**A Rhymed Epistles Gathering Letter by R. Yeyidyah Monsoñego**

Tamar Lavi

An *iggeret kibbutz* (which we have translated here as “alms gathering letter”) is, in Eliezer Ben Yehuda’s definition, “a letter given to a poor person who goes from town to town to request aid, to arouse the donor’s care and pity for him.”[[1]](#footnote-1) As a literary genre, the alms gathering letters emerged from pogroms and harsh decrees that were inflicted upon the Jews in the late Middle Ages.[[2]](#footnote-2) Because of difficult economic conditions, the number of the needy continually increased, and the presence of wandering mendicants came to be a common phenomenon. Most of the alms gatherers were abjectly poor, entirely without resources, uprooted individuals who chose to move to Eretz Yisrael, or Jews who sought to free relatives held for ransom. These letters became more numerous and varied as the situation of the Jews worsened, and they provide evidence of how Jews lived in that period and a reflection of the changing times. The alms gathering letters were produced from the end of the 13th century in Spain and Provence by the official community secretaries, among whom were known poets and writers. They were given to poor people who went around from community to community, and they were meant to ensure that their bearers received aid from community leaders and members.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In the Jewish communities in Morocco, concern for the poor also stood at the center of communal undertakings. As Ovadia attests regarding the custom of collecting donations, “poor people who visited the city from other lands and other cities […] were assisted by the community in accord with their honor.”[[4]](#footnote-5) Since it was not the accepted practice to draw on the community’s funds for such aid, the rabbis regularly equipped wandering beggars with such letters. In them, the authors pleaded with the public to give generously to the bearers, describing the mendicants’ past, when they supported themselves and contributed to their communities, and their dire circumstances at present. Many of those letters are preserved in the collection of letters and documents from the Jewish community of Sefrou and in the collection *Leshon Limmudim* assembled by Rabbi Ya‘akov ibn Tsur (1673–1752).[[5]](#footnote-6) The letters are composed in a variety of structures, from simple notes of a single paragraph to sophisticated artistic works.[[6]](#footnote-7) The language of these letters is Hebrew with an admixture of Aramaic. A few artistic alms gathering letters are also preserved in the collection of Rabbi Raphael Aharon Monsoñego’s works, *Ne’ot Midbar*, including also a rhymed alms gathering letter written by his son, Rabbi Yedidyah.[[7]](#footnote-8)

Rabbi Yedidyah was born in Fez, Morocco, in 1799. He studied in the *bet midrash* of Rabbi Avraham Danan and was later chosen to serve in his father’s stead as rabbi and rabbinical court judge. Rabbi Yedidyah was a Talmudist, an expert in Jewish law, and a poet, and he was widely known for his prodigious memory. He died on 1 Kislev 5528 (Nov. 28, 1867). He fathered three sons—Yehoshu‘a, Ya‘akov, and Raphael Aharon. The latter two died at a young age.

Rabbi Yedidyah Monsoñego authored many works, among them *Kuppat Rokhelim*, which contains collections of laws from early medieval scholars (*rishonim*) arranged alphabetically. That book is of particular importance for the study of the history of Moroccan sages and their halakhic works. He also penned two compositions in memory of the two sons who died during his lifetime, *Qorban Benei Aharon* and *Benei Tsiyyon Ha-yekarim*, and collections of responsa with Talmudic novellae and selections of halakhot, such as *Divrei Emet* (published in Fez in 1951/2), *Mishpat Evyonim*, *Ve’elleh Ha-mishpatim*, *Elleh Toledot Aharon*, and *Tomekh Nofelim*. Extant as well is a collection of letters from him on a number of topics, which he titled *Ḥayyim Be-yad Ha-lashon*, along with dictionaries, belletristic writings, and poems.[[8]](#footnote-9)

In terms of format, the letter has two sections: an opening, in which the name “Yedidyah” appears as the initial letters of the words in each of eight consecutive lines, and the body of the letter.

