

The young Nasay writes from Alexandria to his old uncle Abu Ishaq Mu'awiya b. Bashir ... Finished on April 12, 1057 w/r regard to his cousin's loss.

Abu Ishaq Bashir b. Ishaq, who is another nephew of mine.
 (1) Likewise! ask you - may God make your house & position permanent - to kindly write to my lord Abu Ishaq ^{Bashir}.
 (2) To Ishaq a letter in which you explain to him my situation and tell him how accursed & dedicated I am
 (3) to comfort in dealing with ^{every single} ~~affair~~ ^{business} more than with those connected with the partnership b/c. you know me. Ask him also to be considerate with me, as he used to, with regard to all I send him. Also, he should reduce (a little bit) ~~his~~ ^{to} reproaches. Nothing good comes out of reproaches. If you do not write him and cannot write him especially ^{about} ~~because~~ of me, please write mention in your letter to Abu Sa'id - [the father of Abu Ishaq] what he should tell him by way of sending a note which he would pass on to his son Abu Ishaq - may God protect him. And ask him to send him a letter in which he would refer to the note such you would send him - may God protect you. I wish to inform him

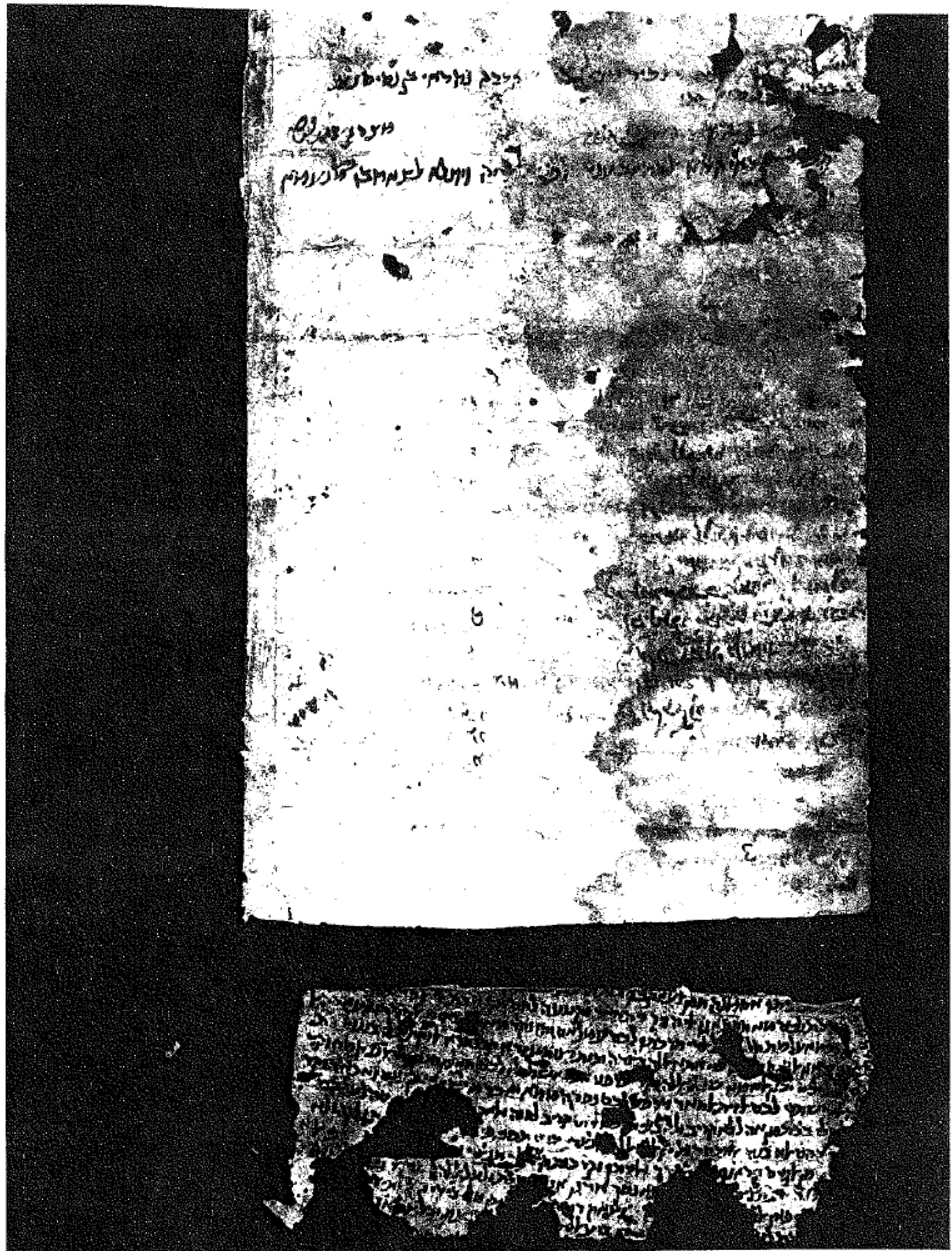
Over

Abu Sa'id Ishaq b. Bashir probably lived in Cairo and while his son stayed in al-Mahdiyya.

