1 Introduction: A List of Luggage from the Indian Ocean World

(Line 1)[1] In the name of the Lord. Specification of the number of baskets and (2) gunnies and bottles and *fātiya* chests, (3) and remaining luggage. These include: one large (4) gunny of rice and one small gunny of RĀ[. . .]. (5) And also, for the travel provisions: four small (6) gunnies and two baskets of rice and two baskets of hard wheat and one basket (7) of coconuts and one basket of flour and 3 *fātiya* chests of L[. . .] (8) and one *fātiya* chest of *dādhī* and one *fātiya* chest of copper and iron, (9) and one *fātiya* chest of the fishermen's gear. One cloth with iron (10) and other items, and one *qarṭala* basket of bread and 5 *marīna*s of vinegar (11) and also one bamboo *fātiya* chest of locks and one basket of locks (12) and one meal carrier, separate in straw, and one table jug, (13) separate in straw, and one basket of worked brass (14) and another basket of worked brass and another basket (15) of worked brass, large, and 3 small baskets of (16) iron and stuff, and one *salla* basket of glassware and two *fātiya* chests (17) of glassware and two stone *ṭājin*s in hay and two stone (18) pots and one *salla* basket of china and 4 *raṭliya* jars filled with (19) oil and *ḥumūḍa* and one bottle of wine and one trap (20) for rats and six bottles of oil and one *fātiya* chest of firewood (21) and six empty bottles and one bottle of soap (22) and two *barniyya* jars of citrus and ginger, and 5 waterskins of mango (23) and two waterskins of *ḥūt* fish and two waterskins of citrus and 5 empty waterskins (24) and the *salla* basket of bread and one large *ṭabaq* and 3 ladles and one large (25) ladle. And of the *qaṣᶜa* bowls: two *qaṣᶜa*s and also one large (26) *qaṣᶜa* and one new *qaṣᶜa* and two old *qaṣᶜa*s. (27) And of the *fātiya* chests: 4 *fātiya* chests of textiles. (28) And two *barniyya* jars of clarified butter and 4 legs for a bed and two old (29) *qaṣᶜa*s and 4 new *qaṣᶜa*s and 3 bundles of pots (30) and one undecorated cabin door. (31) And with the *nākhudā* Abu-l-Sh[..]ᶜ FYDM: one *miḥlab* bowl (32) and one MWJH and 4 *qaṣᶜa* bowls (33) [. . .] planks for the cabin and 3 planks for beds (34) and 4 ᶜĪDĀN and one plank for a *kursī* (35) [.] and six [. . .]ᶜYA with other stuff. (36) And of the copper: one table jug and

[1] In this chapter the English translation is formatted as a sequential list along the lines of the original document. For this and other layout and translation decisions see the introduction to the Appendix.

> one *ṭājin* and one basin and ewer (37) and 3 *tālam* platters. 20 carpets and one iron lamp (38) and two strips of leather and its ^{C}[..]L, the *farāsila*[2] [. . .] (39) and one coconut scraper and seven [..]ĀSĪ and one *mīzār* wrap [. . .], [. . . . .] six [. . .]Ā^{C}, with the *nākhudā* Abu-l-Faraj.

So runs a list of luggage written in Judaeo-Arabic, that is Arabic written in Hebrew characters, penned on two sides of a small, narrow slip of paper. Like other informal, utilitarian lists of its kind it runs sequentially across the page, using every millimeter of paper to enumerate over 173 different items, from items listed singly such as a "trap for rats," to containers of multiple uncounted things such as a "basket of worked brass." The use at one point of the term *zād*, travel provisions, clarifies that the writer had packed at least some of these items for that purpose, while several references to furnishings for a *balīj* (*billīj*) or ship's cabin and to certain *nākhudā*s or ship owners involved in the transport of this luggage leave no doubt that at least part of this journey was to take place by sea. The terms themselves belong to a maritime patois distinctive of the western Indian Ocean and their use here anchors this luggage firmly within that area.[3] The presence of large quantities of rice among the provisions and other items such as "one basket of coconuts" and "5 waterskins of mango" confirm this general location, rather than a Mediterranean context. But it is the abundant use of *fātiya* chests for packing – no less than thirteen in all – as well as the more discreet presence of "3 *tālam* platters" that point more precisely to the assembly of this luggage in India, somewhere on the coasts of modern-day Kerala and Karnataka where these terms (and the objects they designate) have a long history of usage.[4]

