

From Aden to Malabar Coast
Arabian 226000?

21/III/79 217

Two copies of a letter by Maḍmūn, Aden,
to Abraham Ben Yijū, Malabar Coast, India

now:
Ch. II 13, 14, 15

23. TS⁹ 6 J 4 fol. 14
24. TS 18 J 2 fol. 7
25. TS 12.416

Numbers 23 and 24 together form one complete letter. Line 5 of number 23 is identical with the first line of number 24, but the paper was torn in such a way that the first five words of line five are in number 24, while the last word in the line is on the lower left hand corner of number 23. The length of the page is $7.8 + 36 \text{ cm.} = 43.8 \text{ cm.}$, its width 10.3 cm. The paper is light grey and of medium thickness. It is well preserved, except that the ink on the opposite side can be seen through the paper in places.

Number 25 is written on paper of exactly the same type and dimensions. Only the lower half of this copy has been preserved, approximately 22 cm., corresponding to number 24, recto, ll. 18-37, and verso, ll. 1-18 (to the word kt¹by, "my letter," i.e., only two words are missing here).

Number 23 and number 24 recto were written by the clerk who also wrote number 25, i.e., he made at least two copies of this letter. This same scribe also wrote numbers 26, 30,

⁹ TS = Taylor-Schechter Collection in the University Library, Cambridge, England. The numbers 23, 24, etc., are the numbers given to the relevant Geniza texts in my book Documents (on the India Trade from the Cairo Geniza (in preparation)).

of the High Middle Ages, the India Book

61 and 199, and wrote the postscripts in the margins of number 32. However, the postscript on the verso of number 24 was written by another hand, the same hand which wrote that to number 199 in a very cursive style. It stands to reason, therefore, that this was the hand of the sender, Maḍmūn, himself. The same handwriting is to be found in numbers 27, 29, 32, and 33-34.

The recto of numbers 23-24 is written in a very ornate style in such a way that the sheet is filled exactly. It is thus clear that it was copied from an original which Maḍmūn himself had written. The question then arises, why Maḍmūn added the postscript on the verso of his scribe's copy, and not on the original itself. The answer is that the calligraphic copy served as the official text of the letter, while the draft was sent in another boat as a replacement in the case that the official text was lost.

It is surprising that the receiver of the letter kept two copies of it during all the years he lived in India and did not dispose of them until he came to Cairo. It is even more strange when we see that number 25 has no more room for further writing. From this we may conclude that he kept the paper, ^(if not for reference) for uses other than writing, for example, "to wrap over the mouth of a small flask" (Mishna, Sabbath, 8, 2, in reference to 'erased paper'), or "to stop up the mouth of his flask" (Baba Metzia 13a, in reference to a cancelled legal document).

Contents of the letter:

- A. Acknowledgment of Ben Yijū's letter and shipment (number 23, ll. 1-5, number 24, ll. 1-10).
- B. List of gifts sent to Ben Yijū with ^cAbd al-Masīḥ, the deacon (number 24, ll. 10-23).
- C. Acknowledgment of a shipment sent by Ben Yijū to the merchant Abu 'l-Khair and business dealings of the latter (ibid., ll. 23-29).
- D. The market for iron in Aden (ibid., 29-35).
- E. Greetings (ibid., 35-37).

Postscript:

- F. Request to ask three Indian acquaintances, two Hindus and one Muslim or Jew, to send pepper and iron from Mangalore, and coconuts etc. from Diu (ibid., verso, ll. 1-12).
- G. Announcement that Maḍmūn was prepared to fit out a ship to sail from Aden in partnership with the aforementioned (ibid., ll. 13-18).

Translation:

- A. No. 23. (1) Your hands (sic) shall be high above your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off.
- (2) To our worthy m(aster) and t(eacher) Abraham, m(ay God

remember him) f(avorably), the son of o(ur honored),
g(reat) and h(oly) m(aster) and t(eacher) (3) Yijū,
m(ay he rest in the) g(arden of) E(den), (from) your
friend Maḍmūn, the son of Ḥasan, m(ay he rest in the)
g(arden of) E(den).

(4) The letter of my lord, the most illustrious elder, arrived; I read (~~number~~ 24, 1.1) and understood it, and I was happy to learn that you were well (~~number~~ 23, 1.5) and your affairs (~~number~~ 24, 1.2) in order, for which I thanked God very much, and asked Him to give you more of every good thing. May God unite (4) us under the most joyful circumstances, and in the best of (5) spirits, for he controls this and is able to effect it, if (6) God will.

From what you mentioned, (7) my lord, I learned that you sent the two locks and the two thousand (8) white and red betel nuts. I have already (9) received this and I thank you for attending (10) to it.

