

Please, never let me be without an illustrious letter of yours reporting your good health and any concern you may have so that I can deal with it to your satisfaction, . . . Kindest regards to my lord. Your servant Mūsā²⁵ sends to my lord kindest regards.

God is sufficient for me and in him I trust.

(Address:)

(To) my master and lord, the illustrious elder Abū Yahyā M. R. Nahray, *son of R. Nissim, (may he) r(est in) E(den)*, may God prolong his life and always protect him and keep him prosperous. (From) Labrat, *son of Moses, (may his) s(oul) r(est in peace)*, Ibn Sighmār.²⁶

(Nahray's address is repeated in Ar. characters. As destination "his home," obviously known to the courier, is given.)

34 DEATH OF THE MASTER

August 12, 1062

The writer of this letter, Yeshū'ā b. Isma'il (see selections 13-16, above), and Nahray b. Nissim had studied in their youth with R. Nissim b. Jacob of Qayrawān.¹ Here Yeshū'ā informs Nahray of the death of their spiritual mentor a day after he had learned about it from travelers arriving from Sicily.

The date of the letter is established by the reference to the death of the Sicilian condottiere Ibn al-Thumna, who was killed in March 1062 (see Amari, *Musulmani di Sicilia*, III, 89).

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter Collection,
TS 13 J 19, f. 20, *Nahray* 88.

recently, the judge looked at the Norman conquest of Sicily more from a practical point of view.

²⁵ Moses, the son of the judge. He might have been the copyist, who wrote this letter calligraphically.

²⁶ The non-Hebrew names are Berber, not Arabic.

¹ See no. 33, introduction, above.

A. SAD TIMES²

I am writing to you . . . from Alexandria on the 4th of Elul (August 12, 1062) . . . My body is sound, but my soul is sore. But we must be grateful to God under all circumstances. "*He spoke, and so it was.*"³ Your letter—may God make you honored—arrived after I had not seen a letter from you, nor heard from you, for a long time. Then your letter came, delivered by the courier Surūr ("Happiness"),⁴ and from it I learned about your well-being; may God make it permanent. I thanked him, the exalted, for his benefaction. The worries expressed by you are shared by me. May God, the exalted, *hide us in the shadow of his wings*⁵ and not summon us to his court in this time of great tribulations.

B. DEATH OF THE MASTER

The gravest of all, however, that afflicted my heart is what I have to communicate you now:

The boat of Mujāhid ("Warrior in the Holy War")⁶ arrived from Mazara (Sicily) after a passage of seventeen days. A number of our Spanish coreligionists traveled in it, among them Abū Jacob Joseph, whose son-in-law is in Miṣr (Cairo-Fustat). The boat arrived on Friday, the day of the new moon, but they were able to disembark only yesterday, on Sunday. I went to them and asked them about news from Sicily. They reported good and reassuring news, namely, that Ibn al-Thumna had been killed and that the situation in the place had become settled.

Today I was visited by M. Isaac, son of R. 'Ābid ("Devout," "Pietist")⁷ and he relayed to me calamitous news from them "which

² The year 1062 marked the complete collapse of civil government in Egypt and its replacement by the anarchy of rivaling bands of mercenaries. In that year a pitched battle was fought between the Turkish and the black battalions of the caliph just outside Cairo, in which the former remained victorious.

³ Psalm 33:9, which, however, refers to the miracle of creation.

⁴ An equivalent of Heb. Simhā. A Jewish courier. See no. 31, n. 1, above.

⁵ Cf. Psalm 17:8.

⁶ Mentioned as already being on its way from Egypt to Tunisia in 1046 and as sailing from Denia, Spain, to Alexandria, with no Jewish passenger on board in TS 8 J 20, f. 2, a letter by Isma'il b. Farah. See no. 31, above.

