

22.

The Tale of a Goldsmith from Ceuta, Morocco, Who Had to Leave His  
 Native Country, Emigrating First to Sicily and from There to Egypt,  
~~Owing to the Almohad Persecution.~~

T.-S. 12.3

(After a Hebrew preamble, verses from the Bible, and another preamble written in eloquent Arabic, interspersed with many Biblical quotations and beautiful sentences - fifteen lines preserved; there were at least five to six more - the letter continues:)

Your obedient servant, a lonely, poor foreigner, informs your Excellency that he is from the Maghrib, from the town of Ceuta, which I<sup>a)</sup> had to leave owing to the religious persecution thirty-five years ago. I then lived in Sicily for about fifteen years, where I also suffered great misfortune, as I was robbed and everything I possessed was lost. Then I came to this country, but needed no one's help, as I found my livelihood by working as a goldsmith. I have been living here for seventeen years. Three years ago, however, I contracted an eye illness and lost half of my eyesight. Compelled by this misfortune, I took in four boys to teach them Bible for four dirhams<sup>e</sup> a week, which, however - God knows, is not sufficient.<sup>b)</sup> Ten of my lords and masters kindly helped me, their poor servant, the stranger, by paying the poll tax for me.<sup>c)</sup>

Now, my master and lord, I entreat you, kindly write to my masters and lords, your brothers, the two olive branches, the two anointed ones, the two golden horns,<sup>d)</sup> to remember their servant,<sup>e)</sup> and perhaps you, in

your kindness, could send me some flour to keep body and soul together...

God knows and is my witness that I never used to ask for such a thing.

Please ask our friends, the Maghr<sup>e</sup>bi Jews, about me and, in particular,

Ephraim b. Abi Il-Khair and...Joseph, the merchant, who is known as

Ben Yogli.<sup>f)</sup> The Holy one, may He be blessed, may be a Helper and Sup-

porter to you... (other good wishes)

This was written by me, Ephraim b. Isaac - m(ay he rest in) E(den) -  
a native of the town of Ceuta, where I was born, but I grew up and was  
educated in Palermo.<sup>g)</sup>

To his honor, the wise and prudent Master Moses, who has come to  
sojourn in the land of Egypt as if he had come to the Land of Life<sup>h)</sup> -  
may God give him success for my sake and that of the other Maghr<sup>e</sup>bis.

Peace!

Notes

- a) As usual, the writer changes over from the third person, referring to "your servant," to the first person.
- b) One dirham a day was certainly the minimum for a life at subsistence level (~~see p.~~). The text is somewhat doubtful: lais tamma rewaha (H., vowelled with a Pathah beneath the w and a Qāmāḡ beneath the heth) akthar; this could perhaps also be translated: "there is no more possibility of making a livelihood."
- c) The most urgent concern of any destitute person was to find someone who would pay the poll tax for him (see p. ). Orig. waltafū<sup>f</sup> alayya asara mawālaya. Before mawālaya, one expects min. To read isra<sup>h</sup> for asara<sup>h</sup> is not recommendable.
- d) A quotation from Zechariah 4:12 and 14. The two persons certainly held some office in the community organization.
- e) I.e.e., to pay the capitation tax for him.
- f) Perhaps a pun on the Biblical name Bukki ben Yogli, Numbers 34:22, but more likely a misspelling.
- g) In Ar., Madīnat Siqilliyya; literally: "the city of Sicily."
- h) Text: hyt for hyym, written erroneously.

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