B. I have sent you a bundle of (12) Berbera mats, six in number, (11) with ḲAbd al-Masīḥ, the deacon. (13) We wrapped them in canvas and your name is written (14) on it in Arabic and Hebrew. With him, I have also sent you (a gift) from me: (16) a new, first-rate, unbleached Dabīqī scarf, (17) which has a pretty band on each side, (18) and is fit to be worn by prominent men. (I) also (sent) with him (19) two sets of fine, large paper -- (20) government paper, the like of which (21) no one has. In

addition, (I sent) with him two rubā^ciyyāt of (22) sugar and raisins. See that you receive all this from him.

C. (23) Everything you sent to Abu 'l-Khair arrived, (24) and he has taken delivery of all of it. (25) He bought Egyptian linen and went up into the (26) Highlands. He requested me to ask you to look after his interests (27) and send his remaining (28) iron and cardamon, and the entire balance to his credit. (29) Send him all this on the first boat (30) which sails from India.

D. As for iron, this (31) year it sold (well) in Aden -- all (32) kinds of iron -- and in the coming year (33) there will also be a good market, because (34) there is none at all left in the city. (35) Please take notice of this.

E. Please accept for yourself the best of (36) wishes, and for your son Surūr, and for Bamah, (37) the most bountiful well-being. And Peace.

Verso (in Maḍmūn's hand).

F. (1) Please give Sūs Sītī and Kinbātī [and Ishā . .] (2) and Ishāq the Banyān my best regards, and tell them (3) of my longing for them. Inform them in my name that as for pepper, in (4) this coming year its value, (that is) the price per bahār, will be (5) thirty dinars, and more, and as for refurbished iron, (6) a bahār will be (worth) not less than twenty dinars, (7) and that the raqs (shining, glittering iron), which was in the city, is completely exhausted. (8) (Tell them also) to

dispatch a ship from Mangalore, if they can, (9) and to send in it any available pepper, iron, (10) cubeb, and ginger; it should set out at the first opportunity for (11) al-Dyyb [Diu], taking some coir (coconut fiber), fine aloes wood, (12) mango (?), and coconuts, because all these are selling well.

G. (13) If they are equipping a ship in Aden, and they want me (14) to take part, I will share (in it) with them. If there were (15) a ship sailing from Mangalore this year, I would send them (16) gold, sugar, raisins and (other) goods. Be sure to inform them (17) of all this, and do not be remiss, for you take the place of (18) a letter of mine to them. And Peace.

Address in Arabic script, written in the same direction as the postscript below:

(1) The most illustrious elder,	His servant
Ibrāhīm b. Īshū, the Israelite,	Madmūn b.
may God preserve his high	al-Ḥa[san]
position.	

Address in Hebrew script, written on number 24 verso, on the reverse side, opposite the beginning of the letter:

(1) <u>To our worthy m(aster) and</u>	<u>Your friend Maḏmūn,</u>
<u>t(eacher) Abraham, (2) m(ay)</u>	<u>the son of Ḥasan, m(ay</u>
<u>God remember him f(avorably),</u>	<u>he rest in the) g(arden</u>
<u>the son of o(ur master) and</u>	<u>of) E(den).</u>
<u>t(eacher) Yijū, m(ay he rest</u>	
<u>in the) g(arden of) E(den).</u>	

Commentary

No. 23

- 1 Your hands shall be high, etc. -- Micah 5:8; where
 "your hand" ^{(in the singular) (biblical)} . . . This verse and similar ones, are
 found at the beginning of other letters from that
 period. ^{This replaces Arabic wa-ḥabata a'dāhu, "may}
^{he crush your enemies," usually said at the}
^{beginning of letters.}
 - 2 The abbreviation z"l is generally known as a blessing
 for the dead. In Yemenite usage, however, these
 letters stand for z(ākhūr) l(eṭōv[a]) and are used as
 a blessing for the living.
 - 3 Your friend -- spelled 'hbk, both here and in the Hebrew
 address, without the waw, as often in the Bible, for
 example, I Kings 5:15, Isaiah 41:8, Proverbs 18:24,
 Esther 5:10, 14.
- Ḥasan -- in the Arabic address with the article.

No. 24

- 7 Locks -- see number 26, verso, l. 28, below.
- 8 Betel nuts -- a common Indian export commodity. See
 numbers 26, verso, ll. 23-27, below.
- 11 ^cAbd al-Masīḥ the deacon -- shammās. Just as Jewish
 rabbis and Muslim qadis dabbled in trade, so did
 ecclesiastical officers of the Christian Church --
 here probably of the Syrian Church of India. While
 traveling from Aden to India, he acted as ^{an} agent for
 two Jews.