The opening:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| He will make the banner of salvation flourish;  my beloved will hasten [the arrival of Elijah]  the Tishbite. | **יַ**צְמִיחַ **דֶּ**גֶל **יְ**שׁוּעָה **דּ**וֹדִי **יָ**חִישׁ **הַ**תִּשְׁבִּי. |
| He will encourage to the path of the righteous,  my beloved will adorn the lowly. | **יְ**עוֹדֵד **דֶּ**רֶךְ **יְ**שָׁרִים **דּ**וֹדִי **יְ**פָאֵר **עֲ**נָוִים. |
| [My] beloved will hasten salvation,  my beloved will give courage to the lowly. | **יָ**חִישׁ **ד**וֹד **יְ**שׁוּעָה **דּ**וֹדִי **יְ**עוֹדֵד **עֲ**נָוִים. |
| He will strengthen the poor,  he will support the downtrodden,  he will support those who fall. | **יַ**חֲזִיק **דַּ**ל **יִ**תְמוֹך **דַּ**ךְ **יִ**סְמוֹך **הַ**נְּפוּלִים. |
| The unique eminent one will keep his word,  he will fulfill [his] promise. | **יָ**חִיד **דָּ**גוּל **יִ**שְׁמוֹר **דְּ**בָרָיו **יְ**קַיֵּם **הַ**בְטָחָה |
| He will bring near the salvation of his beloved ones,  [my] beloved will cause the Redeemer to flourish. | **יֵ**שַׁע **דּ**וֹדִים **יְ**קָרֵב **דּ**וֹד **יַ**צְמִיחַ **הַ**גּוֹאֵל. |
| He will spill out drachmas,  he will take out dinars,  he will disburse [?]. | **יָ**רִיק **דַּ**רְכְּמוֹנִים **י**וֹצִיא **דִּ**ינָרִים **יְ**פַזֵּר [**ה**]. |
| He will strengthen the poor,  he will take away his sorrow,  he will disburse his riches. | **יַ**חֲזִיק **דַּ**ל **יָ**סִיר **דַּ**אֲבוֹנוֹ **יְ**פַזֵּר **ה**וֹנוֹ. |

Notes and Sources

**1 יצמיח דגל ישועה** make the banner of salvation flourish: cf. 15th blessing of the weekday *‘Amida* prayer. **2 יעודד דרך ישרים** reworks Ps 146:9. **יפאר ענוים** adorn the lowly: cf. Ps 149:4. **3 דודי יעודד ענוים** give courage to the lowly: cf. Ps 147:6. **4 יסמוך הנפולים** support those who fall: cf. 2nd blessing of the weekday *‘Amida* prayer. **5 ישמור דבריו** keep his word: cf. Ps 119:17. **6** **ישע דודים יקרב** bring near the salvation of his beloved ones: cf. Ps 85:10. **דוד** **יצמיח הגואל** [my] beloved will cause the Redeemer to flourish: cf. R. David Kimḥi on Is 4:2. **7 יריק דרכמונים** He will spill out drachmas: He will take out and give from the best of his funds. **יוציא דינרים** take out dinars: cf. bBM 52a. **יפזר [ה]** he will disburse [?]:a word is missing, one that must behind with ה (perhaps הממון: cf. *Metsudat David* commentary to Prv 11:24). **8 יפזר הונו** disburse his riches: cf. Rashi on Prv 13:7.

The purpose and subject of the letter are hinted at in those initial signature lines. It appears that there, Rabbi Yedidyah Monsoñego implores the public to assist the poor person, along the lines of “He will strengthen the poor, he will support the downtrodden, he will support those who fall,” since such acts of kindness are requited: “The unique eminent one [or: One] will keep his word; he will fulfill [his/His] promise.” In plain sight, as well, are the spellings of the acronyms in the second and third lines: Yedidya‘ (ידידי״ע), ending in *‘ayin*, rather than Yedidyah (ידידי״ה), ending in *he*, and intentionally so. Perhaps the author is asking the readers to be friends of (*yedidei* ידידי) the poor (a term that begins with the letter *‘ayin*: עניים)*.*

