

49. A MOROCCAN WRITING FROM BAGHDAD ASKS HIS RELATIVES IN EGYPT
TO HELP A COMPATRIOT ON HIS WAY BACK HOME

(Late Twelfth Century)

This is a ruq'a, or "short note containing a request", as indicated by the fact that the name of the petitioner is written in the left upper corner of the page. The writer, betrayed by his language as a Moroccan, was on a pilgrimage to the Jewish holy sites of Iraq, probably combined with a business trip and perhaps also some study at the then flourishing Baghdad yeshiva. He requests his relatives in Egypt to assist a fellow Moroccan who once had been opulent and liberal, but had fallen on bad times and was forced to rely on charity for his way back to Sijilmāsa in southern Morocco.

TS 8 J 21, f. 22,

My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.¹

Your servant Abū 'Alī, son of your paternal aunt.

To his high, noble, and illustrious presence, the Nafīs², may God prolong his days in utmost glory and make permanent his excellence, high rank, and prominence throughout a carefree life. The fame of Your Excellency³ has spread through the regions and the scent of your virtues⁴ is fragrant like that of fruits on the trees.

This is to inform you that I have traveled to Iraq and visited (the tomb of) our lord Ezekiel⁵ - may he rest in peace - and (those of) all the saints - may God let me and you see the building of the Temple.⁶

You and your son-in-law have a fine reputation at the seat of the head of the yeshiva, our lord Samuel, the son of the grandee,⁷ in Baghdad and with the elder Abu 'l-Fakhr Hunayn, the banker.⁸ I was very happy that your name is so well known everywhere and to the most illustrious persons.

I wish to give you opportunity for a good deed, namely with his honor, R. Solomon of Sijilmāsa. Please take care of him to the extent he deserves and commensurate with your liberality, for you are the generous, sons of the generous, and he is a man who had few his like in munificence, his house was open to any wayfarer and he was known by his works of philantropy, but fortune had hit him hard - may God not deprive you of (his mercy at any time), especially not in a time like ours.

Greetings to your high ⁹ Excellency ...

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Versø:

(Address in Heb. script. Upside down, the same in Ar. script, slightly abbreviated.)

To Fustat, to the elder Abū Mansūr al-Nushādirī,¹⁰ may God grant him life. To be handed over to his son-in-law Tamīm b. Mūsā, from his servant Abū 'Alī, the son of his paternal aunt.

1. Psalm 121:2.
2. "The Precious", a title common in that period, see p. below.
3. Spelled here shmwth'. The Moroccans interchange the sibilants (s-sh, s-s).
4. Text: t'jrt for t'rjt. Next line correctly: kt'rj.
5. On the tomb of the prophet Ezekiel at al-Kifil, near Hilla, and that of Daniel near Kerkuk, see D. S. Sassoon, Jews in Baghdad, p. 98, and ^mpassion (see Index). One did not say "I visited the tomb of the saint", but "I visited the saint".
6. Meaning that pilgrimages to the tombs of saints were only a poor substitute for the obligatory pilgrimage to the Temple of Jerusalem.
7. Samuel b. Eli, in office 1164-1193. The Persian title of his father, dastūr, is known from other sources, see Mann, Texts, I, p. 214.
8. Text: srfy, for sayrafī, see n. 3, above. He was perhaps head of the Jewish community of Baghdad.
9. The rest of the sheet is torn off, but not much can have been lost.
10. Dealer in Sal ^mammoneiac. About this product and the rather frequent family name derived from it see Med. Soc., I, p. 228.