

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.

Nahray as an equal (although he talks to him the way older people address younger men) and expresses warm admiration for him.

The time of the letter is fixed by the report that people were unable to leave Qayrawān, then the capital of Tunisia, for eight months. This must have been before November 1057—when the city was sacked and ruined by the Hilālī bedouins—and after April 1052, the decisive battle which opened the country to them. A letter from Qayrawān, written in August 1052 (TS 13 J 26, f. 9, *Nahray* 227) shows that the situation was already very serious, but not yet as bad as that described in our letter. Any time between 1053 and 1057 would suit the events reported here.

British Museum, Or. 5542, f. 9, *Nahray* 67.

A. WARM THANKS AND SOME SUGGESTIONS

... 24th of Elul (August-September) ... Your letter, transmitted by the courier Jacob¹ has been received, together with its enclosure of two letters by your friend and intimate Farah;² may I never be deprived of your benefactions nor miss your kindnesses.

You mentioned the sale of the copper and the quantity still remaining in the *qaysariyya* (caravanserai).³ May God enable you to sell well; I hope soon to receive the rest of the price of the copper which was sold. You further mentioned that Khalaf b. Ḥātīm was on his way (to Būṣīr); please do not cease writing him so as to give him a boost and to encourage him to buy quickly; otherwise, he will keep his eyelids glued together⁴ and not open his eyes. Have him buy flax of middle quality at current prices, and God will do the rest for you.

In your letter you mentioned that transaction which only a man like you was fit to carry through; may God reward you. Indeed, all

¹ Jewish couriers operated between Alexandria and Fustat.

² The writer's son, who was at that time in the flax-growing center of Būṣīr (see sec. D, below). It was a matter of delicacy in Arab letter writing to relate a person mentioned not to oneself, but to the addressee, even, when, as here, a father wrote about his son.

³ See *Med. Soc.*, I, 191, 194.

⁴ Ar. *yatalakḥḥaṣ*, from *lakḥiṣ*, having fleshy, swollen eyelids. The young man referred to never appears again in the Geniza correspondence known to me and clearly was not one from whose services the merchants expected much.

you touch with your hand makes other people happy, because it is profitable and done with pure intention.

B. BUSINESS IN MAGHREB IN MIDST OF TURMOIL AND BLOODSHED

You wish to know the news from the West. Until now, four boats have arrived from the capital city of Sicily (Palermo), namely, Ibn al-Baladī,⁵ Ibn al-ʿUdī ("Trader in odoriferous wood"), Ibn al-Nushārī ("Sawduster"),⁶ and Ibn al-Mufassir ("Koran-commentator").⁷ I received a letter of my brother Sulaymān from Mazara.⁸ He was carried out from Qayrawān as dead, for during eight months they tried to leave the city for Sūsa,⁹ but were unable to do so. Finally, a group of Muslims and among them some [Jews??] left the city, but the Arabs (meaning: the bedouins) killed them, cutting their stomachs open and saying: "You have swallowed dinars." According to what I learned from our friends, al-Ashqar ("the Red-haired"), the son of Abū Sulaymān, the goldsmith, was one who died in this manner. But my brother Sulaymān said: "I do not leave the city in such a way." Had we not stored our goods in Sūsa, he would not have left at all. (Half a line in which three words, at least, are effaced).¹⁰ The stores were plundered and so was the *funduq* (caravanserai) of Ibn Abī Miskīn, the large one. Qaṣr Ribāt¹¹ and Qaṣr Ṭāriq¹² were burned. That my brother escaped safely via Sūsa is a miracle. He carried with him purses of gold, two of which were for the Kohen (Nahray's brother-in-law). He gave one to Sidi Ibn ʿImrān, known as "Son of the Mule." I received it from him and it is here with me. He gave the other to Faḍḍāl

⁵ Many localities were called or referred to as "Balad," place. Baladī could mean also "a man trading in local textiles."

⁶ See *Med. Soc.*, I, 100, and 416, n. 4.

⁷ All these ships are also mentioned in other Geniza letters, the last one as once transporting about 500 passengers.

⁸ One of the boats mentioned before had called at this seaport on the southwestern corner of Sicily.

⁹ A seaport on the northeastern coast of Tunisia.

¹⁰ The ruler of the country is referred to with the Heb. word for "king."

¹¹ Probably identical with Qaṣr qaṣabat al-Ribāt, the castle of the fortress R. (Idris, *Zirides*, p. 565), which may be identical with Qaṣr Ribāh(?) of uncertain reading (*ibid.*, p. 454), near Qayrawān.