The body of the poem is presented here, along with explanatory notes and sources:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| דַּל וְרָזֶה / הַמְהַלֵּךְ עַל כַּנְפֵי רוּחַ / וּמִיָּדוֹ מָמוֹנוֹ יִבְרַח בָּרוּחַ / הֵן קֶדֶם זֶה הָאִישׁ נָקִי הָיָה לְבֵיתוֹ / וְשִׂמַּח אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ / בְּחֶמְלַת ה' עָלָיו מַאֲכָלוֹ נְקִיָּה / וּכְסוּת הוֹגֶנֶת וּרְאוּיָה / | 1 | It is these signs of ours that speak to you personages, who striving to do good, keeping things in good repair, about this man, / poor and emaciated, / who moves on wings of the wind, / from whose hand his money will flee in the wind. / Earlier, this man fulfilled his responsibility to his house / and gave happiness to his wife / in the LORD’s mercy on him, his food is “clean,” [his] clothing proper and appropriateץ | |
| / כְּמוֹ פֶּתֶן חֵרֵשׁ / לְרוֹב תְּשׁוּאוֹת נוֹגֵשׂ / עָקְרוּ הַגֶּזַע וְהַשּׁוֹרֶשׁ. הֵם הֵם הִרְהִבוּהוּ / וּלְרַגְלָיו הֱפִיצוּהוּ / וּמֵהַר לְגִבְעָה וּמִתֵּבֵל יַגִּידוּהוּ / אֵלֶּה הֵם קְצוֹת דַּרְכֵי מִקְרָא הַזְּמַן וְתוֹלְדוֹתָיו / פְּצָעָיו וְחַבּוּרוֹתָיו / יֵלְכוּ יוֹנְקוֹתָיו / וְהָיוּ תוֹצְאוֹתָיו / לָצֵאת חוּץ עַד הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה יָצָא הַקֶּצֶף דָּחוּף, וְלִבּוֹ כַתַּנּוּר קָטוּף וְגָרוּף / וְרִשְׁפֵּי זַעַם וְעֶבְרָה וְדַלּוּת וַעֲנִיּוּת עָלָיו כַּמָּטָר יַעֲרוֹף. וְהוּא כַּתַּנּוּר בּוֹעֵר / הוֹלֵךְ וְסוֹעֵר / מוּקָף רוֹבָדִין / חֲמַת מַלְאֲכֵי מָוֶת עֲשָׂרָה כַּדִּים / וְקוֹל פְּסָדִים / גַּם מוֹדִים / וּכְתוּבוֹ שֶׁל שֵׁידִים / אַרְבָּעָה אֲבוֹת נְזִיקִין / וַיֵּלֶךְ שׁוֹבָב מְשׁוֹבָב וּבָא מִן הַמַּזִּיקִין / יִהְיוּ הַבַּדִּים / לֹא יָסוּרוּ מִמֶּנּוּ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכּוֹן שָׁם שָׁם יַחֲנוּ / וְהַשָּׂטָן עוֹמֵד עַל יְמִינוֹ / וְהוּא לְבַדּוֹ / יִמַּס כָּעָשׁ חֲמוּדוֹ. | 2 | Indeed from his youth / the regularities of his life were overturned; / while still tender / there was no breath left in him. / He walks along and weeps / limping on his hip. / From the multitude of disasters [that have befallen him, he experiences] hardships / that pass by and come on [again] / while he still flourished, / and he has wasted away as does an invalid, / like a deaf viper / he inflicts a disastrous bite / yanking up stock and root. / They have impelled him / and sent him out and about on his feet, and from mount to hill and from the earth they stand against him. / These are the [just] the [visible] edges of the events and occurrences of his times, / his wounds and welts, / his boughs have spread out far and his outer limits / go beyond the town until reaching this place where wrath has gone forth in haste, / his heart is like an oven raked clean [of ash] / and lightning bolts of rage and wrath and poverty and penury come down upon him like rain. And he is like a burning oven / storming all about / with nowhere to lay his head / the wrath of the messenger of death filled to overflow / and the voice of wastage and thanks [?] / and the deeds of demons / the four types of damages / and he meanders about hither and thither because of the gremlins / the poles remain [in place], / not moving away from him, [but instead] where they are placed, there they remain / and the Accuser [“Satan”] stands to his right / and he is alone, / what he treasures consumed like a moth. |
| / עַל מִי אָנוּשׁ מענה באנו / עָנִי וְגֹוֵעַ כִּי מִי יַאֲכִלֵם וּמִי יָחוּס עֲלֵיהֶם חוּץ מִמֶּנּוּ / וּפִתְאֹם יָבוֹא אֵידוֹ. | 3 | To whom, mortally wounded,?????, / destitute and dying, for who will feel them and who will take pity on them but us, lest disaster befall him? | |

