

and betrothed herself to him, which meant (as is expressly said) that she was legally married to him.<sup>4</sup>

I leave it to the imagination of the reader to fancy what was behind that court record. Sitt al-Ahl probably knew that Barakāt was not eager to have Abraham as his brother-in-law. She might have had another opinion about the man. The end of the story is revealed in the next document.

The date is in TS NS 184, fs. 98, 72 (line 31 of the court record), which states that the betrothal had taken place in the beginning of Kislev (mid. Nov.) 1118. The document was drawn up Sunday, January 12, 1120.

{The testimony to Sitt al-Ahl's betrothal was probably heard in court after it became known that she did not want to consummate the marriage with her cousin. The court record confirms that her betrothal was legally binding and she had the status of a married woman, that is, she could not be released from the betrothal without a bill of divorce.}

<sup>4</sup> A girl betrothed could get free only by a formal bill of divorce, which was not always easy to get; see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 3:69, 73-74, and *passim*.

I, 34b *Another Betrothal, This Time between Sitt al-Ahl and an India Trader*

Fustat, June 10, 1124

TS NS J 460 {+ TS NS J 112 + TS NS 211, f. 8 + TS NS 323, f. 11 + TS 8.138 + TS AS 152, f. 19}

See Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 4:449-50, n. 35, according to which Goitein identified the first fragment on July 2, 1981. For TS 8.138, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 3: 382, no. 25.

Four and a half years passed. Sitt al-Ahl, daughter of Joseph Lebdi, was 'divorced,' i.e., freed from her betrothal to her cousin, Abraham b. Isaac, and betrothed to Abu 'l-Surūr Peraḥyā ha-Levi.<sup>1</sup> She received part of her father's large house,<sup>2</sup> and her brother promised to give her a house in the al-Fiḍḍī ('Mr. Silverman') Lane in the Castle of the Candles.<sup>3</sup>

{After I added TS NS 211, f. 8 and (upon the suggestion of Amir Ashur) four additional fragments, the entire original document has been restored. The full name of Sitt al-Ahl's new groom was Abu 'l-Surūr Peraḥyā ha-Levi b. Benjamin. In I, 36 (where his father's name is given as Binyām),<sup>4</sup> he is mentioned as part owner of the Lebdi house and identified as a perfumer ('*attār*'). Perfumers often were involved in the India trade, and from II, 11a, we learn that he was traveling from Aden to Fustat, probably in connection with that commerce. We thus have an example of the daughter of an India trader marrying another India trader.

Sometime between May 26 and June 4, 1124, the dowry of the couple was publicly displayed and assessed. It was so lavish that Abu 'l-Surūr feared that the bride's family might rescind part of it. He asked the witnesses to stay and insisted that Sitt al-Ahl's young brother, Zayn, declare

<sup>1</sup> The name Peraḥyā is not found in the Bible and is rare in post-biblical, pre-Islamic Hebrew literature, one example being Joshua b. Peraḥyā in M. Avot 1:6. It is fairly common in Geniza times, because the Arabic-speaking Jews identified Hebrew Peraḥ ('flower') with Arabic Farah ('joy'), and Peraḥyā was understood to mean 'Joy in God.' Accordingly, the by-name used with Peraḥyā was Abu 'l-Surūr, Joyful. {The *kunya* Abu 'l-Surūr is also used with the Arabic name Farah, e.g., Abu 'l-Surūr Farah. b. Yeshū'ā ha-Kohen, II, 33-34, side e, lines 14-15. Also see Goitein, *Letters*, 317, n. 1; Friedman, "Ransom-Divorce," 307, n. 69.

<sup>2</sup> The house formerly belonged to the Ibn Zaffān family, concerning which see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 3:460, n. 74. It is mentioned as the place where the dowry was assessed, but it is not stated explicitly that this house was a gift to the bride.

<sup>3</sup> The Castle of the Candles, *qaṣr al-sham'*, is the ancient center of Fustat, for which see, e.g., Gil, *Foundations*, 579 (index); Lambert, *Fortifications*, 274 (index).}

<sup>4</sup> This abridged form of the name Benjamin, Binyām—BENIAMÉS is already found in a Greek inscription from Attica in the second or third century C.E.; see Schwabe, "Schools," 113. It is common in the Geniza.

before them that he accepted responsibility for his sister's dowry gift, both in his name and in that of his absent older brother, which he did. The older brother, Abu 'l-Barakāt, must have been away on another journey to India. Perhaps Abu 'l-Surūr was concerned that after Abu 'l-Barakāt's return from the East, he might not agree to the generous dowry or to the match itself. Mention of the house in the al-Fiḍḍī Lane, which was promised the bride, was added a number of times between the lines in the document. On June 10, the *ketubba* was written and the betrothal formalized. At Abu 'l-Surūr's request, this document too was written, but for some reason another eight months passed until its signing in January–February 1125. This is what the text states, but below it there is no trace of a signature.

Abu 'l-Surūr explained his demand that Zayn make a formal declaration of his and Abu 'l-Barakāt's commitment to give the entire dowry to their sister, in that 'I am apprehensive of the consequences of the time' (Arabic *anā khā'if min 'awāqib al-zamān*). The (almost) identical phrase (*khawf min 'awāqib al-zamān*) appears in a number of contemporary dowry documents. In one such formula, written—like our text—by Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Manasseh (dated documents from 1100–38) the phrase clarifies why a bride's father, who wanted to hide his wealth, requested that her dowry be registered in a separate document and omitted in her *ketubba*.<sup>5</sup> While our text is also a special document concerning dowry, its circumstances are entirely different, since it includes neither an itemized list of dowry articles nor their total value, which were explicitly registered in her *ketubba*. The phrase under consideration evidently explained why an irregular procedure was followed but did not indicate any particular type of commitment concerning the dowry.

This betrothal may not have worked out either. Two fragments of a contract of remarriage (as indicated by the payment of 12½ *zuz*) of our bride's namesake, Sitt al-Ahl d. Joseph, to a certain Is[aac], also written by Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Manasseh, have been identified.<sup>6</sup> Two additional fragmentary

<sup>5</sup> {ENA 3755, f. 6. See Friedman, *JMP*, 1:293–94. The phrase was translated there: 'out of fear of contemporary penalties (by the government).' The words in parentheses correspond to Goitein's remarks noted in the continuation. The translation itself was imprecise; it treated *'awāqib* as if it were a plural form of *'aqūba*, rather than *'āqiba*, and *al-zamān* as referring to the present time. See further Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 3:126 (where the phrase is translated 'apprehension of the vicissitudes of the time') and 3:453, n. 44 (where reference is made to TS NS J 112). For Time as a personification of fate, see Goitein, *ib.*, 5:294, 329; Friedman, *Yemenite Messiah*, 174–75, n. 157, and the literature and sources cited there; cf. III, 57, line 16.

<sup>6</sup> TS 12.595 and TS 12.604.

texts, dated 1139 and 1146, attest Perahyā ha-Levi b. Benjamin's marriages to two other women, the first fragment to Sitt al-Nās the second to Sitt al-Ḥasab.<sup>7</sup> These fragments illustrate the frequency of divorce and remarriage in the Geniza society, in the best of families.}

<sup>7</sup> ULC Or. 1080 J 49 (1139); Bodl. MS. Heb. e. 98, fol. 63 (1146).}