

I, 19 *Testimony on the Date of a Bill of Divorce*

Aden, April 5, 1095

ULC Or. 1080 J 58

Described by Goitein, *Palestinian Jewry*, 258, n. 22.

Because of its extreme brevity the text is translated in full.

(1) Date of the bill of divorce: (2) [*Thurs*] day, the 27th (3) day of the month of *Nisan*, (4) 1406 E.D. (5) We, the undersigned witnesses, have checked (3) this date and found that it was correct, (7) when we scrutinized it {alt. tr.: have compared . . . upon comparison}. *Established and approved.*

(8) Jacob b. R. Abraham, *may his memory be blessed!*

(9) Joseph b. David.

The first signatory wrote the document. His Maghrebi script is of exquisite beauty, similar to that of his contemporary Nahray b. Nissim, and almost indistinguishable from that of his compatriot Abraham Ben Yijū, who lived about half a century later (chap. 3). Tunisia, a country of Jewish learning, excelled also in its high standards of penmanship.

Lebdi's signature, known from his letter I, 14 {and TS NS 320, f. 24},¹ is bold, but untrained, so much so that he misspelled here the name of his father David as *dywd* instead of *dwyd*.

What does this small piece of paper tell us? In addition to their business, the overseas traders had to exert themselves for the public weal, for instance, as here, to help the rabbinical court back home clarify the affairs of a divorced woman living abroad.² Since we find Lebdi back in Fustat no later than the autumn of 1097, and since he made prolonged halts in Aden, Nahrwāra, and Mirbāt, he and his fellow traveler must have been charged with this errand while setting out from Fustat in 1095 at the latest. The record of their testimony was brought back to Fustat by another traveler and finally was disposed of in the Geniza.

¹ {See page 28, n. 8.}

² Cf. VII, 21, instructions to a community official to bring to court two North-African merchants on their way to Yemen, one of whom carried a bill of repudiation. {That official was a *parnās* and trustee; see I, 15. Lebdi and his traveling companion were presumably requested to verify that the date of the original bill of divorce was the same as that in an ancillary document that had been presented in Egypt.}

The city where the divorced woman lived could hardly have been any other than Aden, for Qūṣ, which also contained a considerable Jewish community, was connected with Cairo by a regular weekly commercial mail service, so that there was no need for the authorities to burden busy traders with such a task. For broken marriages in Aden, concluded between local and foreign spouses, see II, 64, and VI, 55.

No other document emanating from Lebdi's fellow traveler Jacob b. Abraham has been found thus far. He might have been as prominent an India trader as his Maghrebi compatriot Ben Yijū. However, we know only what the Geniza has stored for us.