Notes and Sources

**1 אותותנו אלה** – cf. Ex 4:9. **הם מדברים** – cf. Ex 6:27. **אליכם אישים** – cf. Prv 8:4. **רודף צדק** – cf. Prv 21:21. **מחזיק בדק** – cf. 2 Kgs 22:5. **האיש הלזה** – cf. Gn 24:65. **המהלך על כנפי רוח ­**– cf. Ps 104:3. **ומידו**... **ברוח** – cf Jb 27:22. **הן קדם** – cf. Jb 23:8. **זה האיש** ­– cf. Ps 25:12. **נקי**... **אשתו ­–** cf. Dt 24:5. **בחמלת**... **עליו** – cf. Gn 19:16. **מאכלו נקיה** ­– cf. bQid 20a, where a פת נקיה is a loaf of white bread from fine processed flour (as distinct from a פת קיבר, dark bread from coarse flour). **וכסות**... **וראויה –** cf. Maimonides, Laws of Creditor and Debtor 1:7. **2** **נשתנו**... **סדריו** – cf. bShab. 53b. **עודנו באבו** – cf. Jb 8:12. **רוח**... **בקרבו** ­– cf. Hb 2:19.  **הלך**... **ובכו** – cf. Ps 126:6. **צולע**... **יריכו** – cf. Gn 32:31. **לרוב תשואות תלאות** – for תְּשׁוּאוֹת as disasters, cf. LamRab 24. **ובאות הן**­ – his travails come one after the other. **בעודנו מתנוצץ** – cf. bEruv 54a “these glitter” and Rashi *ad loc*. **כמסוס נוסס** – cf. Is 10:18, an expression indicating melting away, evaporation **כמו**... **חרש** –cf. Ps 58:5. **תשואות נוגש –** cf. Jb 39:7, reading תשואות as related to ֹשוֹאָה “destruction,” “disaster.”**.**  **הם**... **הרהבוהו** – cf. Sg 6:5; understood as “impelled,” meaning that he is driven forward by a dearth of alternatives: his tribulations forced him into itinerant mendicancy. **ומהר לגבעה** – cf. Jer 50:6. **אלה... דרכי** – cf. Jb 26:14. מקרא הזמן – cf. Rashi on the phrase זמן המקרא bBer 13a. **פצעיו וחבורותיו** – cf. Is 1:6. **ילכו יונוקותיו** – cf. Hos 14:7. **והיו תוצאותיו** ­– cf. Num 34:4. **לצאת חוץ** – cf. Rashi on bEruv 43b: to go out from the town. **עד... הזה** – cf. Dt 9:7. **יצא הקצף ­** – cf.Num 17:11, and on the entire clause יצא... דחוף, cf. Esth 3:15. **ולבו כתנור** – cf. Hos 7:6. **ורשפי... ועברה** – cf. Ps 78:48-49. **ודלות... עליו** –cf. R. David Qimḥi (RaDaQ) on Is 17:4. **כמטר יערוף­** – cf. Dt 3-s2:2. **כתנור בוער** –­ cf. Mal 3:19. **הולך וסוער** – cf. Jon 1:11. **מוקף רובדין** – cf. bTam 25b, where the phrase seems to mean “surrounding by stone projections” or “… by stone steps.” **חמת מלאכי מות** ­– cf. Pr 16:14, where the image is one of constant danger. **עשרה כדים** – cf. Rashi on bKet 108b, where the phrase is “ten full jars,” used here to to indicate an excessive measure. **וקול... מודים** – Perhaps the intent here is say that because he is a wanderer, he missed out on communal prayer. **ארבעה... נזיקין** – cf. b. BQam 2a. **וילך שובב** – cf. Is 57:17, where the original context is about straying form the correct path. ובא... המזיקין – cf. bPes 190b. **יהיו... ממנו** – cf. Ex 25:15. **במקום... יחנו** – cf. Num 9:16. **והשטן... ימינו** ­– cf. Zech 3:1. **והוא לבדו** ­ cf. Gn 42:38. **ימס... חמודו** – cf. Ps 39:12. **3** **על... אנוש** – cf. Is 10:3 עַל מִי תָּנוּסוּ “To whom will you flee [for help]?” with אָנוֹּש substituted the similar-sounding verb. **מענה באנו** – (meaning uncertain). **עני וגוע** – cf. Ps 88:16. כי... ממנו ­– cf. Eccl 2:25, but here the implication is that the community is obligated to support him. **ופתאם... אידו** – cf. Pr 6:15.

