

III, 29a *Poem by Abraham Ben Yijū in Honor of Judge Labraṭ II*

{Yemen, possibly ca. 1140}

TS Misc. 29, f. 4a

A poem by Ben Yijū in honor of the spiritual leader of the Jews of al-Mahdiyya, Tunisia, probably attached to the preceding (III, 29), in which {verso, line 3} deep respect is paid to him. For other poems by Ben Yijū, see chap. 2, sec. E.

{The poem is written in Abraham Ben Yijū's hand, and the three stanzas preserved on this page contain the acrostic RHM, i.e., [Ab]raham (the first two stanzas were presumably written on a separate sheet). It is dedicated to 'the son of Moses b. Labraṭ,' who as suggested by Goitein is to be identified as Judge Labraṭ b. Moses b. Labraṭ, to whom Ben Yijū sent greetings in III, 29. Ben Yijū lauds Labraṭ's wisdom, especially his Talmudic commentary, for which this poem seems to provide unique testimony. This confirms Ibn Daud's statement:

[Accordingly], with the demise of these two [R. Ḥananēl and R. Nissīm], Talmudic learning came to an end in Ifrīqiya except for a meager representation in al-Mahdiyya through the leadership of the Sons of Zughmār...

We can now identify this as a reference to Judge Labraṭ b. Moses and other members of the Ibn Sughmār family.¹

Goitein, above, page 552, suggested that Ben Yijū might have written the poem "in his youth while still in his native city, al-Mahdiyya, Tunisia."² Nothing else written by Ben Yijū before he left the Maghreb has been preserved. The above comment, that the poem was "probably attached to the preceding (III, 29)," supersedes that suggestion.

Notwithstanding Ben Yijū's obsequious greetings to Labraṭ in III, 29, there is nothing in that letter to suggest that this poem was appended to it. Presumably a panegyric poem such as this implied that at the time of its writing the poet was in close contact with the individual, whose praises he sang, and perhaps intended to express his gratitude for some favor recently bestowed or soon anticipated. Ben Yijū wrote a draft of the same three

¹ {Cohen, *Book of Tradition*, 78 (quoted with minor changes in the spelling). Hirschberg, "Soghmar," 240, already associated Ibn Daud's statement with members of the Ibn Sughmār family, with which he was familiar from Goitein's India Book papers; cf. Gil, "Sughmār," 151 (but neither was familiar with the evidence from Ben Yijū's poem).

² In page 686, n. 40, Goitein remarked: "Yijū had no doubt studied under Labraṭ II."

stanzas of this poem on a second page, TS G 2, f. 59v, together with a draft of another poem, tentatively dated ca. 1140, in honor of his Adenese patron Maḍmūn b. Japheth (II, 40).³ This supplies the tentative dating for composing the poem in honor of Labraṭ, which looks as if it was written at the same time. The responsum in Ben Yijū's hand, written on TS G 2, f. 59r, concerns the marital status of a manumitted slave girl and her children (III 29b). Were we to suppose that it concerned Ben Yijū's wife and children and further speculate that Judge Labraṭ authored it, the rationale for the panegyric, written on the paper's blank side, would be supplied. On this assumption and speculation, see below, the description of III, 29b. On Ben Yijū as a poet, see pages 66–67.}

³ See Friedman, *Polygyny*, 352. On the opposite side of the bifolium, which contains III, 29a, Ben Yijū wrote a liturgical poem (*selihā*); thanks to Dr. Ben Outhwaite of the Cambridge University Library Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit for checking the manuscript for me.}