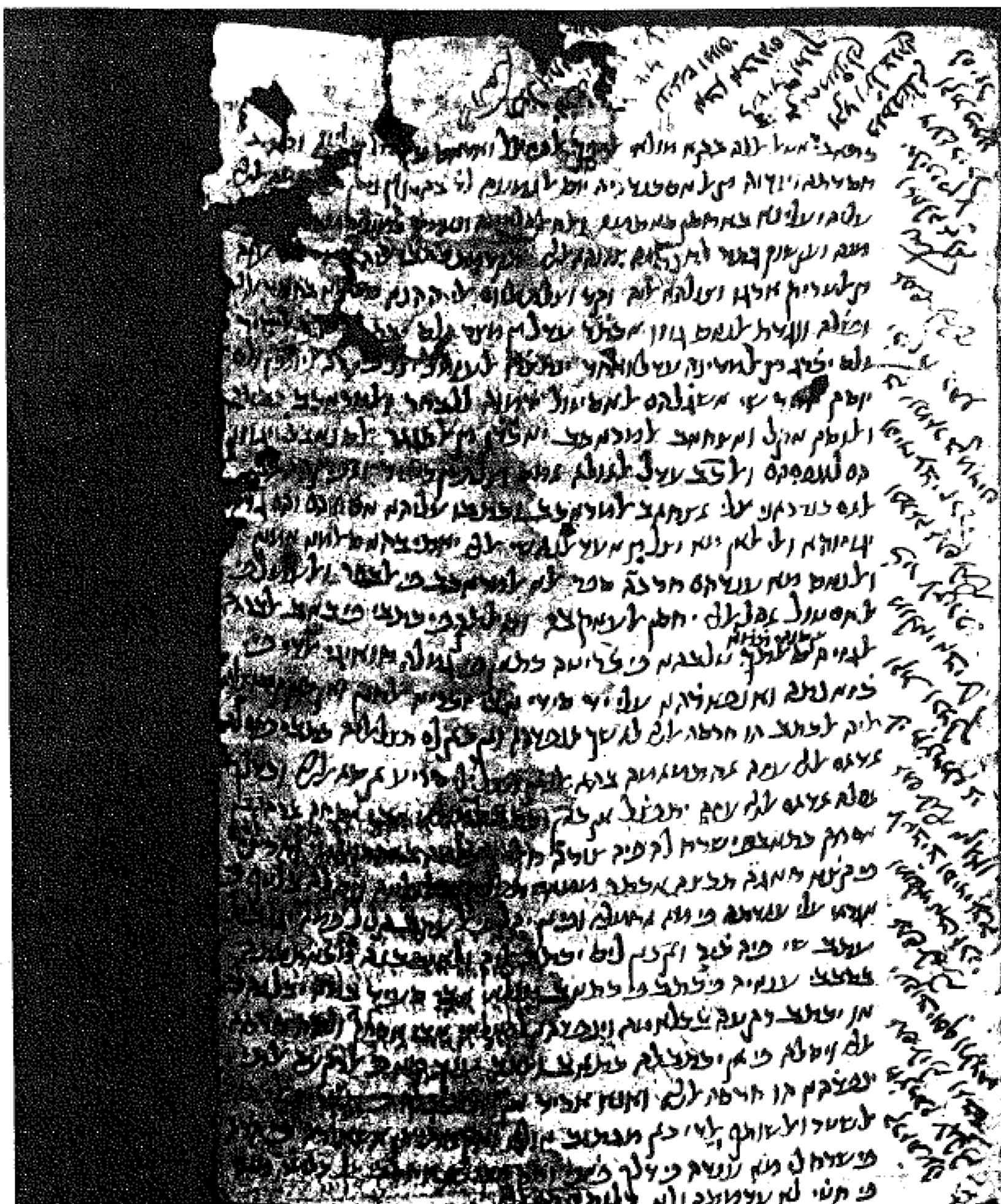
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undoubtedly the flood is Natural
first o. N 10. Then ~~is~~ ^{is} fresh
after the flood and on S. 1 overtopped

