

I, 31a *Testimony on Joseph Lebdi's Last Will*

Fustat, early twelfth century

TS 6 J 2, f. 11

The manuscript is a tiny fragment that represents the upper right corner of a document written by Hillel b. Eli. Since the last document we have from the hand of this prolific scribe is from 1108, Lebdi must have died in the course of the first decade of the twelfth century, possibly before 1106/7; see I, 29, n. 3.¹ He died while on a journey, as befitting a seasoned India trader.

For reasons that I can only describe as sentimental, I translate the fragment in full.

Translation

(1) *Testimony given before us, the undersigned* [...] that] (2) Joseph Lebdi—may God be pleased with him!²—*son of R. David* [before he set out on the voyage], (3) from which he did not return to Miṣr [made in our] (4) presence a last will which we have taken down in his name. [He did so while being in full command of his mental faculties,] (5) without being coerced. We performed with him the symbolic act of obligation³ [...]

¹ {While Hillel's handwriting is similar to that of his son-in-law, Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Manasseh (dated documents 1100–38), I believe that this document is written by the latter. Joseph Lebdi's daughter Sitt al-Ahl was engaged in November 1118, apparently not long after the death of his sister (I, 34a). His demise preceded hers, but it is not clear by how much time.}

² This Muslim blessing upon the dead, originally reserved for persons of Muhammad's family, entourage and saints, is next to absent from the Geniza. It was probably used here because Lebdi's friends were shocked by his death. {The blessing, *raḍīya 'llāhu 'anhu*, while not very common in the Geniza papers, does appear in numerous documents (in the India Book also in: I, 23, lines 6–7; I, 34b, line 9, written in 1124, also referring to Joseph Lebdi; IV, 18, line 17; IV, 68, f. 20, line 4; IV, 70v, line 11; a search of the Princeton Geniza Project data base identifies seven other documents, in some of which the phrase appears more than once). Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 5:557, n. 308, states that the blessing "may God be pleased with him, was easily taken up by Jews," etc. I suspect that further Geniza research will demonstrate that this and other blessings for the dead known from Islamic literary sources as especially used with reference to saints were in more common use.}

³ According to Jewish law any legal action had to be validated by a symbolic act of acquisition (*qinyān*); see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:329. This and other legal formalities mentioned in line 6 mean to say that the will produced by the witnesses represented a valid legal document.

I, 31b *Power of Attorney by Barakāt Lebdi to Joseph's Widow*

Fustat, early twelfth century

TS AS 165, f. 190

Remnants of eight lines in the hand of the court clerk Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Manasseh (dated documents 1100–38) consisting mainly of legal phraseology.

I assume that this document was written soon after the tidings of Joseph Lebdi's death had reached Fustat. His only known son and legal heir, (Abū 'l-) Barakāt,¹ {in all likelihood} set out to retrieve the goods and other assets his father had left anywhere on the India route. Barakāt appointed Joseph's widow, probably his own mother, as caretaker to look after the estate until he returned from his voyage. {Joseph's female relative given power of attorney was identified in the missing part of line 3; however, the only logical assumption is that she was his widow.} No other female relative except Joseph's widow could have been given such a task. His daughter was still an unmarried young girl (see I, 34a).

In the translation the legal verbiage is abbreviated.

Translation

(1) *This is what happened:* [Barakāt, the son of Mr. Joseph] (2) *known as al-Lebdi—may he rest in Eden!*—[appeared in court] and said to us:

Be witness to my declaration, write it down (3) [and hand it over to Mrs. X,² the widow of] (4) *the elder Mr. Joseph—may he rest in Eden!*, so that it should be in her hand as a legal proof (5–7) that I have made this declaration while in good health, etc. (8) I have given her a power of attorney over all [...]³

¹ {Barakāt had a young brother named Zayn, mentioned in I, 34b, lines 6 and 10 (and referred to in I, 34a, line 22).}

² Joseph Lebdi's wife's name was Jamī'; see I, 34a, line 11.}

³ Unfortunately, at this point the fragment is torn, and the exact description of the attorneyship is missing.