

CHAPTER TWO

MADMŪN B. ḤASAN-JAPHETH,
PRINCE OF YEMENITE JEWRY, AND HIS FAMILY

II, A. *Ḥasan b. Bundār, his Brothers Abraham and Isaac,
and Elder Son Bundār II*

II, 1 *Letter from Mukhtār b. Jacob to Šā'id b. Najā' Describing Ḥasan b.
Bundār's Assistance*

Aden, ca. 1100

TS 8 J 15, f. 24

The sheet follows the format used (18 × 13 cm.) for books and is shorter than typical letters. The beautiful and very orderly script is that of a copyist rather than that of a merchant, unless the sender was himself learned, or dictated his message to a scholarly fellow traveler. The script is Mediterranean, not Adenese. It is very similar to, if not identical with, that of Makhluḥ b. Mūsā, from whose exquisite hand we have several letters and who often visited Aden; see page 338, n. 4.

The name of the sender, Mukhtār ('The Chosen'), was common among Syro-Palestinian Jews. He or his family might well have originated in Syria-Eretz Israel, for the addressee, the 'Trustee' Abu 'l-'Alā Šā'id-'Ullā, or his father, was a native of Damascus;¹ and Mukhtār's partner and probably his business associate, Ibn Sha'yā were also from Syria-Eretz Israel.² The 'Trustee' held a powerful position in both the business world and the community. He was the confidant of the court physician Mevōrākh b. Saadya, whom the government recognized as *Rayyis al-Yahūd*, 'the Head of the Jews' of the Fatimid Empire. Ḥasan b. Bundār, representative of the merchants in Aden, is also referred to here as *rayyis* (lines 5 and 15), an Arabic title corresponding to the Hebrew, 'Leader of the Congregations,' mentioned in the letter addressed to him, I, 13, line 4. The representative of merchants in Fustat, Abū Ya'qūb al-Ḥakīm was

¹ See pages 209-10.

² See the notes to lines 7 and 16.

the writer's agent (as he had acted for Joseph Lebdi). Wherever he was and in all his dealings, a merchant needed the protection of people of consequence. But such people were always busy and needed a watchdog to remind them of their duties. The 'Trustee' addressed in our letter performed such a service. Being a busy man, he included his messages for Mukhtār in his letters to Ḥasan b. Bundār.

Translation

[A. Opening of letter]

(1) I am writing to you—may God prolong the life of my lord, the illustrious Sheikh, and make (2) his honored position and well-being permanent and crush his enemies!—to tell you how much I long (3) and yearn for you. I ask God to grant that we be reunited, (4) in the best of circumstances through His grace and bounty.³

[B. Business affairs mentioned in correspondence between addressee and Ibn Bundār]

Your letter to (5) my lord, the illustrious *Rayyis*⁴—may God make his honored position permanent!—has arrived. You mentioned there that Tamīm⁵ (6) had arrived with the cloves⁶ and the aromatic wood. Sar

³ Mukhtār was a permanent resident of Fustat, but, as the following shows, had been away on the India route for a considerable time. The phrases used are absolutely stereotype.

⁴ Ḥasan b. Bundār; see the introduction to this letter.

⁵ Mentioned here and in line 13 without an honorific epithet or the name of his father or family. The same in VII, 36, line 26 (a suit against him in Aden). In VII, 46v, line 4, he is called 'Sheikh' (carrying, like here, cloves from Aden to Fustat), and in VI, 37, line 12, he is mentioned as dead after transporting goods from Aden to Egypt (ca. 1137). Most probably he was a freedman, but a person of good social standing (cf. Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:132–33). This Tamīm should be differentiated from his namesake, probably also a freedman, commuting between Alexandria and Cairo in 1140 (IV, 68, line 7). [I assume that Goitein associated the name with a freedman before he identified documents (VI, 19, VI, 20, VI, 20a), concerning Tamīm ha-Kohen b. Jacob (since he was a Kohen, he could not have been a former slave). Tamīm ha-Kohen b. Samuel signs a document, TS K 25, f. 66, apparently in the late tenth century. Another example can be found in TS NS 143, f. 5, a poem eulogizing Abu 'l-Wafā' Tamīm b. Sham'a, who died 1123, apparently in Damascus (ed. Fleischer, "*Diwān*," 179; see ib., 170, where there is a misprint in his byname).

