

CHAPTER TWO

THE WEALTHY MERCHANTS OF YEMEN

Letters from Madmūn to Abraham ben Yiju, a merchant and
manufacturer from Tunis residing in India.

portions of two copies of a letter by Madmūn to ben Yiju

23 University Library Cambridge 6 J 4 fol. 14

24 " " " 18 J 2 fol. 7

25 " " " T-S 12.416

Nos. 23 and 24 together comprise one complete letter. Line 5 of no. 23 is identical with the first line of no. 24, but the paper was torn in such a way that the first five words of line 5 are in no. 24, while the last word in the line is on the lower left hand corner of no. 23. The length of the page is 7.8 + 36 cm., its width 10.3 cm. The paper is ^{light} bright grey and is of medium thickness. It is well preserved except that the ink on the opposite side can sometimes be seen through the paper.

No. 25 is written on paper of the exact same type and dimensions. Only the lower half of this copy has been preserved, approximately 22 cm., corresponding to no. 24, recto, ll. 18-37, and verso, ll. 1-18 (to the word , " my letter ", i.e. only two words are missing). As we see, only the beginning of the verso has been preserved, since the custom in writing was to

4c. 1. 12 India book-

III, 23-31 (84 pages)

turn the page, topside down, so that the beginning of the verso was written on the opposite side of the lower part of the recto.

No. 23 and no. 24 recto were written by a clerk who also wrote no. 25, or who at least made two copies of this letter and wrote the additions in the margins of no. 32. This same clerk also wrote nos. 26, 30, 61 and 199. However, the addition on the verso of no. 24 was written by another hand, the same hand which wrote the addition to no. 199 in a very cursive style. ^{We} ~~XX~~ may then presume ~~XXXXXX~~ ~~XX~~ that this was the hand of the sender, Maḍmūn, himself. The same handwriting is to be found in nos. 27a - 27, 29, 32, and 33 - 34.

The recto of nos. 23 - 24 is written in a very ornate style, in such a way that the sheet is filled exactly. It is thus clear that he copied from an original which Maḍmūn himself had written. However, the question then arises, why Maḍmūn made the addition on the verso of his clerk's copy, and not on the original itself. The reader will find an explanation of this in the introduction to no. 29 (p. § and to no. 32 (p.).

It is hard to decide whether the clerk first copied the recto of 24 or ^{of} 25. No. 24 is written in a slightly more elaborate style, but with less diacritical marks than no. 25. At any rate, it is clear that a clerk copied no. 25 verso from no. 24 verso, since this side, or, more exactly, the addition, was written by Maḍmūn (see above) .

It is very 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 no. 25 has no more room for further writing. From this we may perhaps conclude that he kept the paper 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'), " to stop up the mouth of his flask " (Baba Metziah 13a, in reference to a ^{worthless} legal document)

The contents of the letter are as follows:

acknowledgement

a) ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ of receipt of ben Yiju's letter and shipment (no. 23, ll. 1-5, no. 24, ll. 1 - 10).

b) a list of gifts sent to ben Yiju with Abd al-Masīh, the ^{deacon} ~~scribe~~ (no. 24, ll. 10 - 23).

c) acknowledgement of a shipment sent by ben Yiju 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) salutations (ibid., 35 - 37)

appendix:

f) a request to ask three Indian acquaintances, two Hindus and one Muslim or Jew, to send pepper and iron from Mangalore, and coconut fibres and coconuts etc. from Dayb (ibid. verso, ll. 1 - 12).

g) an offer by Madmīn to fit out a ship to sail from Aden in partnership with the aforementioned (ibid., ll. 13 - 18).

Translation:

- a) no. 23 1. (1) Your hands will be lifted up above your adversaries, and all your enemies will be cut off. (2) To our worthy m(aster) and t(eacher) Abraham, m(ay remembrance of him be to the good), the son of our honored, great and holy m(aster) and t(eacher) Yiju, m(ay he rest in the garden of) E(den), your friend Madmūn, the son of Hasan, m(ay he rest in the garden of) E(den). (4) The letter of my lord, the illustrious Sheikh, arrived ; I read/and understood it, and I ~~was~~ happy to learn you were ~~XXX~~ that ~~XXXXXX~~ ~~IX~~ well (no. 23, 1. 5) and your affairs (no. 24, 1. 2) in order ~~XXXXXX~~, for which I thanked ~~XXXXXX~~ very much, and asked Him to give you more of every good thing. May God unite us under the most joyful circumstances, and in the best of spirits, for He controls this and is able to effect it, if God will.
- From what you mentioned, my lord, I learned that you sent the two locks and the/thousand/white and red betel nuts. I have already (9) received this and I thank you for attending/to it. (12)
- b) I have sent you a parcel of Berbera mats, six in number, (11) /with Abd al-Masīh, the deacon, (13) We wrapped them in canvass and your name is written (14) on it in Arabic and Hebrew. (15) I have also sent you ~~XXXXXX~~ (a gift) from me with him, (16) a new, thin, unfinished Dabīqī scarf (17) which has a pretty band on each side, (18) and is fit ~~XXXXXX~~ to be worn by prominent