¹² Near Sūsa (*ibid.*, p. 446).

("Distinguished") b. Khalfa, "Son of the Slipper,"¹³ and I received it from him together with letters and an account. I shall copy one letter and forward it together with this, my letter.¹⁴ Likewise, if any goods should arrive for the Kohen, I shall not be remiss in taking receipt of them. In my eyes, my obligation toward him is like a religious duty, especially if the matter concerns his partnership (with you), for this is my part and my duty. Likewise, my master, if you will receive textiles¹⁵ dispatched by him, send them on immediately, for they are much in demand, since many foreigners are here. I shall appreciate this greatly.

C. RECIPROCAL SERVICES IN SALES

You noted that you had sold the oil. May I never be deprived of your kindness. I, too, my master, shall recompense the benefaction and, if God wills, send you light silk,¹⁶ silk, copper fragments,¹⁷ and bundles with wax. I ask God to reward me and you, as is his good habit, and grant us safety for the shipment. When it arrives, sell what sells well and leave what is dull.

I have already sent you several letters, one with a Muslim, whom I asked to deliver it to Abraham, Son of the Scholar,¹⁸ and a bundle with letters from Mardūk,¹⁹ which I gave to another Muslim with the request to deliver it to 'Abd b. Bishr ("Slave, son of Good Tidings").²⁰ In future, all letters I shall send with a Muslim shall be addressed: "To the house of 'Abd." Please always inquire there.

¹³ "Slipper," *babūsh* (spelled thus) was the nickname of his mother or of an ancestress. The Muslims were no less inventive in coining pejorative by-names than the Jews.

¹⁴ After his brother's letter had survived so many dangers, the writer did not want it to be lost in a humdrum accident, such as falling into the Nile during the travel upstream. Copying letters before forwarding them was common.

¹⁵ Ar. *matā'*. Same usage in no. 70, sec. C, below.

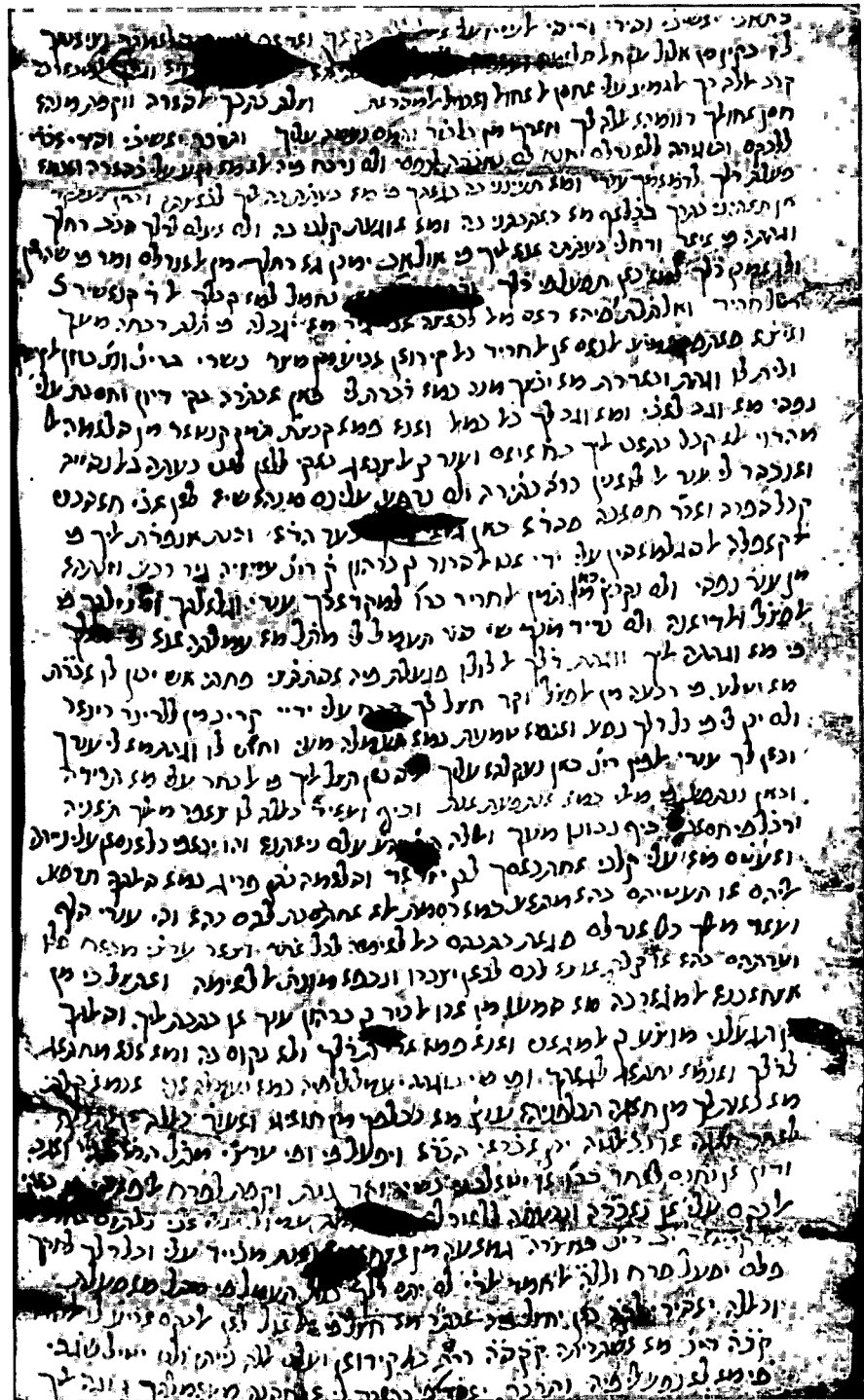
¹⁶ Ar. *khazz* (see no. 2, n. 12, above).