⁶ For the medicinal faculties and other information concerning cloves (Arabic *qaranful*)

Shālōm (7) Ibn al-Shāmī⁷ previously wrote to you to deliver my share to my lord, Sheikh (8) Abū Ya'qūb⁸ al-Ḥakīm, for he is my agent, empowered to collect this, namely (9) 17 *manns* of cloves, of which he (Sar Shālōm) noted that seven were exclusively his⁹ (10) and that of the 10 *manns* and the 7 *manns* of aromatic wood, two thirds were mine and one (11) third his. Also carried with him (Tamīm)¹⁰ 12 Malikī dinars¹¹ for expenses {alt. tr.: tolls}¹² for the (12) 10 *manns* of cloves and 7 *manns* of aromatic wood. Please¹³ check (13) the letter of Ibn Bundār, which arrived with Tamīm, examine (14) the shipment and take out for me what belongs to me.¹⁴

You wrote (15) to my lord, the illustrious *Rayyis*, concerning the silk,¹⁵ (16) which we (= I) had sent to Sheikh Abū Naṣr Ibn Sha'yā,¹⁶ namely

see Lev, *Medicinal Substances*, 96. Maimonides mentions its use to increase sexual potency in his autograph manuscript TS Ar. 44, f. 79.]

⁷ 'The Prince of Peace, the son of the *Shāmī*. *Shām* means Eretz Israel or Syria (or Damascus); see Bacher, "Schām"; Strauss, "Review" and Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:589, n. 8. He and his son Zechariah were India traders; see above 264, n. 31.

⁸ [Written Abū Ya'qōv (Jacob), with the Hebrew spelling. According to Goitein, *Letters*, 231, n. 3, the use of the Hebrew form in a byname is a Maghrebi practice.

⁹ Arabic *li-khāṣṣatihi*. *Khāṣṣa* expresses exclusive ownership. See Maimonides, *Responsa*, 1:135, no. 87: *wal-fā'ida li-Reuven khāṣṣa*, "and the profit belongs to Reuben exclusively." See, e.g., *li-khāṣṣat 'abdih*, 'exclusively for me, your servant,' in II, 32, lines 52, 56. For *khāṣṣa* for a 'separate account,' see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:183–84, and cf. Gil, "Merchants," 276. Also see below, 380, n. 8.

¹⁰ Arabic *wa-mā'ahā*, lit., 'with them,' i.e., together with the cloves and aromatic wood.]

¹¹ The expenses were mainly for Mukhtār's shipment. In the contemporary letter VII, 36 (see above note 5), lines 18–19, (a *mann* of) *qaranful*, cloves, was sold (in Fustat) for 4½ dinars; *ibid.*, verso, lines 12–13, 'ūd, aromatic wood, according to quality and type, brought 4–10 dinars.

¹² {Arabic *mu'na*. See 171–72, n. 23.}

¹³ Until here, the writer addressed the recipient in the third person and referred to Ḥasan b. Bundār as the illustrious *Rayyis*. When it comes to actions requested, formalities are dropped for the sake of clarity. Cf. 201, n. 21.

¹⁴ Arabic *ta'khudh-hu li ḥiṣṣatī* {lit., 'take it as my portion'}. When the writer added: "what belongs to me," he forgot to cross out *hu*, 'it.'

