

II, 68 *Letter from Halfon (?) to Shemaryāhū b. David, Requesting Appointment as a Religious Functionary*

{Egypt, after 1213}

TS 6J 2, f. 10

Draft of a letter to Maḍmūn II (here called by his Hebrew name Shemaryāhū), asking him to appoint the writer as a cantor.

{The petitioner, whose name may have been Ḥal[fon] presumably traveled from Egypt to Yemen and took the original letter with him, and this fragment is from the draft, which remained in Egypt and thus found its way to the Geniza. On the other hand, it could be from the original, which somehow was returned to Egypt and eventually discarded in that chamber.<sup>1</sup> Of particular interest are Shemaryāhū's titles: 'The Great Nagid, Prince of Princes, Head of the Pietists' (*ha-nāgīd ha-gādōl, negīd ha-negīdīm, rōsh ha-ḥasīdīm*).<sup>2</sup> These titles are unattested in Yemen, but in Egypt they often accompany the name of Abraham Maimuni, who assumed the title of Nagid apparently in 1213 and was the leader of a pietistic movement. Since it is highly unlikely that the Nagid's same titles and his leadership of an extension of the pietistic movement appeared in Yemen at this time, I assume that the Egyptian scribe who drafted the letter for the petitioner mechanically transferred Abraham Maimuni's titles to his Yemenite counterpart. The explanation by which the petitioner reinforces his request, is also of interest:

Your servant has no occupation in which to engage other than the service of God, the Exalted, and the service of the distinguished *community*,<sup>3</sup> since I have poor eyesight and cannot perform work in the *majlis* other than ser[vice].<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> {As noted below, the titles ascribed to the Yemenite Nagid suggest that an Egyptian wrote the letter. The first sentence in my comment is intended to clarify Goitein's assumption that the fragment is from a draft of the letter; otherwise this paper would not have been found in the Geniza. From the fragment's appearance alone, there is no indication that it is not from the original. The second sentence raises the possibility that the original, for unknown reasons, was returned from Yemen to Egypt. This may have happened in other cases as well; see 469, n. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Lines 3-4, quoted by Mann, *Jews*, 2:338, no. 4.

<sup>3</sup> On community service for the sake of remuneration, see Goitein, *Med. Soc.*, 2:88, 541, n. 113, where he quotes this passage.

<sup>4</sup> The last few words are fragmentary and their decipherment uncertain. *Majlis*, 'sitting hall,' is sometimes used as a designation for the synagogue; sources in Friedman, "Notes by a Disciple," 527, n. 21.}

II, 69 *Panegyric Poem in Honor of Maḍmūn II*

{Cairo, after 1186}

ENA 1810, fs. 1 and 6

Long poem in honor of Maḍmūn II by a Cairene poet, who had already sung the praise of Maḍmūn's predecessors.

{On the various pages of fs. 1-6, the writer wrote drafts of panegyric poems, in which he requested assistance from a number of notables, including Maimonides. In the latter poem and the accompanying letter he extended blessings to Maimonides' son, viz. Abraham, who was born in 1186. This allows us to establish the approximate time of our poem and ascertain that the panegyric was addressed to Maḍmūn II, who was active in Maimonides' later years, rather than to Maḍmūn I. Maḍmun is called Nagid, and the writer adds variations to the title: *Negīd 'am ēl* (Nagid of God's people) and *Negīd ḥakhmē te'ūdā* (Prince of Torah scholars). His forefathers, like him, are called Nagids. Maḍmūn's sons are blessed that they grow to become Torah scholars and marry. The writer was in dire straits and was apparently unable to pay the poll tax.}