¹⁷ See no. 14, n. 7, above.

¹⁸ This notable (see no. 5, n. 25, above) could be easily found by a Muslim, because he had his office in the "House of Exchange." See *Med. Soc.*, 1, 238.

¹⁹ One of the closest business friends of Nahrāy (see Mardūk's letters to him in *Nahrāy* 101-109, 245, 252-253). Other letters by and to Mardūk have been preserved.

²⁰ The proprietor of a *wakāla*, or warehouse, where business was also conducted. Thus our letter was sent to that place. See the Ar. address, below.



1. Beginning of letter no. 1. Good example of the script of an eleventh century business clerk. From the David Kaufmann Collection, Budapest, Hungary.

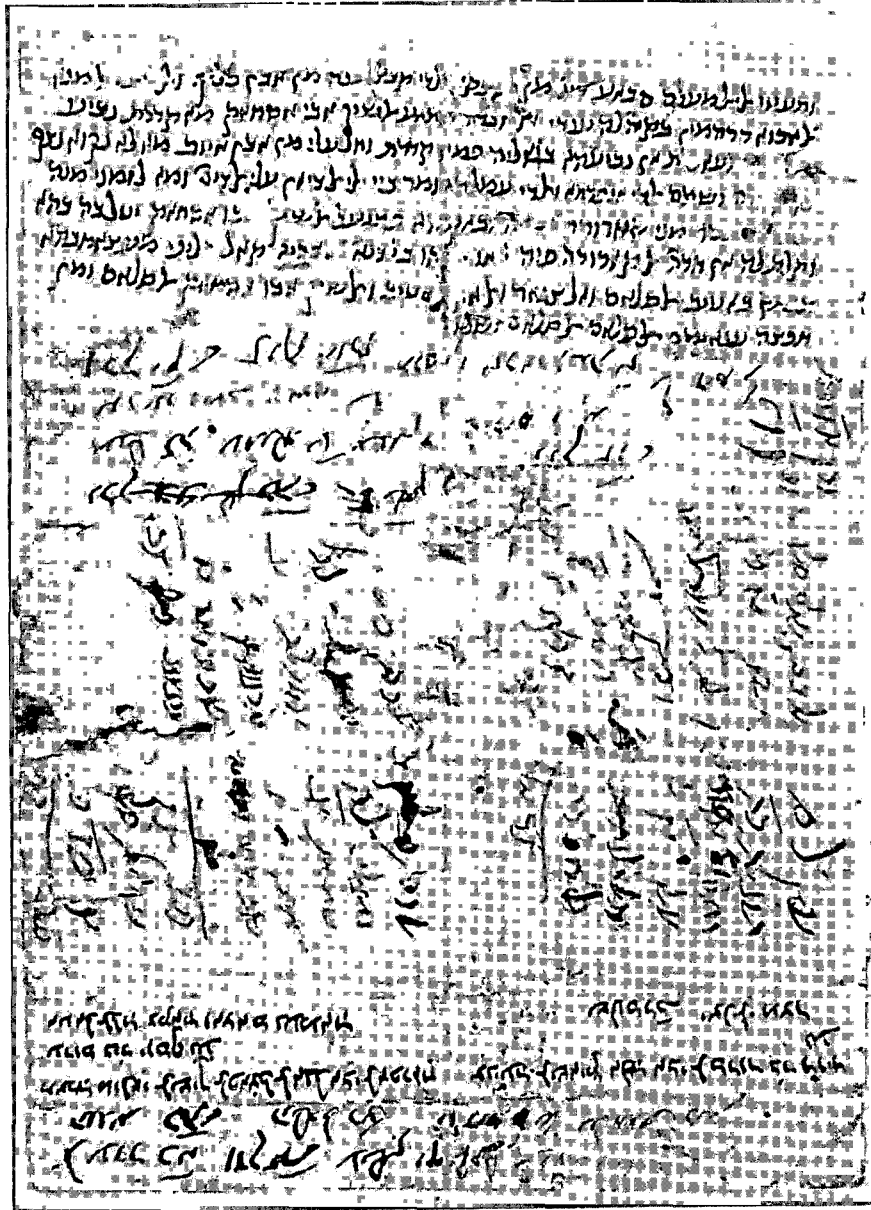
Handwritten text in Spanish style, likely a holograph of Abraham Maimonides. The text is arranged in several lines, with some words appearing to be in a different script or dialect. The ink is dark and the paper shows signs of age.