¹⁵ Hebrew *shēsh*. In the Mediterranean (not India) trade, this biblical word serves as a general designation for silk, a kind of code word, and is therefore not mentioned among the twelve types of silk discussed in Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:454–55, n. 53. Cf. TS 13 J 19, f. 27, lines 7–8, *Nahray* 14: *shēsh . . . a'nū al-khazz* (like here); Bodl. MS. Heb. b. 3 (Cat. 2806, no. 19), fol. 21, where 10 pounds of *shēsh* are sold for 21 dinars, and DK 22, line 9, *Nahray* 194, where the same quantity cost 30 dinars. Here silk brought from India must have been meant. {Cf. Gil, *Ismael*, 4:940, Index; id., 'Silk,' 37, who vocalizes *shish* and takes the expression *shish khazz* as "probably meaning a type of *khazz* with a linen warp." For *khazz*, see line 17.}

¹⁶ Abbreviated Arabic form of the name of the biblical prophet Isaiah. The Sha'yās were a great and ramified family, possibly also originating in Syria (Goitein, *Med. Soc.*,

40 pounds (17) of good *khazz*.¹⁷ I ask you to attend to this and to its sale, on two months' credit, (18) for whatever price God, the Exalted, apportions.¹⁸

[C. Request that the Nagid assist in settling the estate of a trader]

[Margin] I wrote to you about Abū Sa'd b. Rashīd—may God have mercy upon him!—and what he had deposited with Sar Shālōm, namely 75 Egyptian dinars, his investment, making 300 (Malikī) dinars. You know that the orphans, two girls, are poor. Please tell his excellency, the illustrious [Top of page] *Rayyis*—may his glory be enhanced and his esteem wax!—to do in matters of this calamity what will bring him near to God.¹⁹

[D. Closing remarks and greetings]

Please do not withhold from me your letter, (in which you charge me) with any service or errand, [Verso] (1) for this will be a pleasure to me, and write in detail in it about all that I asked you.

3:9–10). The person meant here is probably identical with Abū Naṣr (Abraham) b. Isaiah (b. David) b. Isaiah, who made a deposition in the Fustat Jewish court in 1084, ULC Or. 1080.5, f. 16. {Abū Naṣr b. Sha'yā is mentioned in DK 231 g–k, line 19, also written to the same recipient as our letter (Gil, *Ishmael*, 4:419, no. 740); cf. TS AS 149, f. 12, line 25 (ib., 4:421, no. 741).

¹⁷ *Khazz* is superior-quality silk. See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:454, n. 53, and frequently; Gil, "Silk," 37.}

¹⁸ The addressee is asked to supervise the sale by Ibn Sha'yā, not to do it himself. In most sales, a deferment of payment was granted (Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:197 ff. [cf. Gil, "Merchants," 296]). Frequently the sender instructed his agent at what price or price range he wished his shipment to be sold. Mukhtār, who clearly had been abroad for a considerable time, preferred not to do so. {For the 'whatever...apportions' formula, see the discussion above, 63–65.}

¹⁹ Abū Sa'd b. Rashīd, an India trader seemingly not known from elsewhere, had a partnership with Sar Shālōm (see the note to line 7, above), in which he had invested 75 Egyptian dinars, which had been exchanged for 300 Adenese specie (1:4, a common exchange rate [see above, 172 n. 27]). Abū Sa'd had died, probably on a voyage from Aden eastward, and Sar Shālōm was on his way back to Egypt. Mukhtār writes here a second letter in this matter, exhorting the 'Trustee'—and the {Egyptian} Head of the Jews himself {the *Rayyis*}—to exert themselves for the orphan girls.

Accept (2) my most cordial personal regards and please greet Sheikh Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Dihqān,²⁰ (3) and tell him how much I yearn for him. And to your (paternal) uncle best greetings.²¹

[E. Address]²²

(1) (To) My lord, the illustrious Sheikh Abū 'l-'Alā (2) Ṣā'id b. Munajjā {read: Na[j]ā'},²³—*may he rest in Eden!*—the Trustee. (3) May God prolong his life and make his prominent position permanent!

