

reminds the young man of his apprenticeship with him, disappears entirely from the vast Nahray correspondence—also a sign of how early this memo must have been.¹ Letters 30 and 31 illustrate Nahray's rise to the status of a full-fledged overseas trader, while no. 32 is one of the shorter letters reflecting the esteem in which he was already held during his middle period. Selections 33-35 show him mainly in his capacities of scholar and communal leader.

Other letters to Nahray are translated in no. 5, above, and no. 72, below.

29 INSTRUCTIONS TO A BEGINNER

Mosseri Collection L 5

Memo from your friend who loves you, Khalfa b. Isaac, son of Menahēm, (*may his*) *s(oul) r(est in peace)*.

My brother and master, Abū Yaḥyā Nahray, may God keep you and give you life. I sent you with my master, the elder Abu Shāq Barhūn b. Ishāq (Abraham b. Isaac)—may God support him—two packages¹ with beads, 300 black units, 300 yellow units, and 400 green, red, and white ones. All these are mine. Those beyond this number (of 1,000 units) belong to the elder Abu Shāq Barhūn.²

I now wish you to remember the education I gave you and the interest in me of my master, the elder Abu Shāq Barhūn. Sell those beads to the extent and in the way you deem fit. No one will interfere with you in this matter. I wish, however, that you kindly inform my lord, the illustrious elder Abū Naṣr al-Faḍl b. Sahl al-Tustarī—may God make his honored position permanent—about the nature and the arrival of this shipment before you sell it and act in accordance with his advice. Likewise, after the sale, tell him

¹ But his three sons were Nahray's business correspondents: Joseph b. Khalfa (see *Med. Soc.*, I, 413, n. 46); Judah, in the account written by Nahray for the year 1058 (TS Box J 1, f. 1, l. 1), Ma'mūn, writing to him (DK 22, *Nahray* 194).

² Ar. *'ilāwa*, an appendage to a main load in a ship. See *Med. Soc.*, I, 337.

³ For the value of this consignment cf. no. 64, sec. D, l. 19, below. About 1,600 dirhems or 40 dinars. A common item in both the Mediterranean and the India trade.

how and at what price you have sold and take his advice for further action.

May God guide you to the good and give success to you and through you to me.

And peace upon you, my brother and master.

(In the form of a flourish in Ar. characters:)

And God is sufficient for me and on him I trust.

(Additional Note in another hand:)

The total number belonging to Khalfa b. Isaac: 850 (units), for 150 were returned to him. The 850 (units) form a complete *'ilāwa* (package; see n. 1) and part of another one, the rest of which belonged to Barhūn and Nissīm, the sons of Isaac, as follows: 260 units, 24 units strung up,³ 25 units loose, 16 bundles of "heaps."⁴ Give this to 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Khalaf, the goldsmith,⁵ may God keep the shipment in his mercy.

(A note on the reverse side in Nahray's hand has nothing to do with this text.)

30 LETTER FROM NAHRAY'S MAIN MENTOR

"Buy from the Beggars!"

January 27, 1048

A memo, similar to the one just translated, but more detailed, in the hand of Nahray's main mentor, Abū Ishāq Barhūn b. Ishāq b. Barhūn (Abraham b. Isaac b. Abraham) Tāhertī, is contained in TS 13 J 14, f. 9, *Nahray* 205. These are last-minute instructions, sent from Qayrawān to al-Mahdiyyā, where Nahray was about to embark on his voyage to Egypt. Again he is advised to follow the guidance of Abū Naṣr Tustarī, Barhūn's partner. The cooperation between the Tāhertīs of Qayrawān and the Tustarīs of Cairo, ob-

³ Ar. *muzawwaja*, lit., "paired," as opposed to *mufrada*. The usual term for strung up beads in the Geniza is *manzūma*. Richard Ettinghausen tentatively suggests "in double strings" for *muzawwaja*.

⁴ MS. *ḵndlw*, cf. Persian *ḵindula*. (Doubtful.)

⁵ Dealing in the same commodity with Nahray in no. 64, sec. B, l. 18, below. His son Abu 'l-Qāsim was a business friend of Barhūn b. Isaac, Nahray's mentor (TS 10 J 9, f. 5, l. 5, *Nahray* 171). Muslims.

served in selection 11, above, for the preceding generation, was even closer in the generation of Barhūn, his brother, and numerous cousins.