Handwritten text in Spanish style, likely a holograph of Abraham Maimonides. The text is arranged in several lines, with some words appearing to be in a different script or dialect. The ink is dark and the paper shows signs of age.

2a and 2b. Letter no. 46. Holograph of the Nagid Abraham Maimonides. Although born in Egypt in 1186, eighteen years after his father arrived in that country, his handwriting is in the Spanish style, probably because he had studied with a teacher from Spain. From the Taylor-Schechter Collection, University Library, Cambridge, England.

Handwritten text in a dense, cursive script, likely Hebrew or Arabic. The text is arranged in several lines, with some words appearing to be in a different script or dialect. The ink is dark and the paper shows signs of age.

3a and 3b (over). Letter to 'Arūs (nos. 48-51). Script as used in books. A carefully written letter like this has the look of a carpet. The writer wrote from top to bottom, then in the margin from bottom to top, then, on the head of the page, from right to left, continuing overleaf only when needed. The reverse side had to be left at least partially blank since they used no envelopes. The recipient jotted accounts on the space left blank. From the David Kaufmann Collection, Budapest, Hungary.



D. CASH FOR PURCHASES

I asked God, the exalted, for guidance and sent you a purse containing 109 dinars, 40 of which are in a separate purse with Muhammad, the son of Shibl ("Lion cub"), the hazelnut trader. Kindly send these to your friend and intimate Faraḥ in Būṣīr.²¹ Of the remaining 69 dinars, 64 were acquired by me from representatives of merchants, and they are the best money to be had in the town. Five dinars less one-sixth are broken quarters, of which 1 dinar is Rūmī (Christian, presumably Norman). Please sell everything and buy for them first-class, fine, and shining Shāmī (Syro-Palestinian) dinars and send them to me quickly.²² Also write to me about the prices (in Fustat) of the goods sent from the Maghreb and from . . . (and) sal ammoniac. I shall appreciate this greatly.

E. CONCLUSION AND A P.S.

The two purses of the Kohen²³ are of leather and sewn up. I shall weigh them together with the leather and write you their weight. You write me about that Syro-Palestinian Jew. He lives in the (Jewish) quarter.²⁴ I shall go up to him and act in accordance with your instructions. But today is Friday, too short a day for this.²⁵ I shall go up to him after the Sabbath, if God wills. Best regards to you and to my lord, the elder Abu Iṣḥāq²⁶ Barhūn. *And Peace!*

(P.S. :) The dispatch of my letter has been deferred to Monday,

²¹ See n. 2, above.

²² The writer wished to order goods from one or several of the ports of Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria.

²³ See sec. B, above; "of," Ar. *matā'*, still rare in this period (see J. Blau, *Grammar*, p. 159, d). Thus in the same letter *matā'* has two entirely different meanings. See n. 15, above.

²⁴ A *ḥarat al-yahūd*, or Jewish quarter, in Alexandria is mentioned in TS 12.254, margin, *Nahray* 102, where Mardūk (see n. 19, above) complains that he could not find female help there after the death of his wife. Probably identical with *al-Qamra*, a predominantly Jewish neighborhood, often mentioned.

