

## II, 5 Letter from Amram b. Joseph to Moses B. Abu 'l-Ḥayy

{Alexandria, 1094–96/7}

CAJS 394

The addressee Moses, mostly referred to as Mūsā, was active in communal affairs and was honored, because of his generosity, with the title *Segullat* (*ha-Yeshiva*), 'Treasure' (of the Academy).<sup>1</sup> He was a native of Tunisia, who had settled in Alexandria and was temporarily in Fustat.

Lines 1–32, and margin. Expressions of friendship, complaints about the bad times, personal misfortune, and an eye disease, which made it impossible for Amram to come to Fustat in person.<sup>2</sup>

Verso, lines 1–7. Letters from Joseph b. Abū Kathīr Ibn Yahboy,<sup>3</sup> sent, it seems, from 'Aydhāb,<sup>4</sup> contained, according to hearsay, news about Abu 'l-Faraj Nissīm and the camphor. The addressee is advised to question the Jewish merchants arriving from there.

Lines 7–20. In his dire circumstances Amram had given some of his books to the schoolteacher Isaac al-Nafūsī (also a Maghrebi) to sell, but this man had moved to Fustat and nothing was heard from him. Moses is asked to remind him of his duties as a pious person and gentleman.<sup>5</sup>

{See the introduction to II, 3, for the dating.}

<sup>1</sup> Although this title had been borne by other persons, Mūsā is repeatedly referred to in our letters simply as *al-Segullat*, II, 3, line 28, II, 7, line 25. He was a member of the Tunisian Khalifa family. {See II, 2, n. 5(a); Gil, *Ishmael*, 4:877 (Index).

<sup>2</sup> See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 5:508, n. 36; 512, n. 81.

<sup>3</sup> See II, 2, n. 5(b), and II, 3.

<sup>4</sup> {Perhaps read: Aden.}

<sup>5</sup> Arabic *mā lā yajib fi 'l-dīn wa-lā fil-muru'wa*. {A literal translation of the entire clause in the original is: 'He behaved with me in a manner not befitting piety or virtue.' On this Isaac al-Nafūsī, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:560, n. 27; Goitein, *Education*, 119; I, 33, n. 1.}

## II, 6 Letter from Amram b. Joseph to Nethanel b. Japheth re Goods Sent by Ḥasan b. Bundār

{Alexandria, 1094–96/7}

DK 230, f. 3

Formerly DK 230 h–j; DK XIX.

Nethanel b. Japheth<sup>1</sup> had informed his business friend Khiyār (b. Jacob)<sup>2</sup> in Alexandria that Ḥasan b. Bundār had responded to the *Rayyis* Mevōrākh and sent the proceeds from the sale of Nissīm's camphor. The joy over these good tidings resulted in an extremely verbose letter by Amram.

Lines 1-verso, line 2. Thanks and praise for the Nagid Mevōrākh, whose letter to Ḥasan b. Bundār had achieved what numerous letters of Amram failed to accomplish. Congratulations on the birth of Mevōrākh's younger son. It was proper to deliver such good wishes in person, but because of his financial troubles and sore eyes Amram should be excused for not traveling from Alexandria to Fustat. A girl born to Nethanel had died (it seems, at birth). As usual in such cases, the wish is expressed (twice) that she should be replaced by 'male children,' and concern is expressed for the health of the mother.<sup>3</sup> The long passage concludes with a real encomium on Mevōrākh, who is extolled as a *mōshī'a*, or savior.

<sup>1</sup> See about him 183, n. 9. In Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:478, top, I characterized him as a nephew of the two Nagids Judah and Mevōrākh b. Saadya. This surmise was based on the facts that Judah and Mevōrākh had a brother named Japheth (see Mann, *Jews*, 2:250), and Mevōrākh had a son Nethanel; moreover, our Nethanel was regarded as influential with the viceroy al-Malik al-Afḍal (see Goitein, *ibid.*). Here we see that Mevōrākh asks him to act in his stead on behalf of Amram, and Amram mentions Mevōrākh and Nethanel as belonging together: "I pray for you (both) day and night and ask God to accept my prayer for you" (lines 31–32). {Also see Cohen, *Government*, 127. Goitein, *ibid.*, referred to our document but did not explain the identification of Nethanel as nephew of the two Nagids. The explanation provided here leads me to speculate whether at a preliminary stage of research the words 'son of the brother of the late Nagid,' which come below and to the right of Amram's name in line 3 of the address in our letter, had been read as the continuation of the blessings after Nethanel's name, which precede them on the same line.}

<sup>2</sup> For his full name see II, 9.

<sup>3</sup> All this shows that Nethanel b. Japheth, Amram, and Mevōrākh were close relatives. See n. 1, above. {As I read the passage, it speaks of the birth and death of the Nagid's child, who should be replaced with sons, and the birth of Nethanel's daughter, which too should be followed by the birth of sons.}