With regard to content, the letter itself has three parts:

I. An opening, in which the sender addresses every “seeker of justice” who cares about the wellbeing of the community at large, asking that he give this “poor, thin” man “whose money races away from his hand.” This needy person, who was once like anyone else, who provided for his family with dignity and “caused his wife to rejoice,” has lost everything and is in need of the community’s assistance.

II. A description of the dimensions of the needy person’s plight. Rabbi Yedidyah Monsoñego gives a graphic description of the man’s difficulties, such as “he walks along and weeps / limping on his hip” (l. 4). The distress into which his physical disability has propelled him festers within him like a snake’s venom, it undermines his very foundations and visits upon him disaster: “like a silent viper / to great acclaim from the oppressor / they have pulled up trunk and root” (l. 5). At the climax of the description is a depiction of an attack by destructive angels: the forces of darkness set themselves boldly against him, and he is powerless to hide from them, since they surround him like massed troops on all sides, forming a veritable noose around him—“from mount to hill and from the earth they are mustered against him […] wrath has gone forth posthaste […] surrounding by projecting stones, the fury of the angels of death […] they do not separate from him; wherever he dwells—they encamp, and the *Satan* (evil angel) stands to his right” (ll. 6-2). He stands alone against all these, and his heart is “like a burning oven, growing more and more stormy”. The terrible misfortunes that plague him, one after another, are like a torrent of rain poured down on him in anger: “and flashes of indignation and wrath and poverty and misery shower down up him like rain.” This precipitation, unlike rain that extinguishes fires, only fans the consuming fires that rage near him.

III. A conclusion. The speaker concludes with rhetorical questions, such as “Who will feed them and who will show them mercy other than us?” That is, the entire community bears the responsibility for extending a hand to help him.

The letter is written in unmetered rhymed prose.[[9]](#footnote-10) It begins with doublets, which are replaced in mid-poem by rhymes of three or more stichs. Examples include:

Two-stich rhymes:

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| --- | --- |
| רוֹדֵף צֶדֶק /  מַחֲזִיק בֶּדֶק | *rodep* ***tsedek*** */*  *ma@hazik* ***bedek*** |
| אוֹדוֹת הָאִישׁ הַלָּזֶה /  דַּל וְרָזֶה | *odot ha-ish ha-****lazeh*** */*  *dal ve-****razeh*** |
| הֵן קֶדֶם זֶה הָאִישׁ נָקִי הָיָה לְבֵיתוֹ /  וְשִׂמַּח אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ | *hen kedem zeh ha-ish naki hayah le-****veito*** */ ve-sima@h et* ***ishto*** |
| / בְּחֶמְלַת ה' עָלָיו מַאֲכָלוֹ נְקִיָּה /  וּכְסוּת הוֹגֶנֶת וּרְאוּיָה | *be-@hemlat ha-shem ‘alav ma’akhalo* ***nekiyah*** */ u-khsut hogenet u-****re’uyah*** |
| הֵן בְּעוֹדֶנּוּ מִתְנוֹצֵץ /  וַיִּמַּס כִּמְסוֹס נוֹסֵס | *hen be-‘odenu* ***mitnotsets*** */*  *vayimas ki-msos* ***noses*** |

