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Fleeing the Almoravid Persecution

The Tale of a Goldsmith from Ceuta, Morocco, Who Had to Leave His Native Country, Emigrating First to Sicily and from There to Egypt, Going to the Almoravid 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^{a)} 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^e a week, which, however - God knows, is not sufficient. b) Ten of my lords and masters kindly helped me, their poor servant, the stranger, by paying the poll tax for me. c)

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, d) to remember their servant, e) and perhaps you, in

The Hebrew

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 Maghribi Jews, about me and, in particular,

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

Ben Yegli.^{f)} 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.^{g)}

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^{h)} -
may God give him success for my sake and that of the other Maghribis.

Peace!

Notes

- a) As usual, the writer changes over from the third person, referring to "your servant," to the first person.
- b) One dirham^e a day was certainly the minimum for a life at subsistence level (~~see p. —~~). The text is somewhat doubtful: lais ṭamma rawahā (H., vowelled with a Pathah beneath the w and a Qāmāḡ beneath the beth) 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^f alayya aḥara mawālaya. Before mawālaya, one expects min. To read iḥra for aḥara is not recommendable.
- d) A quotation from Zechariah 4:12 and 14. The two persons certainly held some office in the community organisation.
- e) I.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 hyt, written erroneously.