Initially the list appears disorganized and inconsistent, quite against the order we assume lists to impose: objects or provisions are not grouped together in any clear way and while some items are simply recorded as part of larger bundles or chests, others are described individually in minute detail. Side by side we find items as varied as one *qarṭala* basket of bread, four *fātiya* chests of textiles, five empty waterskins, one undecorated cabin door, one bottle of wine and no fewer than sixteen *qaṣ^{c}a* bowls – new ones,

[2] A measure of weight; see the Appendix, English translation, n.60.

[3] Both terms are loanwords into Judaeo-Arabic and commonly found before this in Arabic and Persian language sources from the Indian Ocean area. On the reading of *balīj*/*billīj* see English translation in the Appendix, n.49; for *nākhudā* see S.D. Goitein and Mordechai A. Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza ("India Book")* (Leiden and Boston: E.J. Brill, 2008), 121–56.

[4] Other terms can be traced to several of the Indic languages active on the northern coast of Malibarat in the medieval period, notably to Tulu, the language of the Tulunad region around Mangalore, and to Malayalam, the language of present-day Kerala. For the vocalization of these terms see Appendix, English translation, nn.5 and 57.

old ones, small ones, big ones. No doubt this list describes the very real mountain of luggage and provisions that faced its writer. A closer reading nevertheless reveals a determined logic and fitness for purpose. As its heading promises – "specification of the number of baskets and gunnies and bottles and *fāṭiya* chests, and remaining luggage" (*maʿrifa ʿadad al-zanābil wa-l-jawānī wa-l-qanānī wa-l-fawātī wa baqāya al-dabash*) – this list is a specification and enumeration of its author's luggage. The various containers are precisely described: they are "large," "small," of "bamboo," or identified by a range of specific appellations such as *zanbīl*, *salla* or *qarṭala* for baskets, *marīna* or *barniyya* for other containers, and they are always counted. Contents also matter: chests, gunnies, baskets, bottles and cloths either contain some "thing" or are specified to be empty. Foodstuffs are itemized in particular detail, whereas textiles and some metal items are bulk listed; there are no containers of generic "provisions" or "food." Cabin furnishings are also given particular attention: an undecorated door and planks for the cabin, legs and planks for a bed. A few key utensils such as ladles and the *qaṣʿa* bowls appear to have traveled loose among the luggage. The luggage is also subdivided into three parts, the last two consignments entrusted to a different ship owner or *nākhudā* for transportation along at least part of the route. The list is a checklist of sorts, allowing its writer to visually track and count this mountain of luggage during the course of a journey, and to verify that key provisions were present.

But if there is method to this list and even a formal heading, this is a less than formal document. If we look beyond this neatly typeset English translation to the very material qualities of the document itself (Figs. 1a and b, 2a and b), we see that the list is written on the reverse and in the blank spaces of an earlier document.[5] This small strip of paper is only some 28.3 cm long by 10.4 cm wide, and it still bears the creases from where the original memorandum was folded over and over into a small and easily transportable flat "packet," barely 3 cm high by 9.7 cm wide. In both size and format it is typical of the common correspondence of the period, allowing the easy transportation of sometimes a hundred letters about one's person.[6] The list is written, in effect, on scrap paper; and although the

[5] This memorandum is only summarized in the English edition but a full transcription of the Judaeo-Arabic, with Hebrew translation, is available in S.D. Goitein and Mordechai A. Friedman, *Abraham Ben Yiju India Trader and Manufacturer: India Book III, Cairo Geniza Documents* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute and the Rabbi David Moshe and Amalia Rosen Foundation, 2010), 104–5 (IB III, 8).