- 12 Mats which were brought to Aden from the African port of Berbera. The same gift was also sent in letter ~~number~~ 29, l. 46.
- 14 "In Arabic and Hebrew" -- as the two addresses in this letter demonstrate, the terms "Arabic" and "Hebrew" refer not only to the script, but to the language as well.
- 17 Band -- Ar., silsilah. This word, which usually means 'chain,' also has the sense of 'collar,' and it seems that it here refers to some kind of decorated fringes.
- 19 Sets -- Ar. dast, which designates a number of objects of the same description. The word is once specified in these papers (~~number~~ 34, l. 6, in connection with Chinese cups) as a set of six, and once (~~number~~ 54, l. 24, referring to paper) as a set of twelve. Paper was also sent in single sheets, as in number 55, l. 15, where fifteen sheets of large Ṭalḥī paper are mentioned. In contemporary Egyptian and Yemenite Arabic dasta is "a dozen," which in Yemen, when connected to a following word, is shortened to dast, e. g. dast shama^c, "a dozen candles." The same word in Modern Egyptian designates "a quire of paper," cf. Spiro, Arabic-English Dictionary of Egypt, Cairo, 1923, p. 173^a, and Dozy, Supplément I, page 441^a; according to A. Barthélemy Dict. Ar.-Franc., Dialectes de Syrie, page 239, dast is "a set of 400 leaves of paper," which does not, of course, apply here. The sending of paper as gifts or

merchandise to India is mentioned very frequently in our documents.

- 21 Rubā^ciyyāt -- According to A. Grohmann, Sūdārabien als Wirtschaftsgebiet, II, 98, who relies on E. Glaser and other 19th century travelers in South Arabia, the rubā^cī has four Tumānī of 2.387 kg. which would make 9.448 kg. In Ṣan^cā', the capital of Yemen, I am informed, the rubā^cī is 1/8 of a Qadaḥ. The Yemenite Qadaḥ (cf. al-Wāsi^cī, Ta'rīkh al-Yemen, Cairo, 1346/1927-8, page 200, l. 4) is the equivalent of two modern oil tins. This too would give the rubā^cī a weight of about 10 kg.
- 24 Abu 'l-Khair -- This name occurs frequently in these documents. He is perhaps to be identified with Abu 'l-Khair al-Barqī (~~number~~ 199, 1.6; ~~number~~ 32, 11. 63-64).
- 26 To the highlands of central Yemen.
- 32 All kinds of iron -- Five different types of iron are mentioned in these documents.
- 36 Surūr -- This Arabic name, which means 'Joy,' corresponds to the Hebrew name Peraḥyā, which means "Joy in the Lord," according to the meaning of the Arabic root [↑]frḥ.[↑] Peraḥyā was the name of this Surūr's grandfather.
- Bamah -- the slave and house-steward of Ben Yijū.

Verso

- 1-2 Sūs Sītī etc. -- The first two names are Indian. Ishāq can be the name of a Jew or a muslim. Banyān is the usual designation for an Indian merchant.

11 Diu, an island south of the Saurashtra peninsula of Gujarāt on the northwestern end of the Gulf of Cambay (north of Bombay), was a great emporium of trade in the Late Middle Ages, see Enc. Isl.², II, page 322. The name has the article because it simply means "island" (dipa), a meaning certainly known to the Arabic speaking Middle Easterners.

12 Fine aloeswood, ḵrbh, clearly spelled thus in both copies, has not been found by me elsewhere. I take it as Persian agar bih, see ^SF~~i~~steingass, Persian-English Dictionary, p. 90, as derived from Sanskrit aguru (modern agar, information by Professor A. L. Basham).

The item nw'shk also has not been traced thus far. Professor Basham suggested navāmsuka, which might be pronounced something like nūāshuk, a compound of nava, new, and amsuka, fine cloth, muslin. I doubt, however, whether textiles would be mentioned between coir and coconuts and wonder whether nw'shk could not stand for nagzak, mango, see O. Spies, Ibn Fadlallah al-Omari's Bericht über India, Leipzig, 1943, page 33. Mango would be traded as pickles or as a preserve.

13 Equipping -- Ar. jahāz, cf. l. 8, i.e., buying or building a ship and fitting it out.

16 Gold -- the reference, it seems, is to gold coins. Sugar and raisins -- generally appear in small quantities sent as gifts for children. Here they are export

commodities. (Other) goods -- i.e., goods ordered by Indian merchants.

The Arabic Address (the same address, with slight variations, as in 27): 2 Īshū -- The name Yijū was also pronounced and written as Yishū, see number 27 in the Hebrew address, and ~~number~~ 62, 1. 1, or as Ishū.

Fragments of Two Copies of a letter
from Madmūn to Ben Yijū

26 TS 24.66

27a TS NS J, fol. 5

27b 13 J 7, fol. 13

TS

27c TS Box K 25, frgt. 252

No. 26 is a copy, written by the clerk who wrote numbers 23-24, of the original, numbers 27a-c, which is written by Madmūn. The fifth line of number 27a matches the first line of number 26. Number 27b begins with the last word in line 5 of number 26. It concludes with the second word of line 35 of number 26. The address has been preserved only in number 27a, since the custom was to write the address on the reverse side of the sheet, opposite the beginning, and the beginning, usually containing only polite phrases, was often torn away as not needed, while paper always was in demand for all kinds of purposes, see above.

The clerk worked with great exactitude. There is no