

2. A NATIVE OF SPAIN WRITES FROM
JERUSALEM TO OUARGLA IN THE ALGERIAN SAHARA.

(June, 1041)

Our first selection made mention of the main Muslim cities of the Eastern section of the Mediterranean area. This letter shows the connection of Jerusalem with the West. Its writer is a settler from Spain, and another Spanish man, a Castilian, is reported as having carried with him a manuscript from Jerusalem. The letter is addressed to Ouargla (French spelling, Warglān here), an oasis in the Algerian Sahara, "a thirty days march from Tunis". This important desert emporium, which connected black Africa with the Mediterranean, was then occupied by a vigorous Muslim sect (it still is, in part), the Ibādīs, and, strangely indeed, its Jewish inhabitants, too, belonged to a dissenting denomination, the Karaites.¹ I believe that the connection between these Muslim and Jewish merchants who belonged to "protestant" groups goes back to the time when both still sat in their area of origin: southern Iraq and Iran.

The letter makes the impression that its writer had served the North-African community as a religious dignitary, and, when he advanced in age, was enabled by them to spend his latter days in the Holy City, where he also served as their confident and representative. The first four lines are much damaged, but little of the contents has been lost.

18 J 4, f. 14²

A. Introduction

(I am writing...) from Jerusalem...in the month of Shawwal of the year 432 (June, 1041). I am well in spirit³, may God grant you plentiful and perfect well-being, and praise be to God in full. I am yearning to see you and to talk to you; He, the glorious and majestic, must be asked to unite us soon in his bounty and grace here in Jerusalem, the noble city, under the most happiest of circumstances. And I ask him by his glory and majesty to respond soon to the sincere prayers for you in which I persevere here, in this noble city of Jerusalem in front of this illustrious temple, May God restore it soon during our lifetime.

B. Money Sent to a Meanwhile Deceased Brother has been Handed over to his Daughter.

Your⁴ letter - may God keep you - which you wrote to your late brother Mūsā (Moses) b. Joseph has arrived. He died a year ago, may God have mercy with him, grant you complete consolation and let (the angel of death) forget you. May he prolong your life and keep for you your children and all your friends. His death

has afflicted me with deep sorrow, for he was a dedicated friend and a pious and generous person. But such was the decision of him, the exalted, "for all his ways are justice",⁵ may he be praised for ever.

His wife, may God have mercy with her, had died before. After her death he took another wife, who bore him a son and two daughters. The son is at present in Egypt, the daughters are in Jerusalem⁶, the elder one, Rachel, living in Ramle with her husband; she has two girls. The four dinars which you - may God make your honored position permanent - sent to your late brother were sent by me to Ramle and handed over to Rachel, who received them.⁷

C. A Polite Reminder.

I thank you also - may God keep you - for your kind regards for me in your letter and the favors extended to me previously. You have also promised me other favors, both from your side and from others through your endeavors. It is well known that good people always do the good, even if they have not made a promise, let alone if they have promised and vowed. May God prolong your life and make your wellbeing permanent and accept my sincere prayers for you and any other benefactor who enables me to stay here in Jerusalem, the blessed, and to engage in what pleases God.

-4-

D. Thanks to the Community in Ouargla.

I thank also, and pray much for, my lords, the community, the illustrious elders⁸ of Warglān who have showered me with great favors and abundant kindnesses. May the Lord bless them and increase their wellbeing and accept their good deeds.⁹ In particular, I thank and pray for, our illustrious master, rav Amram b. Elijah ha-Levi, the honored and great saintly and upright man, who has done on my behalf many good deeds! May God bless him and increase his good deeds and favors, and send him blessings on all he undertakes, and grant him for ever the gift of good speech and wellbeing.

E. Prospective Visitors.

You mentioned in your letter - may God enhance your honored position - that you intended to come here, to Jerusalem, the blessed, in the company of other people.¹⁰ I was very happy to learn about this and ask God to help you in this in his mercy. And I ask my masters, ^{R-} ~~rav~~ Isaac and ^{R-} ~~rav~~ Benjamin - may God bless you and increase your wellbeing - not to cease sending me letters to keep me informed about your wellbeing and that of the illustrious elders living in Warglān, may God make their honored position permanent.