for on manager that ~~is~~ ^{is} remained
in ~~the~~ ^{the}

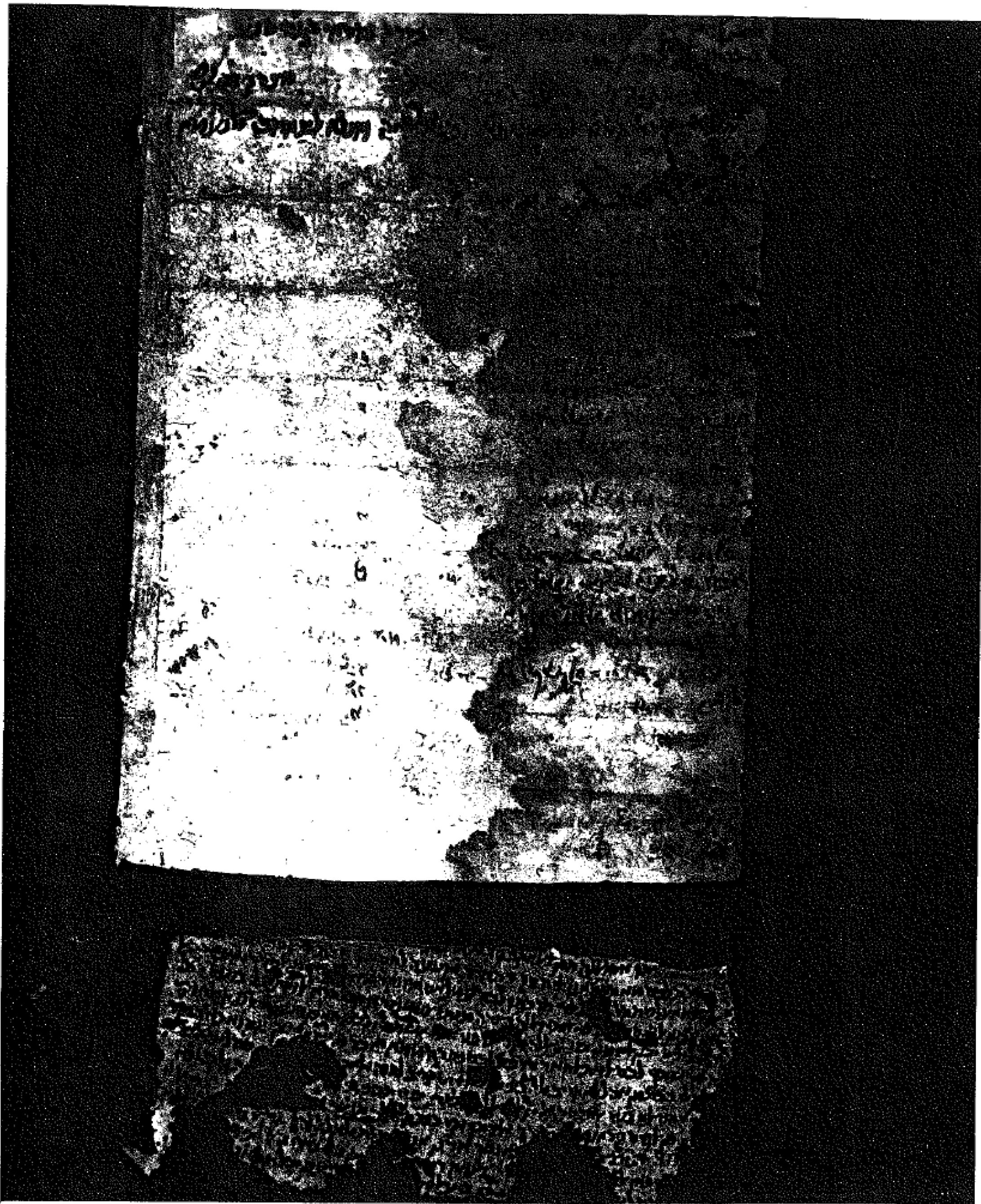


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השולח: בחראי בן נסים (אלאסכנדריה)
המקבל: אבר אלכידר [משה בן ברהון מתרתי] (פסטאט)
תאריך: 12 אפריל, 1051

