

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 Ibrahim 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.

spite utmost exertion, as I was overtaken by snow on my way. The end was thus to the good, for he who hopes for the good will obtain it. God does not break his promise. I arrived safely on Thursday of last week in the middle of the month of Tevet.⁶

B. RETURN TO THE MAGHREB

I intend, however, my master, to return and am preparing my travel to Ramle. I do not know how long I shall stay, for the city has already been gripped by heavy rain and snow for four days.

You have most kindly [honor]ed me in this matter of the purchase of three bales of flax. I have written you about this in my letter from Ramle and asked you to act—may God recompense you and help me to reciprocate, for at this time of the year goods are sold on credit, and he who starts first outruns others.⁷

Please buy these three bales of flax with the dinars you owe me and those to be received by M. Abū 'Imrān Mūsā,⁸ son of Abu 'l-Ḥayy, (*may he*) *r(est in) E(den)*, for twenty skins of oil. Take the balance from M. Abū 'Alī Ḥassūn, son of Yaḥyā, (*may he*) *r(est in) E(den)*.⁹

Thus there remains nothing for me to do except to trust in God, the exalted, and in you. My travel (to the Maghreb) depends solely on God and on you. So, please do not be remiss, for I cannot know how long I shall be forced to tarry on my way; God ordains everything, and he will enable me to be united with my lord, my father, may God keep him, before he departs this world. By my father,¹⁰

⁶ The Tunisian merchant sojourning in Egypt intended to use the quiet business season in midwinter for the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. His friends tried to dissuade him because of the rough weather conditions. But he persisted and states now that his optimism was justified.

⁷ As the continuation shows, Solomon did not need credit. He wished to emphasize that buying during the low season was profitable, wherefore Nahray should now fulfill his promise.

⁸ One of the most prominent Maghrebi Jewish merchants active in Egypt (see *Med. Soc.*, II, 445). Many of his letters have been preserved.

⁹ A close business friend of Solomon and his father. See no. 27, n. 9; no. 28, n. 18, above; and, e.g., TS 10 J 4, f. 2, margin, *Nahray* 184, where he is in Jerusalem expecting an urgent letter from Solomon's father; or Dropsie 389, l. 39, where he travels from al-Mahdiyya to Mazara, Sicily. Here, he is in Fustat, of course.

¹⁰ This is a popular oath in which the regular word for father, *ab*, is used. But in polite speech and throughout the Geniza letters, a father is referred to as *wālid*, "progenitor."

the purpose of my travel to the Maghreb, my lord, is solely to see my father—may God, the exalted, help me in this; business is at a standstill there.

C. PRAISE OF NAHRAY

What you, my lord, have done will be rewarded in this world and the world to come, if God wills. (The continuation, written in the margin, about fifteen words, is lost. The writer seems to speak about something done for his father or someone unable to reciprocate.) He praises you everywhere. May God fulfill through you always the saying of the prophet: "*A good name is better than sweet-scented oil.*"¹¹ Thank God, my lord, for this good name, and do not care that man, as you will know, never obtains reward for his good deeds. May God never take this merit and all you have done for your friends and brothers and everyone else away from you and your children after you. And may you always be a refuge for everyone, as is befitting you.

D. THE ILLNESS OF A FRIEND

I was sad to learn from your letter to my lord Abu 'l-Faraj Rabbi Abūn of Gabes¹² about what happened to my lord Abu 'l-Faraj Yeshū'ā.¹³ May God accept this *as an expiation and atonement*, and, since the end was good, it should be regarded as a benefaction for which God should be praised. Please give him my regards.

E. DEATH IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY

The passing away of Abū Zikrī Judah Ibn al-'Uṣfūra ("Sparrow")¹⁴ affected me deeply. May God have mercy upon him and fix the Garden of Eden as his dwelling place and grant composure to his family. May he spare me and you¹⁵ from death in a foreign

¹¹ Ecclesiastes 7:1. The biblical verse means that the fame of good deeds is more pervasive than the scent of perfume.