Rhymes of three or more stiches:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| הֵם הֵם הִרְהִבוּהוּ / וּלְרַגְלָיו הֱפִיצוּהוּ / וּמֵהַר לְגִבְעָה וּמִתֵּבֵל יַגִּידוּהוּ | *hem hem hirhiv****uhu*** */ u-lraglav hefi****tzuhu*** */ u-maher le-giv‘ah u-mi-tevel yagi****duhu*** |
| אֵלֶּה הֵם קְצוֹת דַּרְכֵי מִקְרָא הַזְּמַן וְתוֹלְדוֹתָיו / פְּצָעָיו וְחַבּוּרוֹתָיו / יֵלְכוּ יוֹנְקוֹתָיו / וְהָיוּ תוֹצְאוֹתָיו | *Eleh hem ketsot darkhei mikra ha-zeman ve-tol****dotav*** */ petsa’av ve-@habu****rotav*** */ yelekhu yo****nekotav*** */ ve-hayu to****tse’otav*** |

In a few places (in the second half of the letter, toward the end) there is a rhyme-within-a-rhyme, such as:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| מוּקָף רוֹבָדִין /  חֲמַת מַלְאֲכֵי מָוֶת עֲשָׂרָה כַּדִּים /  קוֹל פְּסָדִים /  גַּם מוֹדִים /  וּכְתוּבוֹ שֶׁל שֵׁידִים /  אַרְבָּעָה אֲבוֹת נְזִיקִין /  וַיֵּלֶךְ שׁוֹבָב מְשׁוֹבָב וּבָא מִן הַמַּזִּיקִין /  יִהְיוּ הַבַּדִּים | *mukap rova****din*** */*  *@hamat mal’akhe mavet ‘asarah ka****dim*** */*  *kol pesa****dim*** */*  *gam mo****dim*** */*  *u-khtuvo shel she****dim*** */*  *arba‘ah avot nezi****kin*** */*  *vayelekkh shovav meshovav u-va min*  *ha-ma zi****kin***  *yihyu va-ba****dim*** |

In this instance, there are two rhyme schemes with one set within the other: *rova****din****–ka****dim****–pesa****dim****–mo****dim****–she****dim*** *[nezi****kin****–hamazi****kin****]–haba****dim***. The next example shows two rhyme schemes interlaced:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| לֹא יָסוּרוּ מִמֶּנּוּ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכּוֹן שָׁם שָׁם יַחֲנוּ /  וְהַשָּׂטָן עוֹמֵד עַל יְמִינוֹ /  וְהוּא לְבַדּוֹ /ִ  מַּס כָּעָשׁ חֲמוּדוֹ /  עַל מִי אָנוּשׁ מענה באנו /  עָנִי וְגֹוֵעַ כִּי מִי יַאֲכִלֵם וּמִי יָחוּס עֲלֵיהֶם חוּץ מִמֶּנּוּ /  וּפִתְאֹם יָבוֹא אֵידוֹ. | *lo yasuru mimenu ba-makor asher yishkon sham sham ya@ha****nu*** */*  *ve-ha-satan ‘omed ‘al yemi****no*** */*  *ve-hu leva****do*** */*  *mas ka-‘ash @hamu****do*** */*  *‘al mi anush ma‘aneh ba****nu*** */*  *‘ani ve-govea‘ ki mi ya’akhilem umi*  *ya@hus ‘alehem @huts mime****nu***  *u-fit’om yavo e****do*** |