(19)
men. (1) also (sent) with him/ two sets of fine, large paper - (20)
government paper, the like^s of which (21) no one has. In addition,
(I sent) with him two rubā'iyāt 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/ and send ~~XXX~~ ~~XXX~~ ⁽²⁷⁾ his remaining (28)
~~XXX~~ cardamon, and everything which is ~~XXXXX~~ owed to him. (29)
Send him all this on the first boat/ to sail from India. ⁽³⁰⁾

d) As for ~~XXX~~ iron, this (31) year ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ 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 note of this (lit. 'behold,
I have informed him, i.e. you, of this '). ^{e)} Please accept for
yourself the best of (36) ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ wishes, and for your son
Surūr, and for ^{Bamah,} (37) the most bountiful well-being. And Peace .

VERSO (in Madmūn's hand)

f) (1) Please give ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Sūs Sītī and Kinbatī
[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 ~~XXX~~ be (worth)/^{not}less
 than twenty dinars, ⁽⁷⁾ and that the which was in the
 city is completely exhausted. (8) (Tell them also) to fit
 out a ship (to sail) 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) Dayb,
 taking a little coconut fibre ~~XXX~~, , (12) ,
 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 sundries. 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 addition below: ~~the~~

most illustrious

(1) The/~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ Sheikh, Ibrāhīm ~~XXX~~ b. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ his servant,
 Ishu the Israelite ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~
 (i.e. the Jew), may God preserve ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ Maḍmūn b. al-Ha[san].
 his greatness.

ADDRESS: in Hebrew script: written on no. 24 verso, on the overleaf
 opposite to the beginning of the letter, i.e. written in the
 reverse direction to whatever else was written on the same page
 (i.e. no. 24 verso), as is usual for addresses:

(1) To our worthy m(aster) and
 (2)
 t(eacher) Abraham, /m(ay re-
 membrance of him be) t(o the
 good), the son of ~~XXXX XXXXXXXXX~~
~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ o(ur master) and
 t(eacher) Yiju, m(ay he rest in
 the) g(arden of) E(den).

your friend Maḍmūn
the son of Hasan, m(ay
he rest in the) g(ar-
den of) E(den).

COMMENTARY

~~XXXXXXXX~~ no. 23

1 - Your hands will be lifted up, etc. - cf. Micah 5:8; ^{Q(1)J}~~XXXXXX~~
 is written plene here. This ~~XXXX~~ verse, or others like it,
 are found at the beginning of letters of the same period. It
 seems that Maḍmūn was not in the habit of opening his letters
 with the phrase 'in Thy name, o Merciful One', as was usual,
 cf. no. 13, and see below no. 27 recto and no. 30.

2 - '3 - this abbreviation usually stands for the phrase

(u)1725 ✓ ~~(Q(1)J)~~ (12)X, "may his memory be for a blessing", used in
 20225 eulogy of the dead. However, in Yemenite usage, the letters
 stand for (Q(1)J)5 (12)X, "may remembrance of him be to the
 good", used as a blessing for the living. See in the intro-
 duction, p. .

3 - 1X - ~~XXX~~ For the pronunciation of this name, see below
 in the commentary to the Arabic address of this letter.

7201X - the original has 7201X, both here and in the

Hebrew address, without the waw, as often in the Bible, for example, 1 Kings 5:15, Isaiah 41:8, Proverbs 18:24, Esther 5:10, 14. See also below, no. 40, l. 17.

יִשְׂרָאֵל - in the Arabic address with the article, as *al-Yisra'el*.

no. 24

6 - אֲנִי יְשׁוּעָה בֶן-נָחֶמְשִׁי - אֲנִי יְשׁוּעָה would have been better, since it is the subject of what precedes. However, this phrase which usually ends the introductory paragraph of a letter is stereotyped.

~~XXXX~~ 7 - locks - See below no. 26 verso, l. 28, and no. 57, l. 15.

8 - betel nuts - This Indian export commodity occurs often in these documents, cf. Introduction p .

