

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 ʿllāhu ʿanhu*, 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 ʿl-) 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.

D. *The Lebdi Family*

Besides I, 32, which shows us David, Joseph's nephew, active on the India route, I, 33 is of particular interest: Joseph's son (Abu 'l-) Barakāt ('Blessings') traveled as far as northwest India, like his father, and had dealings everywhere on the way back from there to Old Cairo. He was closely connected with three prominent India traders, Halfon ha-Levi b. Nethanel (chap. 4), Abū Zikrī Kohēn (chap. 5)¹ and Isaac b. Makhlūf al-Nafūsī (VI, 26–29).² About Barakāt's sister, widow, and daughter we learn from I, 34–36. His son Abu 'l-Riḍā ('Pleasing God') Joseph II b. Barakāt Ibn al-Lebdi, known from documents dated 1156 and 1178, was a 'perfumer' (I, 37, I, 38),³ and his grandson Abu 'l- Barakāt II b. Joseph II, who made his will in 1227, was the proprietor of a sugar factory and the father of at least four sons and a daughter (I, 39–42). A contract between his firstborn Joseph III, {also} by-named Abu 'l-Riḍā, another son of his, and two investors in that sugar factory is one of the largest documents on partnership preserved in the Geniza (I, 41).

Thus the history of Joseph Lebdi's family can be traced from the end of the eleventh century to the middle of the thirteenth. However, the family name Ibn al-Lebdi occurs already around the year 1000, when a Samuel bearing that name was praised by the Spanish Hebrew poet Isaac b. Khalfūn and he himself issued a power of attorney (I, 43). In an extensive document from the year 1066, one Solomon Ibn al-Lebdi and his brother try to retrieve objects and money left for them in Sicily. This Solomon might well have been the father of David, whose firstborn Solomon was the elder brother of Joseph Lebdi (I, 44).

Anyhow, it seems that the family had left their native town of Lebda by the end of the tenth century and settled in Tripoli, where they became well established in the course of the eleventh century. The India trade of Joseph entailed moving of his household to the capital of Egypt.

¹ {According to V, 14, line 5, Barakāt al-Lebdi carried dinars for Abū Zikrī Kohēn, and in V, 15, line 17, a letter to Abū Zikrī Kohēn, regards were sent Barakāt.

² Barakāt appears in a list of contributors for the 'bread for the poor,' giving a sum of one half dinar (per week); TS NS J 422 (see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:479–80, no. 24): "Sheikh Abu 'l-Barakāt Ibn al-Lebdi: one half." His great-grandson made the same contribution; see I, 42.

³ No. I, 38, from 1178, refers to the latter's son.

I, 32 *Letter from Nahray b. Nathan to Abū Sa'īd: Oriental Goods Ordered by David Lebdi*

{Alexandria, late eleventh century}

ULC Or. 1080 J 92

Only the upper part is preserved. Published in Gil, *Ishmael*, 2:797–98, no. 267.¹

The writer of this letter, Nahray b. Nathan, like his late father, Nathan b. Nahray, lived in Alexandria.² He had received a letter from Abū Sulaymān³ Dā'ūd (David) Ibn al-Lebdi, as well as a detailed list of Oriental products forwarded by him to {Old} Cairo from somewhere on the India route.⁴ Nahray now sends 200 dinars, entrusted to two friends in equal shares, to his business representative in the capital, asking him to buy, as soon as possible specified items from David's list. Since the manuscript breaks off after line 13, only seven orders are preserved. With the exception of costus (see the note to line 10), the quantities noted seem to indicate that the goods were destined for the local market in Alexandria rather than for overseas export. It seems that David had received a list of the items desired by Nahray before he set out on his voyage to Upper Egypt or Aden.

¹ {Gil mistakenly identified the writer as Nehoray (= Nahray) b. Nissīm.}

² Numerous letters of Nathan b. Nahray to his famous cousin Nahray b. Nissīm, sent from Alexandria to Fustat, have been preserved, e.g., *Nahray* 29–40 {cf. Gil, *Ishmael*, 3:389, nos. 411 ff.}. Of Nahray b. Nathan himself we have, e.g., TS 13 J 36, f. 8 and TS 8 J 25, f. 13 {Gil, ib. 3:453, no. 436}; TS 12.314, *Nahray* 234; 235 {cf. Gil, ib., 4:880, index}. In 1094/5, Nathan was still alive, for in his letter Bodl. MS. Heb. d. 66 (Cat. 2878), fōl. 79v, lines 1–5, *Nahray* 31 {Gil, ib., 3:441, no. 431}, he expresses his joy over the reinstallation of Mevōrākh b. Saadya as head of the Jewish community, which occurred in that time; cf. *Goitein, Med. Soc.*, 2:30, and passim {see Cohen, *Self-Government*, 213 ff.}. In our letter, Nathan's name seems to be {rather: clearly is} followed by the blessing upon the dead.

³ 'Father of Solomon.' Solomon was the name of Joseph b. David Lebdi's elder brother; see I, 20–22. Since grandsons were named after their grandfathers, David, Solomon's son and Joseph's nephew (see above), had the same honorific by-name 'Father of Solomon.' It should be noted that in April 1095 (I, 19) Joseph, in his signature, does not add the blessing upon the dead to the name of his father, David, while in 1098 (I, 14) he does. But it is very unlikely, that he is meant here, since an old man near his death would hardly undertake a journey even to Upper Egypt. {But see below, page 525, on travel on the India route undertaken by older men.}

⁴ Aden, 'Aydhāb, or Qūṣ are the most likely places from which such shipments could have been made.