The back-and-forth rhymes are, of course: *ya@ha****nu****–yemi****no*** */ leva****do*** *–@hamu****do*** */ ba****nu–****mime****nu*** */ e****do***.[[10]](#footnote-11)

The letter is written in Hebrew, and the language is replete withinsertions from familiar texts, primarily the Hebrew Bible. An examination of the totality of such insertions in the letter reveals that most of them (60%) are inexact quotations, diverging from the originals in word order, grammatical category, or locution (substitutions having been made or elements having been added or deleted), and often the divergence takes place in more than one parameter.[[11]](#footnote-12) Examples include:

A. Changes in word order:

כַּתַּנּוּר בּוֹעֵר (“like a burning oven”) is a reversal of כַּתַּנּוּר בֹּעֵר (“burning like an oven”) in Mal. 3:19. In this case, one motive for the reversal is to maintain the rhyme scheme: בּוֹעֵר *bo‘er* – סוֹעֵר *so‘er*.

מִקְרָא הַזְּמַן (“occurrences of the times”) is a reversal of the phrase זְמַן הַמִּקְרָא in a comment by Rashi on bBer 13a. The poet changes the meaning of Rashi’s phrase to something like “the events of the time.”

B. Grammatical substitutions:

פְּצָעָיו וְחַבּוּרוֹתָיו “his bruises and his welts” is based on פֶּצַע וְחַבּוּרָה (“bruises and welts”) in Is 1:6. The singular is made plural, and the possessive pronouns focus our attention on the pain of the individual being described.

יַצְמִיחַ דֶּגֶל יְשׁוּעָה “He will make the banner of salvation flourish” is based on the epithet for God in the 15th blessing of the *‘Amidah* prayer as מַצְמִיחַ קֶרֶן יְֹשוּעָה “[one who] causes the horn of salvation to flourish.” In order to preserve the author’s signature acrostic, the participle form מַצְמִיחַ “causes to flourish” is replaced with the future tense form יַצְמִיחַ “will cause to flourish” to yield the initial *yod* of the author’s name, ידידיה (Yedidyah). Similarly, the liturgy’s קֶרֶן “horn” yields to דֶּגֶל “banner” for the same reason: the initial *dalet* there is the second letter of the author’s signed name.

C.. Replacing elements (wordplay):[[12]](#footnote-13)

וּמִי יָחוּס עֲלֵיהֶם חוּץ מִמֶּנּוּ “and who will have pity on them other than us?” plays on כִּי מִי יֹאכַל וּמִי יָחוּשׁ חוּץ מִמֶּנִּי “For who eats and who enjoys but myself?” (Eccl 2:25). The letter-writer creates a multi-valent expression as he replaces יָחוּשׁ  *ya@hush* with יָחוּשׁ  *yahus* by substituting once sibilant for another. With the biblical verse’s tone of urgency in the background, he addresses his readers with a request that they act mercifully toward the bearer of the letter and his family.

עַל מִי אָנוּשׁ “To whom will the one in mortal danger…?” is based on עַל מִי תָּנוּסוּ “To whom will you flee?” (Is 10:3). Here too the substitution of *anush* for *tanus*[*u*] is based on phonetic similarity. The addressee appeals to the community for help, hoping others will be attentive to his appeal and treat him humanely as one might expect of any person ( אֶנוֹש *enosh*). And here too the biblical verse underscores the need for swift action to rescue the one in need.

D. Adding components:

יָצָא הַקֶּצֶף דָּחוּף “wrath has gone out posthaste” combines יָצָא הַקֶּצֶף “wrath has gone forth” (Nm 17:11) and יָצְאוּ דְחוּפִים “went out posthaste” (Est 3:15). The author makes use of the phrase “[they] went out posthaste” from Esther and implanted within it another statement, that “wrath has gone out.” In this way, he stresses the imminent calamities about to befall the recipient.

וּכְסוּת הוֹגֶנֶת וּרְאוּיָה “proper and appropriate clothing” is constructed on the basis of the phrase כְּסוּת רְאוּיָה “appropriate clothing,” from Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Creditor and Debtor 1:7. The addition in this instance serves to strengthen the expression. The expanded phrase emphasizes the mendicant's poverty and his need for support in meeting even his basic needs.