¹² Numerous letters of this native of Gabes in southern Tunisia to Nahray, all sent from Jerusalem, have been preserved.

¹³ Yeshū'ā b. Isma'īl. This grave illness may, or may not, have been identical with that referred to at great length in no. 25 A, above.

¹⁴ Female nickname which became a family name. Several persons bearing this name occur in the Geniza papers.

¹⁵ At the time of the writing of these lines, Nahray had lived in Egypt for at least fifteen years and was married to a local woman. Still, he was regarded as a Maghrebi.

country, for this, by my father, is hard. There is no escape from death; it comes sooner or later; may God prolong your life, spare you for your friends, and keep sorrow away from you.

F. CONCLUSION

By my father, my master, I am disquieted because of you and because of the absence of letters from you. May God let me hear good tidings about you soon. Perhaps you could send me a letter to Ascalon, in care of my lord Abū Isaac Abraham, the Son of the Scholar,¹⁶ which would make my heart somewhat lighter and, together with it, perhaps a letter from M. Abū 'Alī [Ḥassū]n b. Yaḥyā¹⁷ containing news and a report about goods arriving from the West; and perhaps a courier carrying a letter for me has arrived from there. (Two lines, written in the margin and concluding the letter, are lost. The top of the letter contains a note on an old woman, apparently a relative of Nahray, referred to also in other letters to Nahray from Jerusalem.)

(Address:)

To my master and lord Abū Yaḥyā, may God support and help him in his mercy.

Nahray, son of Nissīm, (*may he*) *r(est in) E(den)*, God is his protector and helper.

From his grateful Solomon b. Moses, son of Isaac, (*may he*) *r(est in) E(den)*, of Sfax. *Much support (to you from God)*.

(In Arabic characters: Approximately the same text, but Solomon is called here Ḥassūn, either a misunderstanding of the clerk, or the Arabic name was temporarily changed. "To Fustat" is erroneously written twice. The sender is called "the Maghrebi from Sfax.")

¹⁶ About this personality and his sojourn in Ascalon see *Med. Soc.*, I, 238-239. On his way back Solomon would stay and do some business in that seaport of southern Palestine.

¹⁷ See n. 9, above.

33 FROM THE CORRESPONDENCE OF SCHOLARS

From al-Mahdiyya, Tunisia, to Fustat

1061

The writer of this letter was the Jewish chief judge of al-Mahdiyya. The judge, like a Muslim qadi, or the Christian patriarch of Alexandria, also engaged in business, and examples of the commercial correspondence between him and Nahray have been preserved. But this letter deals mainly, though not exclusively, with learned and legal matters. The scholar referred to in secs. A-D with such epithets as "Light of the World" or "Renewer of the Religion" was R. Nissīm b. Jacob, one of the greatest rabbinical authorities of all times (see no. 75, n. 10, below, where a book of his is copied in Messina, Sicily, ninety-two years later).

Our letter was written after 1057, the date of the ruin of Qayrawān, when R. Nissīm and other inhabitants of that city had found refuge in Sūsa, a seaport on the Tunisian coast north of al-Mahdiyya. R. Nissīm died in 1062 (see next selection). The reference to the Sicilian city whose male inhabitants were put to sword by the conquering Normans (sec. H) fits the fall of Messina in 1061.¹

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A. NAHRAY'S EYE DISEASE

In Your name.

I am writing to you, . . . from al-Mahdiyya, at the end of Av (August), . . . The situation is well in hand,³ thank God who dispenses all benefactions.

Your letters, my lord, . . . worried, disquieted, and troubled me, and scared the sleep from my eyes, because of the eye disease which had attacked you. I ask God to take care of you and to heal you and to never let me hear anything sorrowful about you and to accept me as a ransom for you. *May he send his word and heal you, heal you completely. Amen. May thus be his will.*

¹ Amari, *Musulmani di Sicilia*, III, 71.

² Ed. S. D. Goitein, *Tarbiz* 36 (1966), 56-72.

³ In contrast to the ruin of Qayrawān and the devastation of the Tunisian countryside.