(1) (From) He who is grateful for your kindnesses, Mukhtār b. Jacob—
(2) *may he rest in Eden!*

²⁰ This Persian word, originally meaning chief of a place, designated later in Arabic an astute and learned man; see Dozy, *Supplément*, 1:467. Common in the Geniza as a (family) name, it was originally a nickname, sometimes (for instance, TS Misc. 8, f. 102) in the diminutive form *al-Duhayqin* (which, however, a century earlier, still was used as a title; see Cahen, *Mouvements populaires*, 236 {12}). Our Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Dihqān appears in a list of contributors to a communal collection, headed by Abū Ya'qūb al-Ḥakīm (here, line 8, above) and Japheth b. Abraham, 'the Pride of the Community,' see 234, n. 3, and Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:477, sec. 16. {A government edict issued in 532 A.H., which began on September 19, 1137, forbade the use of the byname Abū 'l-Ḥasan by Jews and Christians in Egypt; see al-Maqrizī, *Itti'āz*, 3:165. Numerous examples of Jews called Abū 'l-Ḥasan appear in this book.}

²¹ Arabic *wa'ammoh afdal al-salām*. The word translated as 'greetings' means 'peace.' I believe the addressee's uncle, not that of al-Dihqān, is meant.

²² As usual, the address is written upside down on the opposite end of verso. The name of the addressee is written on the right side, that of the writer on the left. {Mention will not be made of this below, unless called for by special circumstances.}

²³ Ṣā'id-'Ullā's father was called Joseph; see I, 15. The name al-Munajjā ('Saved') either stands for Joseph, since the biblical Joseph was miraculously saved, or refers to an event in the life of 'Ullā's father. The names are partly effaced, but well known from other manuscripts. {Apparently read here Na[j]ā' (Najā' = 'Deliverance'). Also in TS 10 J 14, f. 7, address, written to Ṣā'id-'Ullā, ed. Gil, *Ishmael*, 3:742, no. 521, he is called Najā'; but Munajjā in Bodl. MS. Heb. d. 66 (Cat. 2878), fol. 43; TS NS J 344; VI, 13 (b. al-Munajjā).}

II, 2-9 *On Abu 'l-Faraj Nissim, who Disappeared in India, with His Camphor*

This affair, represented in the Geniza by eight items, in which reference is made to many other letters written about it, demonstrates the precarious lot of India traders, who assumed they would be able to care for their families back home while far away in *diyār al-Hind*. Yet, Abu 'l-Faraj Nissim's case must have been somewhat exceptional, for, although numerous other Jews were on the India route at his time, he is always mentioned in this abbreviated way (without his father's name); his story was notorious and he was known to everyone.¹ It is almost certain that he is identical with Abu 'l-Faraj Nissim b. Solomon al-Raqqī, who was sought after in India (II, 8) and to whom a letter was addressed, while he lived in Alexandria. The content of that letter betrays him as a Maghrebi, and his family name was common in Tunisia.²

Ḥasan b. Bundār, the representative of the merchants in Aden, as in II, 1, is again in the center of things. While Nissim was on his way home after incredible sufferings—he might have tried to reach Sumatra, Indonesia, the land of the camphor³—he sent, it seems from Mirbāt (II, 4), 1¼, *manns* of 'old' camphor to Ḥasan, with the request to sell it in Aden and to send the proceeds to his wife in Alexandria. This was a very valuable shipment, worth approximately between 100 and 125 dinars.⁴ Nissim informed his family of this arrangement and also that he had received word that his shipment had reached its destination. Two years had passed since that communication, but nothing was heard in Alexandria from Ḥasan (II, 2, line 32). At this point our correspondence starts.

¹ The combination of the Arabic honorific by-name Abu 'l-Faraj ('Salvation, Deliverance') and Hebrew Nissim ('Miracles') was common in those days and could be used for designating a specific person only if everyone knew who was meant.