²⁵ A respectable merchant like the writer of our letter would not walk but ride (on a mule or a donkey). Sabbath, on which riding was prohibited, began on Friday an hour before sunset, approximately at 5:30 p.m. at the time and the place where the letter was written.

²⁶ Spelled with ṣ under the influence of ḥ and q. *Nahray's* mentor.

the 27th of Elul. The large ship of Ibn Abī 'Aqīl²⁷ has arrived; likewise, the barge of (Abu?) 'l-Faraj, and that of the qadi of Tripoli, Syria.

My master Abu 'l-Faraj Mardūk today received a bundle addressed to Elhanan and Joseph, the Kohen. . . .²⁸ I have explained to you what belongs to you (pl.) in this bundle in the copy of the letter which you (pl.) have received from my brother Isaac in Sūsa. Please buy 500 pounds of sugar and send them to me. *And Peace.*

(Address:) To my master and lord Abū Yahyā, Nahray, son of Nissīm (*may he*) *r(est in) Eden*—may God prolong his life and always keep him safe and happy.

From Isma'īl b. Farah . . .

(In Arabic letters:)

To Nahray b. Nissīm

To the house of 'Abd, the agent, if God wills.

To the house of 'Abd, the agent.²⁹

32 A LETTER OF THANKS AND APPRECIATION FROM JERUSALEM

Letters expressing gratitude to Nahray for his selfless help are legion. We have chosen this one for translation because it shows the personal style of Solomon b. Moses of Sfax (Salāma b. Mūsā), mentioned in the introduction to no. 28, above, as the writer of the longest letter preserved in the Geniza. Two other letters of Solomon to Nahray, both sent from Alexandria, show him in close and continuous connection with him, Nahray, as usual, not answering and

²⁷ The qadi of Tyre, Lebanon (see *Med. Soc.*, 1, 296). The ms clearly has Abī (as correct), and not Abū, as usual. These ships came from the Syro-Palestinian coast.

²⁸ Elhanan b. Isma'īl al-Andalusī, the brother of the writer of no. 22, above, and mentioned there, sec. C. Appearing repeatedly as partner of Joseph ha-Kohen b. Eli of Fez. Merchants from Spain and Morocco operating together in Egypt were not uncommon in the eleventh century with its West-East movement of migration.

²⁹ Neatly written twice by way of emphasis.

Solomon, as was his habit, excusing him.¹ One of these letters refers to the death of a member of the Tāhertī family, who, in 1052, still signed a document in Fustat.² Our letter is from Nahray's middle period, ca. 1060.

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter
Collection, TS Box 25, f. 124, *Nahray* 185.

A. ARRIVAL IN JERUSALEM

I am writing to you, my dear master—may God prolong your life and make permanent your honored position and your high and noble rank—from Jerusalem, the blessed—may God let me and you and all Israel see its rebuilding and establishment—on the 20th of Tevet (January). I am well and prosperous and full of gratitude to God who has let me reach this time and this illustrious view (of the Holy City). I ask God the exalted to grant me and all Israel remission in his mercy, as it is written: "*Come back to me, and I shall come back to you.*"³ God is much-forgiving and merciful.⁴

I have written to you several times before from Abu 'l-Bays⁵ and then from Ramle. I hope the letters have arrived, but I have not [received] an answer to any one of them. I hope that occupation with good things has kept you from answering. May you always be occupied thus, my lord, may God keep you, and in such a way that you are excused.

I arrived in Jerusalem safely and in good physical condition de-

¹ TS 10 J 4, f. 2, *Nahray* 184; Mosseri L 42.3 (1v-36). The latter is in the hand of Ibrahīm b. Farāh al-Iskandarānī, the Alexandrian representative of the merchants, but the name of the sender was written by Solomon.

² Mosseri L 42.3v, ll. 1-2. Barhūn b. Mūsā Tāhertī, a cousin of Barhūn b. Isaac, Nahray's mentor. See no. 30, above.

³ Malachi 3:7. Muslims, Christians, and Jews regarded the hardships of a pilgrimage as a means for atonement. The quotation implies the additional meaning that the physical "return" to Jerusalem of the Jewish pilgrim induced God's "return," that is, forgiveness.

⁴ A phrase extremely common in the Koran, a fact of which the writer was of course, ignorant.

⁵ Usually called Bilbays, the town on the eastern border of Egypt, from which the caravans set out to Palestine through the Sinai desert. The fact that the writer was able to send several letters from there to Nahray shows that he had to wait a long time before he found a suitable caravan.