Another Cairene partner of Barhūn to whom Nahray is directed in that memo was the Muslim merchant Abu 'l-Qāsim 'Abd al-Raḥmān, whose name recurs again and again in the Nahray correspondence. Abū Naṣr and 'Abd al-Raḥmān are prominent also in the letter translated below. Thus we see that neither the Karaite sectarianism of the Tustarīs nor the Muslim creed of 'Abd al-Raḥmān impeded orthodox Jews living beyond the sea from cultivating strong and lasting business friendships with them.¹

Barhūn, Nahray's mentor, must have been a very close relative of his, for in every letter, as in ours, he sends greetings "from *all* those who are with me," that is, all the females in the house. Weighing all the evidence available to me at present, I conclude that Barhūn was married to a sister of Nahray's father and expected that his nephew would marry a daughter of his and, one day, take over his firm. But the young man had other ideas. After several voyages to Egypt he decided to settle in that country, and married into a prominent family there, as others had done before and would do after him (see, for instance, no. 18, sec. A, above).

The date of our letter is fixed by the reference to the murder of Abu Naṣr's brother, the "vizier" Abū Sa'd, which occurred on October 25, 1047. The hope expressed in our letter that Abū Naṣr would be spared was fulfilled for only a short time. He was too rich to escape the caliph's henchmen.

Our letter, like the almost contemporary account translated below as no. 64, shows that the young trader Nahray had already proved his mettle. Yet he still receives much guidance from his old mentor. Barhūn died only a few years later. The account, in which his brother wound up his business with Nahray after his death was written in or around 1055. See *Med. Soc.*, I, 373, sec. 15.

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter
Collection, TS 20.180, *Nahray* 172.

¹ Barhūn asks Nahray to assure 'Abd al-Raḥmān of his *maḥabba*, lit., "love." TS 13 J 14, f. 9, l. 19.

A. RECAPITULATION OF PREVIOUS CORRESPONDENCE

I am writing to you, my dear brother and master, . . . on the 8th of Shevat (January 27, 1048) . . . I have previously sent you several letters with the couriers and again in recent days some with other couriers. I hope they have arrived. [. . .]² I was about to travel, but it did not come off. I ask God that this may be to the good. [. . .] arrived in these days and also your letter, in which you informed me that you had gone up to Būšīr and bought ten bales of flax, [. . . that you have packed] your goods and also bought the rest of your orders. You also referred to that consignment; may God give me and all others who have a share in it big success soon.

B. THE MURDER OF ABŪ NAṢR'S BROTHER

The couriers brought disastrous news, which terrified us. I ask God to set us at rest and to console everyone by keeping my lord, the elder Abū Naṣr, alive and by granting him safety. May we never hear bad news about him. This will be a comfort to all and calm our hearts with regard to you (pl.).³

C. ACTIONS ON THE WRITER'S SIDE

I informed you in my letters what my brother had sold for you in Sūsa.⁴ This week he again made good sales on your behalf at 235 and 210 (quarter dinars for a bale of flax of about 500 pounds).⁵ But he was unable to obtain a loan on the price.⁶ [. . .] He bought for you a hundred excellent garments of very fine quality.

This year a caravan, the like of which we have never seen, is in preparation, but I have not found anyone prepared to take with

² Here and in the two following lines two to three words are effaced in each.

³ The writer dreaded the effects of the murder of the Jewish "vizier" on the Jewish population. See the introduction. One feels, however, that he did not appreciate the murdered vizier himself.

⁴ The seaport Sūsa (see no. 25, n. 10), was also the great center of the Tunisian textile industry. In the memo referred to in the introduction Nahray is asked to buy first quality flax "good for Sūsa."

⁵ *Med. Soc.*, I, 224ff. It was customary to mention the higher sum first (the opposite of what we do).