[6] The best reference I know is cited in Nadia Zeldes and Miriam Frenkel, "The Sicilian Trade. Jewish Merchants in the Mediterranean in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," in *Gli Ebrei in Sicilia dal tardoantico al medioevo: studi in onore di Mons. Benedetto Rocco*, edited by Nicolò Bucaria (Palermo: Flaccovio Edittore, 1998), 250, mentioning 103 letters seized from a rabbi traveling in the Mediterranean.

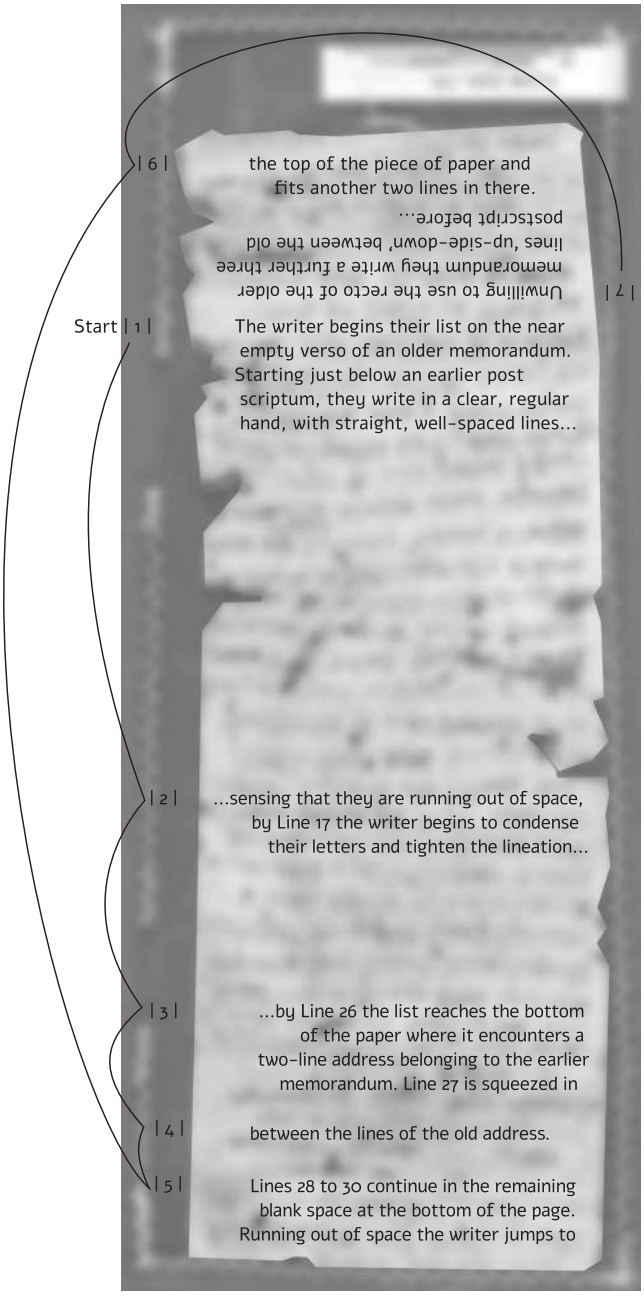

Fig. 1a Diagram summarizing the ductus of Abraham's luggage list, T-S NS 324.114 (verso) beginning on the largely blank reverse of an older letter.

Fig. 1b Photograph of T-S NS 324.114 (verso) seen through its Melinex mounting in Cambridge University Library.