- 1) בחאבי אטאל אללה בקא מולאי אלשין אלפאל ואדם עדת
ותאיירה רכבה
- 2) חסימה וערווה מן אלאסכנדריה יום אלגעה לו בקיון מן
נישן כחמה אללה
- 3) עליה ועלינו באחן כאחנה ואלחאל סלאה ונעמא למליהם
[אלחדר עלי]
- 4) מנה וען שוק כתירלח'רחה צאנחא אללה תקרמת בחבי אליה
[אדם אללה] עדת
- 5) מן אלטראיך ארבו וצולחה אליה זקר וצלה אליהם אליו ההגה סאלמא
בחמד אללה
- 6) ופְּלָה ווּגַרְתָּ אֶלְבָּאָם גּוֹזֵן אֶכְּלָר עֲרָל מִן פְּאַר וְלָם יְבָקֵי
[הנאר אלא] אליסידר
- 7) וְלָם יְלַבֵּג מִן אֶלְמְרִינָה עֲדָל וְאַחֲרָיו יְנַחֲרֵר אֶלְעָמֵל יְצֵל
כּוּרָה לְיוּסִין וְלָם
- 8) יְזֹסֵק אַחֲרָיו שִׁי אַשְׁנוֹלָהָם אלָסְטוּל יְרַמּוּת לְלַבָּחָר וְאֶלְמְרָאָכָב
כְּחִידָה
- 9) וְאַלְוָסָק אָקֵל וְאַצְחָק אֶלְמְרָאָכָב יְאַלְוֵר מִן אֶלְתָּבָאָר אֶלְסְנָאָכָל
וְיְבוּזָה
- 10) הַמַּלְאָךְ וְאַלְכָּבָּעָרָל אֶלְאָוָלָא אַמָּס וְצֵל מִן רְשִׁיד וְאֶפְרָקָה
עַפְּנָן
- 11) אֶלְאָסְכָּנְדְּרָאָנִי עַלִּי אַצְחָק אֶלְמְרָאָכָב וְכָחָר עַלְיָהָא אַסְמָה
וְתָם נָרָא
- 12) יְבוֹזָה דָּאָלִי אַלְאָן מָא וְצֵל מִן אַעֲדָאָלָא שִׁי אֶלְלָה יְאַתִּי
בְּהָא סָאָלָמָא אַמְּרָן
- 13) וְאַלְגָּאָס מָא עַכְדָּה חַרְכָּה סְפָר אַלָּא אֶלְמְרָאָכָב פִּי אֶלְבָּחָר
וְאֶלְעָמֵל פִּי
- 14) אֶלְאָסְטוּל אָסָל אֶלְלָה יְחִסֵּן אֶלְעָקָבָה וְסָאָלָתָה פִּי כְּחַבִּי פִּי
בְּאַבְּאַבְּרָאָה
- 15) אַלְגָּזִיה עַזְמָה סָאָלָתָה טְלָבָהָא פִּי בְּרִוִּיתָה כְּתָאָן פִּי גּוֹלָתָה חַוְאִיבָּי
אַלְרָי פִּי

