

Cheese from Sicily

(A Certificate Given in Alexandria, December 1243)

13 J 4, f. 8

(Sicily and Crete, and in particular the former, must have provided a considerable part of the cheese consumed in Egypt and along the sea route to India - if we are to judge according to the Geniza papers. The present little document, among other things, is also interesting for its nomenclature. The word "kosher," familiar even to the average American, was not used in the East - a fact confirmed, of course, by many other Geniza documents (cf. p. , where also the meaning of the word "seal," used here, is discussed).)

We, the undersigned witnesses, hereby confirm that the elder Abu 'l-Hasan b. R. Ṣedāqā, (may he rest in) E(den), who is a trustworthy person, appeared before us and declared that the cheese in the possession of the bearer of this certificate was pure.<sup>a)</sup> He had brought it from Messina,<sup>b)</sup> travelling with it in person. The number of the "forms"<sup>1</sup> is hundred and eighty, packed in two big sacks,<sup>2</sup> bearing the seal "kosher."<sup>3</sup> This declaration was made by the aforementioned elder Abu 'l-Hasan in the last decade of the month of Kislev, in the year 5005,<sup>c)</sup> in NṢ Amṣn,<sup>d)</sup> which is situated on the coast of the great sea.

(Two signatures, the first of Judah, the teacher, son of Aaron, the physicial,<sup>n</sup> of whose hand documents have survived from Alexandria as from 1205)

Notes

- a) This is the Eastern equivalent of the European "kosher" - at least as far as cheese is concerned.
- b) The name of this seaport in north-eastern Sicily is written MSVIV *cf. above p.* which suggests that it was pronounced at that time Messini.
- c) This number is written with the numerals for 4\* 400\* 400\* 200\*<sup>1/2</sup> because 5\*5 could give rise to ambiguity.
- d) The medieval Hebrew name for Alexandria (see p.        ).

Comments

1. Ar. gillah, a word of Greek derivation and very common in the Geniza in this meaning.
2. Text: Sardin, see Drey, Supplement II, p. 250b (according to a nineteenth century vocabulary).