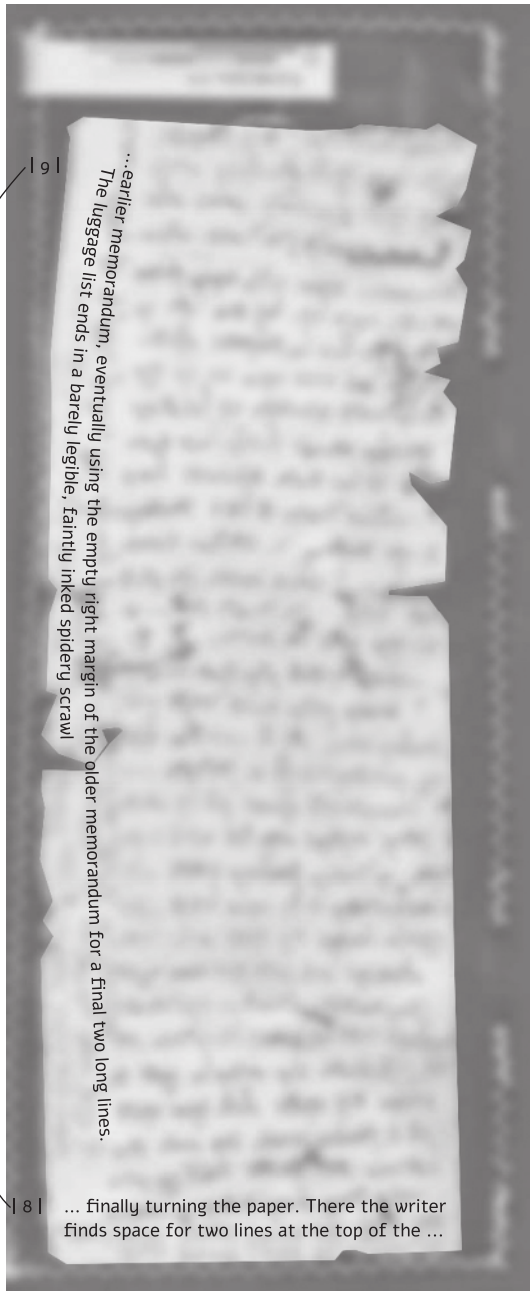

Fig. 2a Diagram summarizing the ductus of T-S NS 324.114 (recto), the luggage list continued.

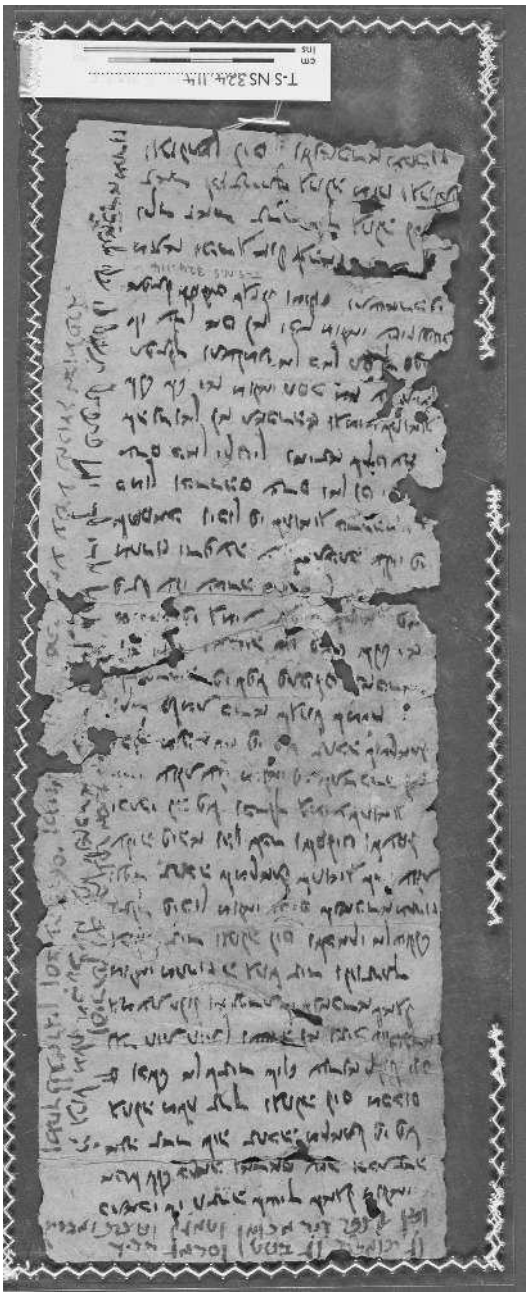

Fig. 2b Photograph of T-S NS 324.114 (recto).

