

NN Add JTS ENA 2805 f.19

Letter to Nahray from, probably, Nissim b. Ishaq, brother of Barhun b. Ishaq.

This long, but unfortunately damaged, letter contains the key to one of the crucial events in Nahray's career - the death of his early mentor and patron (and older relative) (Abu Ishaq Barhun b. Ishaq. This affected not only Nahray's career, but also that of several of his colleagues who were in one manner or another connected to Barhun. The latter seems to have financed in various ways the early careers of several Maghrebis active in Egypt. Also, the shipwreck in which Barhun perished may have also caused the death of several other important Mediterranean merchants, not to speak of much loss of property which resulted in complicated settling of accounts for years to come.

The top left part of the letter is torn away, and other portions of it are damaged. Among the missing sections is that containing the name of the sender. On verso, line 10, the writer refers to "my brother, may he rest in Eden;" he refers to "the deceased" (al-marhum) verso, l. 22. The contents of the letter and the handwriting have much in common with N170 and N182 - both emanating from Nissim b. Ishaq. There can be little doubt that this letter is from him and that it was written shortly after the death of Barhun and contains constant and repeated urgings that Nahray draw up accounts, collect all the information about the late Barhun's debits and credits, etc. As evidenced by N170 (written ca. 1055 or 1056), this process dragged on for three or more years.

That Barhun b. Ishaq died in a shipwreck is fairly evident from this letter. Whether this was a natural disaster or caused by an act of piracy or a raid is not clear. With Barhun on the ill-fated ship was "your maternal

aunt and her daughter." Since in other letters from members of the Taherti family, Nahray is called upon to contribute to the support of daughters of his maternal uncle or aunt, it is possible that Barhun's wife - Nahray's maternal aunt - survived the destruction of the ship together with her daughter - and possibly other children. This could indicate a pirate raid, or a military raid of the Normans in the vicinity of Sicily in which Barhun perished, but from which his wife and family escaped or were taken captive and ransomed. In any case, one should check the chronicles, etc. for raids in and around Sicily and Tripoli in the early 1050's.

The year in which these events occurred was probably 1052. Line 3 of this letter mentions the year 812 or 813 (=4812/4813), i.e. 1052 or 1053. This date connects well with the account contained in 1070 which is still setting in order the fallout of Barhun's death and which refers to the year 815 (=4815) = 1055.

This letter is 1052.

Nahray's junior status at the time of Barhun's death is highlighted by Nissim's request that he send all the data possible, and that he (i.e. Nissim) will put it in proper order and form for him - see recto, ll. 21-22.

If Barhun's demise came as a result of Norman and activity around Sicily (the Norman conquest of Messina occurred at about this time) then this represents not only a turning point in Nahray's career - a kind of independence and also partial inheritance of Barhun's position - but it also represents a turning point for other members of this network which was important in the trade of the southern shores of the Mediterranean and, by extension, Barhun's death symbolizes - and is a kind of turning point - the

shift taking place in the ensemble of Mediterranean trade - of which the center of gravity was moving eastward. Egypt was replacing Tunisia and Sicily as the entrepot. The commercial revolution of Europe was propelling Italian merchants and their ships in increasing numbers over increasing distances toward the East.

Thus the Tunisian Tahertis ceding their preeminence to a first generation Egyptian merchant is in a way a metaphor for this trend.

The image shows a fragment of an ancient manuscript, possibly from the Dead Sea Scrolls. The text is written in a cursive script, likely Hebrew or Aramaic, and is arranged in horizontal lines. The parchment is heavily damaged, with large sections missing, particularly on the right side and along the bottom edge. The remaining text is dark and dense, with some words appearing to be in a different script or dialect than others. The overall appearance is one of extreme age and wear.

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[illegible]