

## 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.}

Verso, lines 2–26. Quoting Nethanel's letter, Amram writes:

He (Ḥasan b. Bundār) sold part of it (the camphor), as far as he saw necessary,<sup>4</sup> bought for the remainder musk and ambergris,<sup>5</sup> and sent this with the messengers<sup>6</sup> bent (for Fustat). At its arrival you will forward it to me.

Should Abraham b. Jacob<sup>7</sup> be in Fustat, he would take care of the forwarding of the expected shipment to Alexandria. Otherwise Nethanel is requested to inform Khiyār<sup>8</sup> whether its sale in Fustat was preferable.

Reiterated praise of Mevōrākh and regards to everyone.

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

<sup>4</sup> Arabic *bā' ba'dah yarāh wājib washtarā bil-baqiyya misk wa-'anbar wa-annuh anfadhah ma' al-rusul al-wāsilīn*. I am not sure how the first four words, whose literal meaning is simple, should be interpreted. The term *wājib* is used for dues to the government. Ḥasan seems to say that a large part of the camphor's price was expended on customs dues.

<sup>5</sup> The perfume. {Ambergris was imported from India; see Watt, *Commercial Products*, 64, 555. It was also found in the part of the Indian Ocean along the east coast of Africa; see Ruska & Plessner, "Anbar"; Goitein, *Letters*, 223, n. 8. Its fragrance is similar to that of musk. For its medicinal uses, see Lev & Amar, *Medicinal Substances*, 266.}

<sup>6</sup> Not with Jewish or Muslim acquaintances, but with a (Muslim) transport service similar to the *fiyūj* in the Mediterranean area. {See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:283–84.}

<sup>7</sup> No doubt, Abraham b. Jacob al-Der'ī of Alexandria, whom we found in Fustat (see 215, n. 13), is meant.

<sup>8</sup> See n. 2, above. It is interesting to observe that Amram did not expect to get an answer to his long letter with all the good wishes. He belonged to the family, but was of lower rank.

II, 7 *Letter from Amram b. Joseph to Nahray b. Nissīm*

{Alexandria, 1094–96/7}

TS 10 J 16, f. 2

Although this letter (28 lines; margin, top, 11 lines) was sent by Amram b. Joseph, Alexandria, to Nahray b. Nissīm, Fustat, it has nothing to do with Amram's brother-in-law and the camphor sent by him to Ḥasan b. Bundār. The letter is brought here because of a short passage (lines 23–25), in which Amram confirms to have delivered a quarter *mann* of camphor for Khiyār {'Allāl},<sup>1</sup> which the latter will give to the *Segullat*<sup>2</sup> to help him after he had suffered grave losses. Such a shipment was worth about 25 dinars.<sup>3</sup>

This shows that camphor could be easily sold in Alexandria;<sup>4</sup> it was almost like cash. When Abu 'l-Faraj Nissīm asked Ḥasan b. Bundār to sell his camphor in Aden and to send (goods bought for) its proceeds to Alexandria, he must have had special reasons, for instance, that the transport of such a high priced substance of small volume over the long route from Aden to Alexandria was hazardous.

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

<sup>1</sup> See II, 6, n. 2, and II, 9. {Goitein's reference to Khiyār seems to be a slip. I find no mention of him in this document. In line 24, Amram writes that he gave the camphor to 'Allāl, that is Nahray's cousin Abu 'l-Ḥasan 'Allāl b. Nahray.}

<sup>2</sup> Mūsā (Moses) b. Abu 'l-Ḥayy, see II, 5, n. 1.

<sup>3</sup> See 288, n. 4.

<sup>4</sup> {The *Segullat* must have been in Fustat at this time.}