16) לזרנחתה ואנפאלחה עלי יד סידי אבי זכריה אלחנן ואן כאן קד זצל

17) אליה אלחנן הר חרסה אללה לא שיר אנטריה ואן כאן למ תצל

אליה כתבי פאסלה

18) אדים אללה עדת אהתמאה בטה אליו אין חצל אליו סרייע אין שא
אללה וכדילך

19) אסללה אדים אללה עדת יתפצל אין כאן יכח למלאי אבי אסחן ברהון בן

20) אסחן חמאת פישרה לה פיה צורתה חאלי ויעלמה באחתמאו וחראי

21) פי קלא האבוי תבצה אכחר מטא יחולק באלכלתו ויסלה בלטר פי

22) אגדאי עלי ערדתת פי מא אחמלה ופי אין יקל פי אלעחב קליל מטא יגולב אל

23) עחבי שי פיה ליד ואן כאן ליס יכח אליה ולא ימכתה מכמתה

24) בסכבי ענאה פיכח פי בחאמ פולאי אבי סעד במא יבלגה לה

25) אין יכח רקעה בכלאתה וינפרהא למולאי אבי אסחן ולודת חרסה

26) אללה ויסלה פי אין יכח לה כתאבייסנדי ענד מא פי אלרכעה אלחי

27) ינפלהה הר חרסה אללה ואנא אריד אין אכח לה פי הדריך אלחנן

28) אלשטר ואלשורה אלדי כאן סחרוב אולא וארדה אין אשורה פי הלא

29) פישרה לי מא ענרתת פי דלק פאדי ותק אבי לאחסב כל כלמה מנה

30) פי חטי לא ערמאתה ולא כלותה מן חפוץ

bienstskopf

שורגיין

קדחת עלי / חזרחה אלבולילה / אתם אלסלםوابי / יעקב יוסף וואלדתה /
אתם אלסלם / ומולאי אבי זכריה / אלטביב וסידי אביה / אתם אלסלם אין גאו /
אלי חערתת אי / נחת ובולך / מולאי אבי אל / ליד אלצירפי /
ופתאה אתם אלסלם / וסידי אבי זכריה / בן עמרן בן מרים / יlez חזרחה /
אתם אלסלם / ואסלה אלא/יבליך מן אל / דעה פי כל /
וחת כהה / למ יזל

ראש העמוד

מחפצלא / זקר ראל ברהון / בן אסמעיל מן / רשייד ותרך / אבי אברהיימ /
יעיאש ומוסי / בדרשייר / ינחויר אלאעראל / חצל גית / /

כתובות

מולאי	אבי אלכידר משה	שאכרצה נחראי בן כסים נע
בן ברהון	תאהרתי	
מצד אין שא אללה	בקאה	
יחפצל	חולא אלחנן עבר אלפיו	וירצלה לצאחה פ' מגעמא

NOTES

- 1) The date of this letter can be established by the reference in ll. 14 ff. to a receipt for the payment of the poll-tax (jizya) for the year 441 A.H./1049-1050. Presumably, the receipt covered the payment of the preceding year's poll-tax, and therefore the letter was written in 442 A.H., beginning the 26th of May, 1050 and ending on 14th of May, 1051 (see, Wustenfeld-Mahler'sche Vergleichungs-Tabellen, 2nd edition, Leipzig, 1926, p. 14). This corresponds to the Hebrew calendar years 4810-4811, in which Nisan ended on the 15th of April, 1051 (see E. Mahler, Die Zeitrechnung der Juden, Vienna (?), 1888, p. 86). This letter, therefore, was written on either April 11th or 12th of 1051.
- 2) Line 1: The epithet al-fādil is a sign of respect, and its use usually reserved when addressing a person considerably one's senior.
- 3) Finance director (al-'āmil) concerning this office, see
- 4) For the warship - ustūl, see Goitein, Mediterranean Society, I, p. 307. One or more of these heavy ships regularly accompanied convoys of commercial vessels on their voyages over the Mediterranean sea-routes. As in the instance described in this letter, it seems not to have been unusual for the merchant vessels to be loaded and ready for sail in advance of the heavier military vessels which accompanied them for protection; see, ibid. pp. 307-308, 331 and especially p. 482, n. 38. The involvement of all available manpower in the repairs and other preparations of the ustūl for the voyage, might indicate that some sort of corvée or conscription was instituted for this purpose.

- 5) Lines 8-10: Since there was more cargo space than cargo, the ship-captains were apparently soliciting among the merchants in order to get as much cargo as possible for their own boats.
- 6) Lines 10-12: Distribution of the bales among the various ships was undoubtedly intended as a means of spreading the risks as widely as possible. In case of shipwreck, piracy, etc., the merchants thus avoided having all their merchandise concentrated in one or two ships. While this practice may have made it more difficult for the merchants and those to whom they shipped their goods to keep track of their shipments it was made worthwhile by the greater likelihood of the safe arrival of a greater part of their merchandise. The ship-captains, who in this particular instance, were anxious for as much cargo as possible, wrote their names on the bales assigned to them with a promise to see it through customs (yujawizūhā) the next day. The shipowners wrote their names on the bales to be sure to get them on their boats.
- Ibn al-Iskandrānī, whose full name was Ibrahim b. Farāḥ, was the wakīl at-tujjār in Alexandria, and the main agent for the Taherti family business there.
- 7) Line 14: The word sa'altuhu, using the respectful 3rd person singular in addressing Abū-l-Khayr, is corrected from the less deferential sa'altuka -- with the 2nd person singular. The same mistake and correction occur in line 15, and a similar mistake and correction in the word 'anhu occurs on line 26.
- 8) Lines 14-15: al-barā'h al-jizya -- receipt for poll-tax. (Why did Nahray need it?) --

8)