E. Deleting components:

For the most part, the author deletes components that are not relevant to the content of the letter, such as:

בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכּוֹן שָׁם שָׁם יַחֲנוּ “at the spot where he settles, there they will encamp,” which is derived from וּבִמְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכָּן שָׁם הֶעָנָן שָׁם יַחֲנוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל “and at the spot where the cloud settled, there the Israelites would make camp” (Nm 9:17)

עָנִי וְגֹוֵע “afflicted and near death,” which is a derived from עָנִי אֲנִי וְגֹוֵעַ “I have been afflicted and near death” (Ps 88:16).

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1. Ben-Yehuda, *Thesaurus Totius Hebraitatis et Veritis et Recentioris*, s.v. *iggeret*, p. 52a. Such letters are also known as *iggerot oreḥiyot* (“wayfarers’ letters”) or *iggerot raḥmanut* (“mercy letters”). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For more on this topic see Hitin-Mashiah and Lavi, *From Neot midbar*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Jefim Schirmann, *Toledot Ha-shira Ha-‘ivrit Bi-Sfarad Ha-notzrit U-vi-Provens*, 672; Hitin-Mashiah & Lavi, “Artistic Epistolary Formulae.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ovadia, *The Community of Sefrou*, vol. 3, 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Ovadia, *The Community of Sefrou*, vols. 1–2, 4–5; for *Leshon Limmudim* see Ovadia, *Fas va-Ḥakhameha*, vol. 2, 246-438; this collection comprises about 250 letters. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. It appears that the shaping of the letter was of great importance, since in epistolary writing the sender demonstrates a variety of talents that are mix of erudition and talent; see Land, “Corresponding Women” (3542,16). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. On *Ne’ot Midbar*, see Hitin-Mashiah and Lavi, *From Neot midbar*; Lavi, שירים ופיוטים [?]לא. איגרות מחורזות. ~~Yedidyah’s poem is found in the MS of~~ *~~Ne’ot Midbar~~*~~,~~ 54b. [לא ברור לי בכלל מהו המקור השני פה, של תמר.]. See, most recently, Hitin-Mashiah and Lavi, “Two Supplications.” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. For details, see Tedghi, “*Mi Kamokha*,” 210-212; see also Ben Naˀem, *Malkhe Rabbanan*, 42b; Toledano, *Ner Ha-Ma‘arav*, 195-196; Ovadia, *Fez and Its Sages*, I, 309-310; Amar, *Chioure mitsva*, p. 9 (introduction). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. On a similar rhymed work, see Hazzan, “Maqama Tradition,” 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. In this case, Rabbi Yedidyah Monsoñego rhymes forms ending with what speakers and readers of modern Hebrew will identify (as we have in our transcription) as two different vowels: /*o*/ and /*u*/, in accordance with his North African tradition of pronunciation in Hebrew. On the pronunciation of the high and medial vowels, see

    15 Garbel, "Quelques observations, 241–242, §2–4; Bar-Asher, *Traditions linguistiques*, 341; כ"ץ, קהילת ג'רבה, עמ' 62–74, 96-88, [???]; Maman, מסורת הקריאה [???], 84-86, 90-91; Stillman, *Jews of Sefrou*, 54-55; אקון, הגייה. On the reflection of that pronunciation in the works of North African rabbis, see, e.g., Hazzan and Albaz, *Tehilah le-David*, 167-172. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. The categorization and terminology are those of Orly Albeck (O. Albeck, “*Shibuts u-makor*”) *[ENGLISH TITLE SHOULD BE CITED FROM THE JOURNAL. I COULD NOT FIND IT ONLINE.]*, who offers a formal system for evaluating a text with regard to its use of the technique of insertions. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. For a definition of wordplay see Cuddon, *Dictionary*, 757-758. For more on wordplay, see Lavi, “Calembour.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)