² DK 3, translated in Goitein, *Letters*, 239-43. {His father's name Solomon appears there but not in II, 8. Abu 'l-Faraj Nissim b. al-Raqqī also appears in TS 10 J 17, f. 21, lines 9-10, 12-13 (Gil, *Ishmael*, 3:880, no. 568), and in TS 16.339v, line 29 (Ben-Sasson, *Sicily*, 491, no. 101, where his father's name is given as Judah; Gil, *ib.*, 3:151, no. 348, where it is his brother's name, but, as the translation there suggests, this is a misprint for 'father.')} For al-Raqqī, see the note to I, 16v, line 1 {cf. Gil, *Ishmael*, 1:512-14}; Goitein, *Letters*, 240 {and 243}, must be corrected accordingly.

³ {Arabic *kāfur*. Camphor was used in medicine, as a perfume and a spice; see Lev, *Medicinal Substances*, 235-36. On the export of camphor from India and the Far East, see Abraham, *Merchants Guilds*, 160-61.}

⁴ A *mann* of old camphor cost 100 dinars in Fustat around 1130 (VII, 36v, line 16) and 80 in Aden late in the twelfth century (II, 65, margin).

The family was represented by the brother of Nissim's wife, who called himself 'Amram b. Joseph of blessed memory, the son of the brother of the late Nagid,' and is referred to thus in letters of others.⁵ Nagid (pronounced Nagheed) was the Hebrew title of Judah b. Saadya, Head of the Jews during the 1060's, who was succeeded by his more distinguished brother Mevōrākh. Whether this Amram b. Joseph is identical with his namesake and contemporary, who possessed a share worth 300 dinars in a house in Fustat (see 231, n. 3), and how exactly he was related to the Nagid Judah, is not clear. Anyhow, he was closely connected with the then leading Jewish family in Egypt, although clearly of somewhat minor status, and both facts are evident in his letters.⁶

In three letters to Nahray b. Nissim, then the highest Jewish religious authority in Egypt,⁷ and one to a fellow Alexandrian of Tunisian extraction, who sojourned in Fustat, Amram describes his own ceaseless efforts to get tidings from, or about, his brother-in-law Abu 'l-Faraj Nissim and information from Ḥasan b. Bundār and asks the addressees to act in this matter (II, 2-5). Finally, Mevōrākh b. Saadya, "despite his preoccupation with the affairs of the government and the Jewish community" (II, 6v, lines 6-7), interfered, after which Ḥasan b. Bundār sent the proceeds from the sale of the camphor, partly in cash, partly in goods, to Fustat

⁵ He signs thus II, 3 (to Nahray b. Nissim) and II, 6 (to Nethanel b. Japheth) and is referred to in an abbreviated fashion as "Imrān (the Arabic equivalent of Amram), son of the Nagid's brother" in TS Misc. 28, f. 155v, line 2, *Nahray* 116 {Gil, *Ishmael*, 3:884, no. 569}, and even as 'Amram, son of the late Nagid' in TS 8 J 25, f. 19, line 4, *Nahray* 40 {Gil, *ib.*, 3:399, no. 415}, which might be a simple slip.

⁶ 'Son of the brother' could refer to Amram's father Joseph or to himself. I prefer the latter, for his letters give the impression of an older man {though he had a son one year old, II, 2, line 25}. But no Joseph appears in the genealogy of Saadya (b. Mevōrākh), Judah's father; see Mann, *Jews*, 2:249-50 {cf. Cohen, *Self-Government*, 155}. Joseph might have been a half-brother of Judah (from another father), wherefore he was not included in Saadya's genealogy. Amram's script is markedly Maghrebi. {In TS Misc. 28, f. 155v, line 2 (Gil, *Ishmael*, 3:884, no. 569), 'Iwād b. Ḥananel writes Nahray b. Nissim that "our fathers' brother" ('*ammunā*), "the son of the brother of the Nagid," had arrived. Gil (*Ishmael*, 1:707) reconstructs the family relationship as follows: The designated Nagid was the North African early eleventh century Nagid Abraham b. Nathan, whose brothers were Nissim's father Nahray, Hananel's unnamed father, and 'the brother of the Nagid.' (Accordingly, 'our fathers' brother' is imprecise, and the intention was: our fathers' cousin. Were '*ammunā*' taken literally, it would seem that the relationship could be reconstructed as follows: the elder Nahray, also called 'the brother of the Nagid,' had three sons, Hananel, Nissim and 'the son of the brother of the Nagid.')} Were we to assume that 'the son of the brother of the Nagid' is the same individual referred to in connection with Amram b. Joseph, this would both explain Amram's failure to appeal directly to the Nagid Mevōrākh and his closeness to Nahray, his cousin.}