- 9) Lines 19-20: Abū Ishaq Barhūn b. Ishaq at-Tahertī of Qayrawan was a nephew of the addressee and an older cousin of Nahray's. He was Nahray's mentor, and had apparently been treating Nahray somewhat roughly. It is for this^a that Nahray requests a good word on his behalf from Abū-l-Khayr Mūsā b. Barhūn, who, as the uncle of Abū Ishaq could intercede favorably for Nahray. Should Abū-l-Khayr be unable to intervene directly with Abū Ishaq Barhūn, Nahray requests him to intercede indirectly via the former's brother and the latter's father Abū Ishaq (ll. 24-25). For the family tree of the Tahertis, see, S. D. Goitein, "La Tunisie du XIe siècle à la lumière des documents de la Geniza du Caire," Etudes d'Orientalisme dédiées à la mémoire de Lévi-Provençal, Paris, 1962, p. 568.
- 10) Lines 27-28: al-Kitāb al-shtar wal-shūṭaf -- This indicates a partnership agreement in the form of a Hebrew document drawn up before a Jewish court. The phrase al-Kitāb al-shtar indicates a Hebrew document drawn up before a Jewish court in distinction to the expression al-kitāb al-hujja which in the Geniza indicates a document in Arabic drawn up before a Muslim court.
- 11) Abū Zikrī at-Tabīb was a wakīl at-tujjār in Alexandria.

11)

12) Abū Zikrī b. 'Ammār b. Madīnī * the nisba Madīnī means "from Palermo,"

From: Nahray b. Nissim (نحراي بن نسيم) { Alexandria }
To: Abū-l-Khayr [Moshe b. Barhūn Tahertī] (أبوالخير [موسى بن برهون تهرتى]) { Egypt }

Date: April 12, 1051

- 1) May God lengthen the life of my master, the gracious elder, and preserve his glory and support [] and may He humble
- 2) his enemies and those covetous of him. I am writing from Alexandria, on Friday the 25th day of Nisan, may God conclude it
- 3) for you and for us in the best possible manner. I am well and sound; praise be to the dispenser of these favors for
- 4) His generosity. (I am writing) in a state of great longing for your excellency, may God protect you. I have already sent several letters to you, may God preserve your glory,
- 5) from the road. I hope these have reached you. I arrived here today safely with praise to God
- 6) and His kindness. I discovered that the people had already sold most of the bales from Cairo, and only a small number are left here (unsold).
- 7) However, not even one bale has left the city (i.e. Alexandria) itself, since everybody is waiting for the finance director who will arrive later, in about two days.

- 8) Nobody has loaded any cargo yet, since all the porters have been conscripted to prepare the warships for the voyage. There are many ships (and their capacity)
- 9) exceeds the available cargo. The ship-captains are taking baskets from the merchants, and transferring
- 10) them to their own (storage places.) The first 22 bales arrived from Rashīd yesterday, and Ibn
- 11) al-^sIkandrānī distributed them to various ship-captains. They wrote their name on the bales, and
- 12) will pass them through customs tomorrow. Up to now, none of our bales have arrived; may God see them through safely, Amen.
- 13) The people are not yet making preparations for travel, even though the ships are ready; work still continues on the warships.
- 14) I pray that God will provide a happy conclusion.
In my letters, I inquired of you concerning the receipt
- 15) for the poll-tax of the year 441. I asked you to look for it in a linen bag among my belongings which are in
- 16) your closet, and to send it with Abū Zecharia Al-Hanān. If my letters have already reached you,
- 17) may God protect you, then you have undoubtedly sent

- 17) it. If my letters have not yet reached you, then
I request
- 18) your attention, may God preserve your glory, to
this matter so that (the receipt) will, God willing,
reach me quickly. I would also like to ask you,
- 19) may God preserve your glory, that if you will
be writing a letter to my master, Abū Ishāq Barhūn
- 20) b. Ishāq, please explain to him my general
circumstances and inform him that my concern and
diligence
- 21) with respect to his private affairs are greater than
(the attention I devote) to the affairs of the partnership.
Ask him to be gentle in his treatment of me,
- 22) as is his wont, especially with respect to that
which I send him, and that he exhibit a little
less anger towards me. For anger never brings
- 23) any good results. If you will not be
writing to him, or if it will not be possible for
you to correspond with him
- 24) specifically on my account, then please write a
letter to my master, Abū Sa'Id asking
him
- 25) to write a note in his own words and
send it to my master, Abū Ishāq, his son, may
God protect him.
- 26) Ask (Abū Sa'Id) to write a letter to (Abū
Ishāq) attributing to you the contents of the

- 26) note which
- 27) he will send to him, may God protect him. I intended to write to you concerning the invalidation of
- 28) the partnership agreement that was previously drawn up, and I wanted to consult with you on this matter.
- 29) Please explain your opinion on this question to me, for, by my father's life, I consider every word from you
- 30) as a privilege to me. I wish you continued good health, and I hope not to be deprived of your kindness.