handwriting is clear it is by no means formal. The purposeful hand and lineation of the heading quickly give way to smaller letters and tighter lines as the writer attempts to contain this growing list within the blank spaces available. Failing in this, the last third of the list from Line 26 onwards jumps and somersaults between lines of older text, negotiating a place between the address and post scriptum of the earlier memorandum before overflowing into the empty margins on the other side of the sheet and ending in a barely legible, spidery scrawl. It is no accident that this is the section of the list with the greatest number of lacunae, and consequently tentative readings in the English edition (Lines 36–9). Several misspellings in the later half of the list add to this sense of hurry: *jazāj* for *zajāj*, "glasswares," in Line 16, *barīnatayn* for *barniyyatayn*, "two *barniyya* jars," in Line 28, and *milḥab* for *miḥlab*, a type of wooden bowl, in Line 31.[7]

The materiality of the handwriting captures larger bodily movements too. While the firm, regularly inked ductus of the first part of the list indicates that its writer began writing against a hard surface of some sort – the medieval Middle East continued the writing postures of Antiquity, writing sitting on the ground and resting the writing surface on a wooden board or *lawḥa* with a pot of ink on the floor nearby – by the end of the list the scrawled and barely inked writing suggests they had abandoned this support for the palm of their hand or some other soft surface.[8] Very probably the writer moved around the pile of luggage they recorded; they were certainly too far from the pot of ink, or too busy, to re-ink their pen. This is the "personal writing" described by Colette Sirat as writing produced when people are in "a familiar environment . . . writing for themselves" – in brief, the writing seen in "drafts, personal notes or friendly letters."[9] The luggage list is a note rather than a formal inventory, or perhaps a draft for a more formal document; the truth is we know little about port administration and paperwork in this part of the Indian coast before the early modern period. Fortunately for us, our writer did not (or could not) continue this list on a second sheet of paper, a fact that has ensured that it has survived in its entirety. Today, this piece of paper is known by the shelf-number T-S NS 324.114 and it lies, ironed flat and shrouded in protective Melinex, altogether inconspicuous among its

[7] See discussion of these misspellings in the Appendix, Judaeo-Arabic Transcription and Arabic Transliteration, nn.6, 11, 14 and 16.
[8] Colette Sirat, *Writing as Handwork: A History of Handwriting in Mediterranean and Western Culture* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 409. Sloping, even "crescent"-shaped lines in several documents suggest the use of a thigh or palm as a writing support, see Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders*, 622 (IB III, 15) and 764 (III, 49).
[9] Sirat, *Writing as Handwork*, 430 and contrasted with more self-conscious "controlled writing."

neighbors in a large black folder in the Special Collections of Cambridge University Library.

This "specification" (*maᶜrifa*) does not name the owner of the luggage. Indeed, why would its writer think to include their name in their own list? Fortunately, when this document finally came to be examined in Cambridge in the 1950s the writer's identity was immediately apparent to its cataloguer on palaeographic grounds. The Israeli scholar S.D. Goitein recognized the handwriting of Abraham Ben Yiju, a North African Jew who had traded between Aden and India's Malabar coast during the 1130s and 1140s.[10] Abraham and his fellow traders referred to the southwestern coast of India in the plural, as *malībārāt*, literally "the Malabars," and this is the designation I retain here, anglicized as Malibarat, as it accurately conveys both the political complexity of this coast in the twelfth century as well as its cultural diversity.[11] Abraham made two extended sojourns in Malibarat totaling twelve years in all, making a home there, marrying locally and fathering three children before eventually returning with his household, and his paperwork, first to the Yemen and then to Fustat (Old Cairo). It was here, in Fustat, that the luggage list was eventually deposited along with other documents in the genizah or ritual depository of the Ben Ezra synagogue.[12] And it is from this Cairene genizah that, in 1897, the list made its last journey to Cambridge in England, part of a far larger shipment of fragments that were to make Cambridge University one of the world's largest repositories of what is now simply referred to as "the Cairo Genizah."

