

nephew, found that he had not the qualities which made a good merchant and safeguarded the future of his only daughter and his riches, earned during his long stay in India. Peraḥya's little aptitude for business can be seen from passages such as No. 76, ll. 37-45, and No. 79, l. 16. He was a scribe and schoolteacher, No. 74, margin. It may also be that the bride herself, Sitt al-dār ("The Queen of the house" - to be sure, a common name at that time) had a say in this matter. Most probably, Abraham Yijū went back to Aden and married there his daughter to the son of Ḥalaf b. Bundār, see No. 73, l. 21 and No. 68, l. 18. We may assume that in the letters sent by Peraḥya in spring 1156, he had reported about the departure of his uncle - that is why no greetings are extended to him in the letters of Joseph's family, No. 76 and 79 - while, and this is only human, he did not mention his failure to gain the favor of Sitt al-dār's father...or of herself.

Our interpretation of the testimony of the documents discussed is borne out by No. 80, where we find Peraḥya as a religious dignitary in a provincial town. Had he married the daughter of his uncle and taken over his business, he would hardly have chosen that way of life. Naturally, all that has been said is only an attempt to give a plausible explanation of the content of these letters.

Letter of Peraḥya b. Joseph Yijū, writing from Messina to his father in Mazara,

Sicily

1154

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There is a hole in the right upper corner of the ms. and many letters are partly or completely effaced, obviously owing to damage by water.

In addition to its general import for the Yijū story, this letter contains a number of interesting details.

C o n t e n t s

- A. Preamble (ll. 1-3)
- B. Description of the journey (from Palermo) to Messina (ll. 3-17)
- C. Request for instructions whether Moses should accompany the writer to Egypt or not (ll. 17-26)
- D. Explanation why Messina was not a place suitable for the Yijū family to live in (l. 26, margin, top, verso, ll. 1-4); very much damaged
- E. Details about business correspondents (ll. 4-9)
- F. Greetings and a medical prescription for the mother (ll. 9-12)
- G. Admonition that the parents should stop fasting and wailing, because of the absence of their two sons (ll. 12-16)
- H. Greetings to the religious functionaries and the congregation (ll. 16-19)
- I. A postscriptum to section E (*margin*)

Translation of A - C and of D, as far as preserved

A (1) My dear father, the commander (?) ((may God prolong)) your life and protect you (2) and keep you alive and give you all you wish and reunite us (3) soon in His grace and favor.

rubā^cī - A quarter of a Fatimid dīnār, as a standard coin popular in Sicily and on the Syrian coast and Palestine, which were in close commercial contact with Sicily. The first three Norman kings did not change the form, and it seems, the value of the Fatimid rubā^cī, see M. Amari-Nallino, Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia, III, p. 837.

8 Friday night - Hebr., "the night of Sabbath." With Jews and Muslims, the day begins at nightfall. The same in No. 75, l. 1.

9-17 The gist of this passage is this: Peraḥya had hoped to arrive at the lighthouse in time for reaching Messina before Sabbath, i.e. before Friday evening.

When the boat was late, owing to the rainstorm in Patti, two Jews, who travelled together with the brothers Yijū, left the boat in Milazzo and travelled from there overland to Messina. Peraḥya, who was afraid he would not reach the town before nightfall and was apprehensive also of traversing a territory unknown to him, took another boat which brought him and his brother direct to his destination.

19 Ben Saṭlūn - Spelled four times this way (ll. 19 twice, 20, 26), but on the next page, l. 5, with a Ṣ. No doubt, identical with Sulaimān b. Ṣiṭrūn, No. 73, l. 26. Whether Peraḥya pronounced Saṭlūn or Siṭlūn, can hardly be made out.

Ben Siṭrūn, who was a business friend of Abraham Ben Yijū, was prepared to bear the costs of Peraḥya's travel to Egypt, as he had no doubt that Abraham would refund him.

"To go up" means to travel to Egypt, whether from the Muslim West or from Sicily. Cf. also No. 45 verso, l. 26, where the verb talā^ca is used for "going up" the Red Sea from Egypt, i.e. out to India.

22 Little Moses wanted to make money to come home as a success. In Messina, obviously, there was no opportunity for business, while he hoped that in Egypt, he would do better.

D It may well be that Peraḥya carried with himself a copy of the commentary on the section of the Babylonian Talmud called ^oErūvīn, compiled by the famous Tunisian authority, R. Nissīm b. Jacob (first part of eleventh century) of Qairuwan. That great book is lost, except three leaves found in the Cairo Geniza and published by B. M. Lewin in Jacob Freimann Jubilee Volume, *Berlin* 1937, p.

72-80. These are in the handwriting of our Peraḥya. Obviously, they were his first trial, before he made the copy mentioned here.

Margin

in his house - Ar. oindahū. One expects oindahum, but there is no space left for an m. Most probably, Ibn Siṭrūn had a spacious house, where he could harbor the proposed school - or Peraḥya simply forgot the letter, as it occurs at the end of a line.

void of everything - Religious education is referred to, of course. Joseph, as remarked above, had become a schoolmaster.

While Mazara, on the south-western tip of Sicily, which served as the terminus for the traffic to Tunisia, an ancient seat of Jewish learning, was well equipped with Jewish religious institutions, see below, Messina, as we learn from here, had only one, instead of three, public religious services a day and no proper school. It is wellknown that both Muslim and Jewish writers decried the low standard of their coreligionists in Sicily in Norman times.

Verso

6 natawassaṭu ma^cahu 'l-nauba, "let us settle with him the deplorable affair," a highly colloquial phrase. The Maḡribi form of the first person plural, imperfect, is, of course, common in the Geniza papers of this time; cf. e.g. above No. 68, ll. 6 and 19.

Obviously, a man called Yōna - a name not common in our papers - had owed a certain sum to Perahya's father, and it was expected that a Sheikh Samuel would settle the affair.

16-18 From the greetings here and in No. 75, ll. 11-12, it appears that the Jewish community in Mazara was a well organized congregation headed by the usual functionaries. Mu^callim means here, as in southern Yemen up to the present time, rabbi. This is proved by the fact that greetings to him and to his brother are given in both letters before Rabbi Zecharia, an authority of Jewish law, quoted by Perahya many years later in his letter No. 80, l. 10.