MARGIN

I send your most noble excellency my best regards.
Best regards to Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf and his mother. Convey my best regards to my master, Abū Zikrī At-Tabīb and his brother, should they at any time come to visit your excellency. Likewise, convey my best regards to my master, Abū-l- Khayr As- Sayrafi and his son, and to Abū Zikrī b. 'Ammār b. Madīnī. My special regards to your excellency. I hope that at all times I will not be absent from your prayers, and that your kindness toward me will not cease. Barhūn b. Ismā'īl has already arrived from Rashīd. He left Abū Ibrāhīm 'Ayyāsh and Mūsā

MARGIN

behind in Rashid to wait for the arrival
of the bales . . .

Summary and Discussion

This letter was written approximately three years after Nahray's settlement in Egypt from his native Qayrawān in Tunisia. He was a young man, probably in his late twenties or early thirties, and was just at the outset of his long and successful commercial career which lasted until his death thirty-five years later, in approximately 1096. This communication is addressed to a scion of the Tahertī family, Abū-l-Khayr Mūsā b. Barhūn I, who was also Nahray's brother-in-law. Nahray's wife must have been a considerably younger sister to Abū-l-Khayr, since the respectful, indeed, deferential manner in which Nahray addresses him (e.g. use of the epithet: al-fādil in line 1 and the requests which are the subject of lines 19-28) point not only to the pre-eminence of Abū-l-Khayr's social and economic status, but also to a significant seniority in years.

Nahray wrote this letter on Friday, April 11th or 12th, 1051 shortly after his arrival in Alexandria. Although there is no explicit statement concerning his point of origin, the circumstantial evidence clearly indicates that he started out from Fustāt five or six days earlier accompanying his merchandise and that entrusted to his care down the Nile via Rosetta (Rashid, explicitly mentioned in the margin) to Alexandria, from whence it was to be trans-shipped to points in the Western Mediterranean.

It is worth noting that even in the course of a journey of such short duration, Nahray says that he had sent Abu-l-Khayr several letters "from the road." One might legitimately wonder why Nahray found it necessary, and he was by no means atypical in this respect, to write several letters to Fustāt, from which he had just departed, within the space of four or five days. Such frequent and often repetitive communications were undoubtedly partially due

to the unreliability and irregularity of communications. Operating, therefore, on an unarticulated probability principle, merchant sent many letters in the hope that some, at least, would reach their destination. I believe, however, that there was another and even more pressing incentive for this prolific business correspondence, namely, the need and usefulness of reliable commercial intelligence. Geniza merchants possessed an apparently insatiable appetite for information of all sorts concerning trade, market conditions, transportation, movement of merchants and goods and any other topic that might conceivably have relevance to their commercial activity. Hunger for such data was not motivated by idle curiosity. Possession of accurate and varied information was a vital necessity, often indispensable to successful and profitable trading. Medieval Near Eastern trade, and medieval trade generally, was beset by uncertainties at every stage, beginning with the production and purchase of merchandise through their taxation, transportation and eventual resale. The one way to minimize these uncertainties and their potential adverse affects was to be in possession of as much accurate and up-to-date information as possible on which to base one's commercial judgments and decisions. It is for this reason, primarily, that after the main business of a letter was disposed of, it was filled with a mélange of miscellaneous information that was always of interest, and sometimes of decisive importance to the recipient.

After the usual epistolary formalities, Nahray begins with a general report on the goods arriving to Alexandria for trans-shipment. He reports to Abū-l-Khayr that most of the bales sent from Fustāt have already been transported to Alexandria. The contents of the bales are not specified. It is almost certain, however, that the bales ('idl pl. a'dāl) contained flax, which at this time and for several decades to come, was the chief export

commodity of Egypt. Generally, in letters of this period, whenever the term 'idāl or a'dāl occurs without further designation, it should be understood as referring to bales of flax. He refers specifically to the arrival on the preceding day of 22 bales of flax which constituted the first part of a shipment sent to Ibn al-Iskandarī, a wakīl at-tujjar, and a representative of the Tahertī commercial interests in Alexandria. Nahray apparently had no connection with these bales, and the relationship of Abū-l-Khayr to this shipment, if any, is not alluded to. In addition, he mentions that the bales belonging jointly to himself and abū-l-Khayr had not yet arrived, and at the very end of the letter he refers to two merchants, Abū Ibrāhīm *Ayyāsh and Müsā, who stayed behind in Rosetta to await the arrival of still more bales.