Goitein's cards and notes suggest that he only examined T-S NS 324.114 briefly in the course of his cataloguing. Even if documentary materials – those fragments made up of secular writings such as letters, contracts and court records, business accounts, or lists – only constitute a fraction of the approximately 330,000 fragments eventually extracted

[10] On Abraham's handwriting and other documents attributed to him on palaeographic grounds see discussion in Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders*, 632.

[11] Ibid., 55. A plural form of the singular *malībār* or *mulaybār*, a term widely used in the medieval Arabophone world to refer to the southwestern coast of India. The term was used by Abraham Ben Yiju in a document closely associated with his arrival in India (see Chapter 2, n.2) and is found elsewhere in the India Book (ibid., 477, Line 36, IB II, 55), as well as in a late thirteenth-century Rasulid document from the customs house at Aden where it even seems to be applied to the Coromandel coast. The *ḥaram al-malībārāt*, Holy Sanctuary of Malibarat, listed here appears to designate Mylapore; see *Nūr al-Maᶜārif* Arabic edition with French introduction by Muhammad ᶜAbd al-Rahim Jazim as *Nūr al-Maᶜārif. Lumière de la connaissance: règles, lois et coutumes du Yémen sous le règne de Sultan Rasoulide al-Muzaffar* (Sanaa: Centre Français d'Archéologie et de Sciences Sociales de Sanaa, 2003–5), vol. 1, 518.

[12] On practices of ritual deposition see Malachi Beit-Arié, "'Genizot': Depositories of Consumed Books as Disposing Procedure in Jewish Society," *Scriptorium* 50, no. 2 (1996), 407–14.

from Cairene genizahs around this time, there may be as many as 30,000 such documentary fragments worldwide and at Cambridge the cataloguing is ongoing.[13] Goitein identified on one side the memorandum of another India trader, Joseph b. Abraham, and on the other Abraham's luggage list. Goitein appears to have had time only to read and transcribe the first side of the luggage list but it was enough for him to be able to identify it as a "detailed list in Ben Yiju's hand of receptacles containing food and other commodities, as well as of certain objects taken with him (on a trip from India to the West)."[14] And so, the only surviving list of luggage and travel provisions known from the medieval Indian Ocean was first identified and formally catalogued. Yet it was to be another fifty years, almost a millennium after the list was first written, before it was read in its entirety and published. After Goitein's death in 1985 the work of editing the fragments from the documentary genizah connected to the India trade – what Goitein referred to as his "India Book" – passed to Goitein's student Mordechai Akiva Friedman. It is to Friedman, then, that we owe the identification of Lines 36–9 on the recto of T-S NS 324.114 as well as, most significantly, the first full English translation and commentary of the list.[15] Abraham's list of luggage was finally published in 2008 in S.D. Goitein and Mordechai A. Friedman's *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza ("India Book." Part One)*, the first part of Goitein's long and eagerly awaited "India Book."[16] There it is India Book document III, 24 according to the "New List," and one of eighty or so documents connected to Abraham Ben Yiju.

****

It is difficult to underline sufficiently the importance of the India Book documents for the study of the Indian Ocean at this period. They enliven a world where the resolution of most sources gives us names but few lives, trade commodities but no personal things. In brief, they allow us to study the Indian Ocean as a lived place rather than as an area of pure, disembodied commercial exchange. Besides Goitein himself, it was the Indian novelist and essayist Amitav Ghosh who was among the first to explore

[13] Figure suggested by Marina Rustow and taken from "The New Geniza Lab," *Princeton Geniza Lab Newsletter* 1 (2016), 1. Jessica L. Goldberg suggests between "8,000 and 18,000 fragments worldwide"; see "The Use and Abuse of the Geniza Mercantile Letter," *Journal of Medieval History* 38, no. 2 (2012), 127–8, n.1.

[14] Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders*, 661.

[15] Friedman's important contributions are self-effacingly indicated by the curly brackets or braces {} enclosing them.

[16] Ibid., 661–4; for the Hebrew edition and the all-important transcription of the Judaeo-Arabic see Goitein and Friedman, *Abraham*, 201–5.