⁷ His name was Nissim al-'Ābid b. Isaac (TS 12.150, dated Fustat, 1005). Isaac and his sons Abraham and Moses were active as merchants. There were other families bearing this name in both the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

*makes the ears of whomsoever hears it tingle*⁸ and let me forget my previous worries. "One disaster makes one forget the other."⁹ The demise of our master Nissīm, (may his) m(emory) be (blessed).

I went to see them, and they told me that they were in Mazara when some Jewish people arrived from al-Mahdiyya and told them that he was buried on . . . in al-Mahdiyya.

When I heard this, I rent my clothes and took off my shoes,¹⁰ and cried out in the bitterness of my soul. I was like one whose beloved lay before him dead. I sat to earth appalled and tears burst from my eyes for the light of Is(rael) which has been extinguished because of our many sins. "The godly man has gone and the righteous one is no more."¹¹ For such a one I howl and lament and wail day and night, / for there is no cure to our affliction / and no one has compassion or pity. / Until the Mighty one will look forth / in mercy and indulgence / upon the dove without guile / .¹² Before I said: Praised be the true judge, all of whose decisions are just and right, and no one should censure his ways. Praised be he by whom no wrong is done. How bitter is this cup, how heavy is this sorrow. Would I had died in his stead. But "no man can redeem his brother nor give to God a ransom for him."¹³ God is just in all his ways and merciful in all his deeds. I ask him, the exalted, to look at our tribulations, and not at our sins and have mercy and indulgence with the remnants of his people. Amen.¹⁴

C. REFERENCES TO NAHRAY'S LETTER

You wrote about the affair with Barhūn.¹⁵ I showed him your letter and requested the account from him. He said: "Yes, I shall give it to you." I shall force him to do so, although he made the impression as if he did not know about that transaction. He is a very slow man, but I got all he owes me out of him, with only 2 dirhems remaining.

⁸ Jeremiah 19:3.

⁹ An imprecise reminiscence of Talmud Bab., Berakhot 13a.

¹⁰ These customs of extreme mourning, permitted only at the death of a close relative, are prescribed at the death of one's main master.

¹¹ Micah 7:2, with change, discussed by me in *Zion* 27 (1962), 17, n. 38.

¹² The people of Israel. A rhymed piece from a dirge.

¹³ Psalm 49:8.

¹⁴ R. Nissīm was over seventy at the time of his death.

¹⁵ Barhūn is Abraham. Impossible to say which one is meant.

I was sorry to learn about the hides. It would have been better if we had sold them at that time, but there is nothing to be done. Perhaps, when the people calm down, Sharaf will remember to ask for them.

D. REQUEST TO SEND THE SLAVE AND BUSINESS AGENT TAYYIB

(Tayyib, Khallūf b. Mūsā's agent, had been lent by him to the writer of our letter—see no. 23, sec. F, and n. 8, above. But Tayyib had soon found out the unpleasant character of his new master and had left Alexandria for Fustat, Nahray's place.)

Kindly meet Tayyib and reproach him for what he has done to me. I have not treated him unkindly. Here are the letters of his master admonishing him and telling him that he should be at my disposal and never leave me, except if I wish to send him to Büşir (the center of flax-growing) or any other place. Now he has left me at the very time when I needed someone on whom I could rely. These tribulations came when I was through with the dissolution of the partnership¹⁶ and intended to leave for the country (to collect debts). But everyone to whom I talked about this said: "Praise God that you were not in the Rīf when those troubles started, for people were destroyed there everywhere." Thus they calmed me somehow. If there was income there, it had gone anyhow. But man is covetous.

So, please make an effort and induce him to return and to be submissive. He could possibly come down to Fuwwa or to Malij.¹⁷ Perhaps God will grant me to retrieve (some of the money due to me). I need not urge you, my lord. You know best what is in my heart and how much I burn to retrieve that money. May God help me in this and let me choose the right thing, me, and you, and all Is(rael).

¹⁶ Ar. *naqd*. Could mean also: demolition of a house. The addressee knew of course the matter alluded to.

¹⁷ Places between Cairo and Alexandria. The writer wished to meet the slave half-way and then travel with him in the Nile delta to collect his debts.