The bales flowing into Alexandria were destined for the ships of the Spring merchant convoy that was imminent about to depart for the ports of the Western Mediterranean. Two factors were delaying the convoy's departure, and were responsible for the near-paralysis of all other activity around the Alexandrian port. First, the finance-director (al-'āmil) was not expected for two more days; consequently, the bales, baskets and other containers of merchandise could not be passed through customs and the cargo loaded on to the merchant vessels. Second, and even more importantly, the ustūl -- the heavy warship which accompanied the merchant convoy, was not yet seaworthy. All hands were engaged or conscripted in helping prepare the warship for the voyage. Delays of this kind were apparently not uncommon, since we have a number of references to similar postponements in other Geniza documents.

It is of some interest that there was less cargo than space available on the departing vessels. This fact explains the eagerness of the ashāb al-Marākib --

ship-captains to solicit the merchants for their cargo. No hint is given in this letter to explain the disparity between the cargo to be shipped and the number of departing boats. This occurrence may have been entirely coincidental, or there might have been some special factor involved, such as an unexpectedly low yield of the Egyptian flax crop that year.

It is Nahray's urgent request for his poll-tax receipt to be sent to him that permits us to date this letter with complete assurance. Most Geniza documents contain only the day of the month on which they are written; rarely is the year indicated. This letter is no exception. Only from the reference to the hijra year, 441, can we date this letter. Nahray does not explain why he is in such urgent need of his poll-tax receipt. Perhaps he needed it to present to the finance-director ('āmil), or perhaps because he was intending to join the convoy and travel to Tunisia and would require proof at his destination of his tax-payment. If the latter was indeed the case, it provides a strong indication that during the early part of his career in Egypt, Nahray made frequent trips between Fustāt and Tunisia. His other documented trips to North Africa also fall, I believe with the first ten or fifteen years of his settlement in Egypt.(?) More generally, this probably shows that the first rungs of the medieval Near Eastern business ladder involved fairly extensive travel. Successful merchants, like Nahray himself in later years, became increasingly sedentary, travelling less frequently and over smaller distances. Larger trips were usually relegated to younger men who were just starting out.

By far the most interesting portion of this letter is that in which Nahray requests the help and intervention of Abū-l-Khayr with Abū Ishāq Barhūn. In a charming manner, these lines illuminate the social and human dimension of commercial relationships of the Geniza merchants. Nahray was

at this point a youngish man, in the early stages of his commercial career and was clearly perturbed by the displeasure of his older cousin Abū Ishaq Barhūn b. Ishaq who was one of the important figures in the business activities of the Tahertī family and served as kind of mentor to Nahray. He asks the correspondent to convey to Abū Ishaq his diligence in taking care of the latter's business, and to show less impatience towards Nahray's efforts and exertions. Either this was a particularly sensitive issue, or Abū Ishaq was an especially short-tempered and difficult man. For Nahray finds it necessary to suggest an alternative approach of indirect intervention on his behalf via Abū Ishaq's father should the first method he requests be unsuitable. We have no information on how this particular contretemp was resolved. We do, however, know that commercial relations between Nahray and Abū Ishaq continued and expanded over the succeeding years, as is evidenced by other Geniza letters.

The importance of personal, family and social ties within the context of medieval Near Eastern economic life cannot be overemphasized. The formal, legal relationships which bound people together do not provide an adequate basis for understanding medieval society generally, nor its marketplace in particular, and in themselves could assure neither a smooth-running society or economy. It was a complex network which has, as yet, eluded complete structural description, which provided the ultimate guarantee for a satisfactory and successful social and economic organization.

A good many of the activities of the marketplace depended on the mutual trust, mutual need and mutual interests of the participants in economic and commercial life. This required not only goodwill towards, but more importantly, confidence in one's collaborator or colleague. Thus a merchant's reputation and stature (wajh or jāh), not only with respect to honesty and reliability,

but also with regard to competence, skill and judgment were a paramount consideration in the attitude of his colleagues, and consequently of determining importance in his economic success.

It is in this context that Nahray's request is to be viewed. For he sought to gain not only the goodwill and patience of Abū Ishāq; but sought also to convince him of his competence and dedication so as not to lose Abū Ishāq's confidence and trust.

As his later career proves, he succeeded, in this case, and with most of his colleagues in firmly establishing his jāh.