jabal, is a general designation for the inland of Yemen, as opposed to Aden. Here, more specifically, ^{Sk}ḥū Jibla is meant, the writer's domicile, where he offers to rent a house for B.Y.
- 23 "The Prince of the people of the Lord" was one of Maḡmūn's official titles, see No. 40, l. 4ff. It is interesting to note that ^{Sk c}Yeḡū ā says about M. that he showed kindness to everybody, despite the strained relations existing between his family and M., as reflected in Nos. 38, 39, and 72.

Margin

Pairūz - This man with a Persian name most probably was a slave, serving as Yeḡū ā's factotum and business agent.

Continued by 223 (72x-b)