

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)<sup>1</sup> and Isaac b. Makhlūf al-Nafūsī (VI, 26–29).<sup>2</sup> 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),<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> {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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

The writer of this letter, Nahray b. Nathan, like his late father, Nathan b. Nahray, lived in Alexandria.<sup>2</sup> He had received a letter from Abū Sulaymān<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> '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.}

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

## Translation

(1-4) [Introductory phrases.] I have received a letter from Sheikh (5) Abū Sulaymān Dā'ūd Ibn al-Lebdi, who has also sent a memorandum.<sup>5</sup> (6) I have now asked God for guidance<sup>6</sup> and sent with *Sīdī* 'Ayyāsh<sup>7</sup> (7) a purse containing 100 new dinars, and with *Sīdī* Iṣḥāq<sup>8</sup> (8) a purse containing another 100 dinars //also of {Old} Cairo {Egyptian} currency<sup>9</sup>// . Please, my lord, buy (9) at your earliest convenience, first

1 *bahār* of (10) pepper

2 *bahārs* of lac

1 *bahār* of costus.<sup>10</sup> Buy me also (11)

30 ounces of good civet perfume,<sup>11</sup> the best to be had;

4 *manns* (12) of *ashbāh* wood for 12 dinars;

4 *manns* (13) of *ashbāh* wood for 16 dinars;

40 *manns* of *bān* [..]<sup>12</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Arabic *tadhkira*. See page 168.

<sup>6</sup> Arabic *istakhart*. {For the *istkhāra*, see Goitein, "Religion," 13-14; idem, *Med. Soc.*, 1:346, 5:331, 597, and references cited there.}

<sup>7</sup> 'Long-lived,' a common Maghrebi name. Whether in those days *sydy* ('my lord') was pronounced *sayyidi* or *sīdī* is difficult to say. Where a writer spells the word *syd* with one *y*, as here, probably he intended *sīdī*. {*Syd*, the classic spelling, is much more common than *syyd*. Nevertheless, there are many hundreds, if not thousands, of examples of the form with double *yy* in the Geniza, and this suggests, in my opinion, that the word was pronounced *sayyid* even when spelled with one *y*.}

<sup>8</sup> Iṣḥāq is for Arabic Iṣḥāq (*ṣ* for *s*). Same change of *ṣ* to *s* in *istadaḥ*, line 9, e.g., and the opposite in *qṣṣ*, line 10.

<sup>9</sup> Arabic *jawāz Mīṣr*; see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:234 (where 'around 1070' is to be changed to 'around 1095,' see n. 2, above), 373, 459.

<sup>10</sup> Costus (the Greek, Arabic and English names are derived from Sanskrit), a fragrant root, native to Kashmir, was used in medicine and for fumigation; see the detailed discussion in Maimonides-Meyerhof, 169, no. 338; Watt, *Commercial Products*, 980. It was a common item of export from India. {Cf. page 561, n. 51.} However, while pepper and lac were regularly traded in *bahārs* (ca. 300 pounds), costus appears in the Geniza papers mostly in smaller quantities (at most 100 pounds, but often far less). For the spelling *qṣṣ* see page 331, n. 9.

<sup>11</sup> {For civet (here *zabada*) as an import item from India and the Far East, see Goitein, *Letters*, 49-50; Abraham, *Merchants Guilds*, 161.}

<sup>12</sup> For *ashbāh* and *bān* see Index. {*Ashbāh* is the plural of *shabah*, the aromatic wood *Paliurus australis*; see Dozy, *Supplément*, 1:725a. It appears also in II, 33-34, side b, line 17; II, 48, line 16. *Bān* is aromatic wood of the ben tree (Moringa); see al-Qazwīnī, *'Ajā'ib*, 284-85; Gil, *Ishmael*, 4:929 (index). For its medicinal uses, see Dols, *Islamic Medicine*, 155; Lev and Amar, *Medicinal Substances*, 150.}

[Verso]

Of the name of the addressee only the *kunya* Abū Sa'īd is clearly readable.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Hebrew *emūnā ōmen*, 'steadfast faithfulness' (as in Isa. 25:1), at the end of the address, here, as in many other letters, corresponds to Arabic *amāna mu'addāh* (written and probably pronounced *muwaddā*, and means that the letter was entrusted to the bearer, and no payment was expected for delivery. Both the Arabic and Hebrew expressions together, e.g., in Bodl. MS. Heb. c. 28 (Cat. 2876), fol. 56. {In III, 55v, address, the Hebrew *emūnā ōmen* is followed by the Arabic *balligh tūjar* (or *tu'jar*), literally, 'convey and get remuneration,' which Goitein similarly explained: be rewarded by God (see the note to III, 29v, address, line 4). A postscript there requests the recipient of the letter to grant the bearer an 'honorarium.' On *amāna mu'addāh*, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 1:304, 476, n. 15; id., "Mamluk," 69. Diem, *Dictionary*, 7, translates: 'as a trust to be delivered.' See Friedman in 'Aodeh, "Letters," 130, n. 30; Friedman, "Quṣayr.")