⁷ As such, Nahray was in contact with the Jewish 'court of Yemen and India,' see 196, n. 1. {See the added comment there on the doubt surrounding such a court.}

(II, 6). This is the end of the story of the camphor. What happened to Abu 'l-Faraj Nissīm himself we do not yet know.

Ḥasan b. Bundār retained the proceeds of the camphor certainly because Nissīm carried with him to India merchandise belonging to other merchants (II, 8), possibly belonging also to Ḥasan himself. That he kept the family in the dark for several years might be explained by the assumption that he expected to hear from or about Nissīm at any time. However, since, after such a long absence, Nissīm's wife had to be regarded as 'a woman the whereabouts of whose husband are unknown,'⁸ Ḥasan's silence was religiously blameworthy. A veiled reproach on this score was certainly contained in the letters to him by his Egyptian peers and prompted him to act.

⁸ This long phrase translates one Hebrew word, *'agūnā*, used by Amram in connection with Ḥasan b. Bundār's answer to the Head of the Jews Mevōrākh (II, 6, lines 19–20).

II, 2 *Letter from Amram b. Joseph to Nahray b. Nissīm: Request to Intervene with Ḥasan b. Bundār*

{Alexandria, 1094–96/7}

TS 13 J 23, f. 10

This is the opening letter of the correspondence; Amram b. Joseph recapitulates what had been done thus far and asks Nahray b. Nissīm to intervene with Ḥasan b. Bundār through the merchants returning to Aden.

Lines 1–13. Excuses for the writer's long silence: he always inquired after Nahray's well-being, but refrained from writing so as not to obligate a response.¹

Lines 13–29. A letter of Abu 'l-Faraj Nissīm, containing the story of his horrible experiences, had been forwarded by Nahray ten months earlier. It caused the family great distress, which was exacerbated by the illness of both the writer's sister (Nissīm's wife) and his own wife, an orphan whom he had recently married after the death of his former wife, and who had borne him a sickly boy. Economic difficulties did the rest. "Man's road is not his [to choose]."²

Line 30–verso, line 13. In that letter Nissīm had mentioned that he had shipped to Abū 'Alī³ Ḥasan b. Bundār 1¼ *manns* camphor with the request to sell them in Aden and to send the proceeds to Nissīm's family; the camphor had arrived in Aden, but Nissīm did not know whether Ḥasan had forwarded anything.

That letter had been written exactly two years before.

Recently a number of acquaintances, all mentioned by name, had arrived from Aden, some with letters and receipts⁴ from Adenese

¹ {This excuse for not writing more often is often found in letters. Cf. below, page 308.}

² Jer. 10:23. Continuous pain in the joints of the hands and the feet (II, 2, lines 18–19) rendered Nissīm's wife incapable of work (II, 6, line 20), and her treatment was expensive (II, 2, line 19). These and similar details in this and other letters of Amram to Nahray show that, despite Amram's minor status, the relations were intimate. These details are also intended to emphasize the impropriety of Ḥasan b. Bundār's behavior.

³ Persons were addressed with their honorific by-name. Amram rarely forgets to add Ḥasan's *kunya*, although he only mentions him. Also, in II, 6, lines 12–14, he enumerates nine titles of Mevōrākh b. Saadya, while speaking of him.

⁴ 'Receipt' translates *barā'a*, literally, an acquittal given to a person in court testifying that he had delivered a shipment entrusted to him. Without a *barā'a* proving that Ḥasan had received the camphor he could not be sued.