-5-

F. About a Book Sent from Jerusalem.

A long time ago I sent with my master Elisha
b. ^hKalfa, the Castilian, may God always keep him, a
large and beauti^ffully written book containing an explan-
ation of all difficult expressions in the Pentateuch and
the Bible in general and their derivations^s, and asked
him to send it to you to Warglān.¹¹ I have not heard
any news about the arrival of the book and do not know
whether he has forwarded it or lost it on his way.
Kindly inform me about this in one of your letters.

G. Conclusion

I ask you - may God enhance your honored position -
not to be remiss with regard to me, both in bestowing
favours on me and prompting others to do so, as is fitting¹²
your religiosity and beneficence. You will find plenty of
reward from your Creator for ever. The wellbeing of your
honor may increase for ever.

Address:

(In Arabic characters) To Qayrawān,¹³ to his excellency
my lord...

(In Hebrew characters) To...and to Abu l'-^Kkhayr,¹⁴
For my masters ^Rrav Isaac and ^Rrav B(enjamin), the sons of
Joseph,

From Moses, the son of rabbi Nah(man), the Spaniard who
sojourns in Jerusalem, the Holy City.

-6-

To be delivered in Warglān to the addressees,¹⁵

Having been trustfully kept.

NOTES

1. On Karaites in Ouargla see Mann, Texts, II, p. 139, n. 19.
2. Ed. Assaf, Texts, pp. 49-54.
3. Meaning: not in body. The old man was ailing, but did not wish to enlarge on this. See the continuation.
4. Since two brothers are addressed, all the relevant forms are in the dual.
5. Deuteronomy 32:4, recited in the funeral service.
6. Meaning, as the context shows, the Holy Land. Jerusalem, ³ is ⁵ called ² in this letter ⁴ always al-Quds, which originally denoted the sanctuary, the temple. The term then was expanded to the city and, in popular usage, to the country, see my "The Arabic Names of Jerusalem", J.L. Zlotnik Jubilee Volume, Jerusalem, 1950, pp. 64-65.

7. It can hardly be assumed that the two brothers had not heard from their brother in Jerusalem for twenty years or so and then suddenly sent him a gift. Besides, Jerusalem in 1041 had well ordered Jewish and Muslim courts, and it was out of question that money sent to a person who had meanwhile died should be given without much ado to one of his children. The facts to be gathered from this passage were obviously these: the death of the brother ^{was not} ~~had not been~~ known to the recipients. The other details were recapitulated by the writer for ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{of accuracy,} ~~exchange~~ sake. The money was given to Rachel because it had been earmarked for her in the letter to her father, probably as a belated wedding gift.

8. Ar. al-shuyūkh al-ajillā', a common designation for prominent merchants.

9. Good deeds are not rewarded by God automatically. He must deign to "accept" them.

10. "A guided tour to the Holy Land."

11. The Karaites devoted a large section of their religious studies to Hebrew, the language of the Bible, and Jerusalem was a great center of linguistic research. The book in question most probably was The Hebrew-Arabic Dictionary of the Bible of David ben

+ Abraham al-Fāsi (tenth century) ed. Solomon L. Skoss,
New Haven, 1936, 1945, which was written in Jerusalem.

12. MS yūjibuh. The edited text contains a
misprint.

13. Qayrawān, then the capital of the country
known today as Tunisia, was connected with the East by
brisk traffic. Our letter was sent early in June, with
the spring convoy sailing from Ascalon. It would reach
Qayrawān from Jerusalem in about a month (or less).
Another month would be needed for being carried by a car-
avan to Ouargla.

14. There is little doubt that this is
Abu Ḥayr Moses b. Barhūn Taherti of Qayrawān, who
was in Jerusalem around 1022, when he was elected member
of the yeshiva, or high council, there (TS NS Box 320,
f. 16, ed. by S.D. Goitein in S.W. Baron Jubilee Volume,
New York, 1972, p.) and was still active in April,
1051 (ENA 2805, f. 14A). See p. , below.

15. One additional line, largely effaced.