11 - Abd al-Masīh the deacon - in Arabic *ʿabd al-masīḥ*. Just as we found Jewish Rabbis and Muslim Qadis dabbling in trade, so here we have an ecclesiastical officer of the Christian Church - the Syrian Church it seems - travelling from Aden to India, who acts as the intermediary between two Jews.

12 - ~~XXXXXXXX~~ 'ṭaṭṭa - i.e. mats which were brought to Aden from the African port of Berbera. The same gift was also sent in letter no. 29 (cf. l. 46).

14 - "in Arabic and ~~XXX~~ 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.

16 - 'ṭaṭṭa - see in the index to the Introduction.

Ar.
17 - band - ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~, 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.

Ar.
19 - sets - ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ dest , which designates a number ~~XXXX~~ of objects of the same description. The word is once specified in these papers (cf. no. 34 recto, l. 6~~7~~, in connection with Chinese cups) as a set of six, and once (cf. no. 54, l. 24, referring to paper) as a set of twelve. Paper was also sent in single sheets, as in no 55, l. 15, where fifteen sheets of large Talhi paper~~4~~ 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&, "a dozen candles". The same word in Modern Egyptian designates "a quire of paper", cf. Spiro, Arabic-English Dictionary of Egypt, Cairo, 1923, p. 173A, and Dozy, Supplément I, p. 441A ; according to A. Barthélemy, Dict. Ar.-Franc., Dialectes de Syrie, p. 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 these documents, cf. 26, v. 31; 199(= 29x), ll. 9-10 ; no. 51 v. 12 ; no. 53 l. 10 ; no. 54, l. 24 ; no. 55, l. 15 ; no. 57, l. 27 ; no. 58, ll. 42-3 ; no. 208 (= 60x) l. 49 ; no. 67, ll. 4,13 ; (no. 84 margin l.3) ; no. 175, margin, l.2.

21 - rubā'īyyāt - According to A. Grohmann, Südarabien als Wirtschaftsgebiet II, 98, who relies on E. Glaser and other 19th century travellers in South Arabia, the rubā'ī has the Tumānī of 2.387 kg. which would make 9.448 kg. In San'a', the capital of Yemen, I am informed, the rubā'ī is 1/8 of a Qadah. The Yemenite Qadah - as is unanimously confirmed by immigrants and found also in al-Wasī'ī's Ta'rikh al-Yemen, Cairo 1346/1927-8, p. 200, l. 4 - is the equivalent of two modern oil tins. This too would give the rubā'ī a weight of about 10 kg.

24 - Abū 'l-Khair - This name occurs often in these documents. He is perhaps to be identified with a person bearing the same name who is mentioned in no. 199, l. 6, and with Abū 'l-Khair al-Barqī, mentioned below in no. 32 ll. 63 - 64. However, this is not at all certain.

26 - to the highlands - i.e. to the highlands of central Yemen.

32 - all kinds of iron - five different types of iron are mentioned in these documents, see Introduction, p. .

36 - Surūr - this Arabic name, which means 'joy', corresponds to the Hebrew name P^erahyāh, which means "joy in the Lord", according to the sense of the Arabic root 'frḥ'. P^erahyāh is the name of this Surūr's grandfather, see below, p. .

- Bamah - the ~~XXXXXXXX~~ slave and house-steward of the receiver of the letter, see below, p. .

VERSO

1 - 2 - Sūs Sītī etc. - the first two names are Indian. 'Ishāq' can be the name of a Jew or a Muslim. 'Banyan' means 'merchant' in Indian, see below p. .

- 5 - 30 dinars (i.e. Malikī[̄] dinars, see above) for a bahār of pepper in Aden is a stiff price indeed. See Introduction, p. .
- 6 - 7 - For the different types of iron and comparisons between each, see in the Introduction, p. .
- 10 - 12 - for these Indian commodities see the Index to the Introduction.
- 13 - equipping - Ar. jahāz, ~~XXXX~~ cf. l. 8, i.e. buying or building a ship ^{and} fitting it out to sail.
- 16 - gold - the reference, it seems, is to gold coins.
- sugar and raisins - ^{generally} ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ appear in small quantities sent as gifts. Here, however, they are ~~XX~~ export commodities.
- (other) goods - i.e. goods ordered by Indian Merchants.

The Arabic Address: (the same addres, with slight variations, as in
 27 ~~XXXXX~~)

- 2 - 'Ishū - cf. Abraham b. 'Ishū, no. 62, verso, l. 1. The name Yīju
 was also pronounced and written as ^{Yishu} ~~XXXX~~, see no. 27a in the Hebrew
 address, and no. 62, l. 1. or as 'Ishū, see below, p. .