⁶ The collection of the price from the buyers often took four months or more. The seller who was in need of cash took a loan on the expected sums.

him something for me, not even a hundred or so slips.⁷ But I was not prepared to let that caravan go without sending something in it, for I know it will arrive in summer, when everyone burns to buy. Therefore I asked for God's guidance and sent you a purse for my partnership with you weighing 50 dinars in the caravan with 'Abdallāh al Bashqūrī,⁸ another one, weighing 65 dinars, for my partnership with M. Abu 'l-Qāsim 'Abd al-Raḥmān, and with Khalīfa Ibn al-Munaghghaṣī ("Substitute, son of the Loathsome")⁹ a purse with gold, weighing 50 dinars, for my partnership with you, and one of 65 dinars for my partnership with Abu 'l-Qāsim 'Abd al-Raḥmān, and for the latter also a purse with 1,000 silver dirhems. I also sent you, with his¹⁰ companion Aḥmad Ibn Qāsim, a purse with gold weighing 30 dinars and a bag (of paper or vellum) with 1 1/3 pounds of Syracuse silk.¹¹

In a previous letter I had written that I had sent you 1,000 dirhems with Abū Bakr al-Rashīdī,¹² but afterwards he declined to take them. Therefore I changed them into those 30 dinars (sent with Aḥmad).

I sent you with Abū Bakr a purse with 62,250 coral pearls on strings. I paid 25 dinars in advance for two units, but took only the amount noted, which costs 15 dinars per unit here.

D. ORDERS FOR NAHRAY

If you stay on, work on the purchase of four bales of good flax, but do not buy from the Ṭansāwī.¹³ You have no strength for deal-

⁷ According to quotations from the same period and place, the price for 100 ghilālas, according to quality, would vary from ca. 30 to 350 dinars (see TS 16.174, l. 27, *Nahray* 182, ULC Or 1080 J 79, l. 21, *Nahray* 229). The very fine ones were transparent (Dozy, *Supplément*, II, 809b).

⁸ Sounds like an Egyptian place name. A Muslim.

⁹ Also a Muslim. The nickname of the father was found also among Jews.

¹⁰ The two Muslims mentioned first were known to the addressee. This one was introduced as the travel companion of Ibn al-Munaghghaṣī (who appears again, below).

¹¹ Either manufactured in Syracuse, Sicily, or made in the style of the silk woven there.

¹² A Muslim from Rosetta, the Egyptian seaport. As the continuation shows, he refused only to forward cash, but was prepared to carry goods.

¹³ A Muslim flax merchant and shipowner (*Med. Soc.*, I, 311). The name is derived from that of an Egyptian village. Nahray obviously had written that he intended to buy from him next time.

ing with these great houses; you are better off picking up in person whatever you can from the beggars (the small merchants). You will see what serves best for your success. If the lac is good or if not much of it is to be had, try to buy it with the money you have at your disposal, and when the dinars and dirhems arrive with the early ships, buy well-aired indigo.¹⁴

If you travel, charge whomever you deem fit with buying flax or lac during the summer with the money at hand. Do not buy hastily. Buying in a hurry has no blessing. Except if you see goods that can be carried as light baggage, such as musk or lapis lazuli, which sells well here because only a little of it is on the market, or 'ḳhrāḳī¹⁵ pearls, if they are good. Buy close to your departure and try to get on the first boat setting sail. In short, do what God puts into your mind; may he guide you to good decisions.

E. SOME PERSONAL REQUESTS

During the next few days a caravan from Sijilmāsa¹⁶ is expected, which will continue its way shortly afterwards. If I find a suitable carrier, I shall send something additional with him. All shipments will be addressed to M. Abu 'l-Qāsim 'Abd al-Raḥmān.

I am worried about Abū Zikrī al-Ṭabīb,¹⁷ from whom I have not seen any letter by couriers. I can imagine how he was affected by that terrible event. I ask God to let me hear that he and you all are well.

I had asked M. Abū Zikrī to buy me a *milḥafa* (cloak). If he has not found time for this, please buy me one and send it together

¹⁴ Ar. *nafḍ al-nīl*. The word occurs in the Geniza in two meanings: the scutching, or beating of the dried flax in order to separate the seeds from the fiber, and the airing of cloths after they had been packed for a long time. About indigo see the Introduction, sec. 4.

¹⁵ Meaning perhaps saddlebags. The trappings of riding animals of rich owners were richly decorated; if pearls were included they certainly were third class.

¹⁶ The great caravan city in the south of Morocco which served as the terminal of the trade with sub-Saharan Africa. About the Sijilmāsa caravan to Egypt via Qayrawān see *Med. Soc.*, I, 279.

¹⁷ "The Physician," a family name, one of the most prominent Jewish merchants in the capital of Egypt at that time and probably related to the Tustarīs.

with two Arjīshī robes. Do not be choosy, for here I have to purchase them for a very high price.¹⁸

Your letter did not contain any news from M. Abu 'l-Qāsim. I ask you always to report in detail about everything. Nor have I received a letter from him and do not know whether or not he has bought flax for me. I know, of course, that he is a dear one;¹⁹ please convey to him my thanks and constantly remind him about my affairs.

