

I, 21 *Session of the Court: Joseph Lebdi vs. His Nephew David*

Fustat, August 19, 1101

ENA 2594, f. 8

Solomon's death was a tremendous blow for Joseph Lebdi. Not only did he lose a brother and all he carried with him from their joint possessions, but one half of his own belongings—depending on what type of partnership the courts would finally recognize (see I, 22)—were now doomed to go to his brother's heirs. Uncles and nephews, like brothers, as in this case, would sometimes cooperate without any formal agreements.¹ It is natural, however, that in the face of such a disaster, Joseph took a harder look at his earlier dealings with his late brother and his son. "When a Jew goes bankrupt," says a (Judeo-)Arabic proverb, "he searches the account books of his father."²

Our fragment is a first step in this direction. As in I, 20, the court was approached, this time by Joseph, with the request to record a testimony in his favor. Unlike I, 20, however, the other party, David, was present and was interrogated. Because of the smallness of the fragment and its mutilated state only the barest outlines of the case are recognizable.

Ṣedāqā ha-Kohen b. David (line 10, and verso, line 3), an Andalusian India trader mentioned repeatedly in this book, testifies that, some years back, he was entrusted by Joseph Lebdi with a shipment to be delivered in Tripoli, Libya, to his brother (Solomon) or the latter's son (David). The shipment must have been of considerable size, since a sum of "about 400 dinars" is mentioned (verso, line 5), as well as two bales of cowry shells (recto, line 7), Indian popular ornaments, which were as avidly sought after in the Mediterranean area, especially in Spain, as corals were in India. The recipient of the shipment was also instructed to provide Joseph's family, at that time, still in Tripoli, with all they needed (verso, lines 1, 8, 9). David testified that he had indeed delivered a certain sum to his uncle's wife in accordance with the instructions of the Jewish court of Tripoli.³

The document is dated Monday, the 23rd of [...], 1412. In 1412 E.D. (September 6, 1100–August 25, 1101) this combination occurred only on 23 Kislev = November 26, 1100 and 23 Elul = August 19, 1101.

¹ Cf. Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 3:40–43; India Book VII, 7.

² {See page 9, n. 22.}

³ For the importance of this court, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:395–96.

But only the second choice can be sustained, for in January 1102, at the latest, we find Lebdi in Fustat (see I, 22), while in April 1103 he had been away from the city for a year and ten months (I, 24, side a, lines 14–15). Thus, as far as our present knowledge goes, Lebdi's prolonged absence must have occurred between the summers of 1099 and 1101 (I, 20 and 21). After his return from India, the lawsuits between him and his nephew David were renewed.