E. CONCLUSION

As to R. Ḥalfōn, I talked to R. Mardūk and to R. Yeshū‘ā, the member of the academy,¹⁸ about this. We shall take up that matter with him and hope he will return what is due to you.

Whatever additional news arrive—I hope they will be good—I shall let you know. The boat of Mufaḍḍal ("Preferred") has arrived in al-Mahdiyya;¹⁹ thus, all boats have arrived there safely, thank God.²⁰ *And peace.*

F. P.S.

Best regards to you and to R. Abraham,²¹ R. Abū Naṣr, my masters your brothers-in-law, may God keep them, to all under your care and those who inquire about me. *And peace in plenty.*

R. Abū ‘Alī Ḥasan, the physician from Barqa, sends you kindest regards. He intended to travel to your place, for he is on his way to Jerusalem, may God rebuild it, and he insists on continuing the journey. When you write to me, mention him with greetings. He is a friend of yours and speaks of you all the time.²²

(Address:)

(To) my master and elder R. Nahray, son of R. Nissīm, (*may his*) *m(emory) be (blessed).*

May God prolong his life and always give him honor and strength.

¹⁸ Mardūk b. Mūsā (Mordechai b. Moses) was an intimate friend of Nahray's living in Alexandria (see no. 5, n. 15, above). Yeshū‘ā (b. Joseph), the member of the academy, was Jewish judge and communal leader in the city. He was a Kohen, to mention which was absolutely *de rigueur*, but these words were scribbled in a narrow margin and the writer was stingy with his space.

¹⁹ Mufaḍḍal of Haifa, Israel, was the proprietor of both a ship and a barge which commuted between Tyre, Lebanon, Alexandria, and al-Mahdiyya. The name was common among Jews and Muslims.

²⁰ This refers, of course, to the spring convoys. The fall convoys would sail in August and early September.

²¹ R. Abraham, the Son of the Scholar. Many persons in Nahray's correspondence are called Abū Naṣr.

²² The physician from Barqa, Libya, intended to travel to Cairo and from there to Jerusalem overland. Because of the anarchy prevailing in Egypt he would now wait in Alexandria for a boat going to Ascalon or Jaffa, Israel.

(From) his grateful Yeshū‘ā, son of Isma‘il, (*may he*) *r(est in) E(den).*

Peace in plenty!

35 THE COMMUNAL LEADER

Ca. 1085

This short note shows us Nahray at the head of the two Rabbanite congregations of Fustat during a difficult period. The court physician and official head (*Rayyis*) of the Jewish community was temporarily in disgrace, and his adversary David, son of the late Daniel b. Azarya, who derived his origin from the kingly house of David and had been head of the Jerusalem Yeshiva, had usurped authority over the Jews of the Fatimid empire. David claimed to have obtained a ruling from the government that the name of the Rayyis should be omitted from the public prayer and excommunicated any synagogue dignitary who did not comply. This is the background of our note, which was written by the highest religious authority of the Jewish community of Egypt, who calls himself here by name, but is referred to in the Geniza throughout merely by his title "the Master" (*Rāv*).¹

University Library, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter Collection, TS 12.657.

Judah ha-Kohen b. Joseph ha-Kohen²

¹ About the meaning of this title in those days see *Med. Soc.*, II, 211-212, 325-326.

² In short notes it was customary for the sender to write his name in the upper lefthand corner of the sheet. The identification of the sender is based on TS 20.83, dated March 12, 1066, and (partly) written and signed by Judah b. Joseph, the Kohen, who is referred to as "the Rāv" in the validation of the court. TS 8 J 7, f. 15 is also (partly) written and signed by him. His motto, tiny letters arranged in zigzag above and beneath his signature in both documents: "May something good be found in us" *ymš' bnw dbr twb*. A native of Palestine, as is suggested by his handwriting and by his origin from a priestly family of Jerusalem Gaons, he studied with R. Nissīm in Qayrawān (see no. 33, above), returned to his native country, where he must