F. GREETINGS TO THE WRITER'S COUSINS AND FRIENDS

Give my best regards to M. Abū Ishāq Barhūn, the son of my uncle Abu 'l-Faḍl, and to M. Abū Ishāq Barhūn, the son of my uncle Isma'īl, and tell the latter how happy I was to learn about his safe arrival.²⁰ Best regards to M. Abū Ibrāhīm 'Ayyāsh ("Long-lived") and tell him that I constantly remind his maternal uncle of his affairs.²¹ As to M. Abū Sa'īd²² I understand this letter will arrive only after his departure. May God unite me with him soon.

G. ABOUT THE SALE OF A BIBLE. CONCLUSION

In all my letters I have urged you to help 'Aṭā' ("Gift") Ibn Yijū with the books of the Bible he sent you. I hope you have done all you can for him in this matter, for you and I will thereby acquire a religious merit. Do not neglect his request.²³

¹⁸ Arjīsh, a town in Armenia, on the northern shore of the lake of Van, produced cotton textiles (see Le Strange, *Eastern Caliphate*, p. 183, Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles* x, 103). Since another letter, addressed to Nahray (TS 10 J 15, f. 5, *Nahray* 168, l. 4), states that Arjīshī robes used to be bought in Tripoli, Lebanon, from caravans coming from Aleppo, it stands to reason that these robes actually were imported from Armenia. The price of 1 dinar per robe, noted in the trousseau list in TS K 15, f. 99, col. III, l. 21, proves that the Arjīshī was made of cotton, and not of a more precious fabric.

¹⁹ Ar. *annahū mā yufaddā*, "someone for whom one is prepared to offer oneself as a ransom." A common phrase, but one expects *man* instead of *mā*.

²⁰ Since boys were called after their grandfathers, it is not surprising that three cousins should be called by the same name Barhūn. There was a fourth one. A generation earlier, the fathers of these merchants are represented in the Geniza as traveling from Tunisia to Egypt.

²¹ Two cousins bearing the name 'Ayyāsh appear in the correspondence of the Tāhertīs and of Nahray as closely connected with them.

²² Abū Sa'īd Joseph b. Moses Tāhertī, also a cousin of our writer.

²³ Refers to the letter of 'Aṭā' b. 'Ammār b. Mevasser to Nahray in which he informs him that he was sending him a codex of the Bible which his father

Peace upon you. And all those who are with me²⁴ send you kindest regards, and so does my brother in Sūsa. I sent him your letter and have received his answer for you, which I forward to you together with my letter carried by Khalīfa Ibn al-Munaghghaṣī, who has the purses.²⁵

And peace upon you, *and peace to the very end*.

(Address:)

(To) my dear brother and master Abū Yaḥyā, may God prolong his life, Nahray b. Nissīm, may God be his protector.

From Barhūn, son of R. Isaac, (*may the*) *m(emory of the) r(ighteous) be b(lessed)*.²⁶

31 COOPERATION BETWEEN SEASONED MERCHANTS

From Alexandria to Fustat

Ca. 1055

In this letter Nahray appears as a well-established merchant, although not yet occupying the position of authority which he later enjoyed. His correspondent, Isma'īl b. Farah, a native of Gabes in southern Tunisia, but settled in Alexandria, was a close business friend, a friendship that was continued by the latter's son Farah ("Joy"). Five other letters by Isma'īl addressed to Nahray have been found (*Nahray* 63-66, 249), and three by Farah (*Nahray* 68-70), while Nahray addressed Farah in three others (*Nahray* 3, 4, 246). Isma'īl must have been far older than Nahray, for in one of the letters of his son (*Nahray* 69), he is already dead, but he treats

had ordered for himself from the hand of the famous copyist Hilāl (Hillel). The dire economic situation in Qayrawān forced him to sell. The codex was the finest still remaining in Qayrawān (TS 10 J 20, f. 1, *Nahray* 200). His father 'Ammār is expressly called Ibn Yijū. See no. 14, n. 9, above.

²⁴ His wife and daughters. See the introduction.

²⁵ See above, sec. C, and n. 9.

²⁶ Something like "to Fustat" was added. The Arabic address is mostly effaced; but it is noteworthy because of the complete absence of titles.