

Communal

Public Prayer for the Fatimid Caliph al-Amir, for the Predecessors
of the Contemporary Head of the Jewish Community, for Him and
the Community Itself

T.-S. N.-S. 110, No. 28

(CA 1130)

(The caliph al-Amir bi-ahkam Allah died in 1131, while the Gaon Magliah, the head of the Jewish community in the Fatimid empire, mentioned here, appears in dated documents as from 1127. Thus the prayer translated below must have been written down between 1127 and 1131.

This is the only copy of a Jewish prayer for a Muslim ruler found thus far in the Cairo Geniza. However, as most of its text is given in abbreviations (which are sometimes hard to complete), such prayers must have been a regular feature of the synagogue service.

The leaf on which the prayer is written also contains a number of religious poems to be recited on the Day of Atonement. Thus it is possible that the prayer translated below was also destined for that day. It is still customary, but only in Sephardi and Oriental congregations, to recite a prayer for the Government at the beginning of the evening service (Kol Nidre) of the Day of Atonement.

The most remarkable feature of this document is the conspicuous absence of a prayer for the official head of world Jewry at that time, the "Head of the Diaspora," who had his seat in Bagdad. This was not due to the enmity between the Fatimid and Abbasid caliphs (see p.), but to inter-Jewish rivalries. The Gaon Magliah was a scion of the

priestly house of the heads of the Palestinian academy, which for most of the eleventh century rivalled the house of the "Head of the Diaspora" for the leadership of this academy. Therefore, only such leaders who had been forefathers of the Gaon in office, or had closely cooperated with them, are mentioned in the prayer. However, in the passage mentioning "the heads of Israel," there is an allusion to the "Head of the Diaspora"--perhaps discretely inserted by the author of the prayer.^{a)})

In (Your name, o) Me(ruiful).

And we pray for the life of our lord, the g(reat) k(ing), the prince of the sons of Kedar,^{b)} our master and lord, the Imām^{c)} al-Amir bi'ah(kām) Allah, the Commander of the f(aithful) and for his sons, the r(oyal family) and all persons of his e(ncouragement), who serve the k(ing) out of love and wa(ge) w(ar) f(or him) against his e(nemies). May G(ed) - m(ay He be) p(raised) - help them and help us; may He subdue their adversaries and ours; and may He fill their hearts with kindness t(owards us) and towards all His people, the house of Is(rael), and let us s(ay) Amen.

Blessed be the memory of those whose souls rest in peace, namely, the Geonim of Israel, the heads of their academies, their chief judges, their scholars and public leaders, who have ruled over the people of the Lord of Hosts in fairness and integrity before our present lord and Gaon, namely... (here follow the names of eight community leaders

with their titles),

And may life, p(ace) and honor, and fulfilment of all wishes...
and all of the blessings pr(ounced) by the prophets be granted to...
our lord and Gaon Magliah, the High Priest, the head of the academy...
May God bless him and make him great...may He continue his rule until
the coming of the f(irst) kingdom.^d) May He grant that he find favor
in the eyes of the king and of the great and of all that see him.

May our God bless all the leaders of Israel, its heads,^e) scholars,
judges, learned men, and notables,^f) here and in all the settlements to
which they have wandered in their exile, when they were forced to leave
the land of their love and dwell in countries not theirs, in the East
and the West, the North and the South. May He call out to gather us in
and shorten our sufferings, to fulfil that which is written... (biblical
quotations)

May our God bless everyone in this h(oly) congregation, old and
young, with all the blessings pronounced by the prophets; may He bless,
k(eep) and h(elp) them, and may He answer them, before they call, as it
is written (Isaiah 65, 24), together with all Is(rael),¹ and let us s(ay)
Amen.

Notes

- a) This leaf was found by Professor S. Spiegel of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, in July 1959, and kindly handed over to the present writer for study.
- b) A biblical phrase used to denote Arabs or Muslims.
- c) The official title of the Fatimid caliph.
- d) The kingdom of David, which is identified with that of the Messiah.
- e) This word is written above the line, i.e. it was added. See the concluding paragraph of the introductory remarks.
- f) Literally: those that bear a title. Actually, any Jewish notable of consequence had one or more honorific titles, conferred on him by the head of one of the academies or by the Head of the Diaspora (see p.).

Comments

1. Cf. Psalm 107:3.
2. Text: bav'rim lekhol yisra'el, which is probably the original and correct form of the phrase concluding the New Moon prayer of the synagogue.