

# AN UNKNOWN MESSAGE BY MAIMONIDES (T-S NS 327.44)

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For Alexander Fodor – a friend indeed

The Cairo Genizah, which was transferred from Cairo to Cambridge by S. Z. Schechter in 1987<sup>1</sup>, has not only brought to our attention known and unknown works and correspondence by well-known personalities as well as common people, who belonged to the Jewish, Christian, Muslim and other communities, but also has provided us with important information about their daily life and milieu. Mosheh ben Maimon, or Maimonides, is one of them. The documents relating to Maimonides, which are found in the Genizah, may be divided into five types<sup>2</sup>:

a. parts of works written by him [e.g. a leaf of the first page of a draft of his famous work *Dalālat al-Ḥā'irīn* (= *Guide for the Perplexed*) written in his own hand<sup>3</sup>, as well as fragments containing some of his other works copied usually by anonymous scribes.]

b. some of his responsa<sup>4</sup>.

c. letters written by him<sup>5</sup>.

d. letters addressed to him<sup>6</sup>.

e. letters and other documents written by other people mentioning him or referring to his works<sup>7</sup>.

Most of Maimonides' responsa are usually signed by him as *ve-ḥataḅ Mošeh* ("it was written by Moses")<sup>8</sup>, while his letters are usually signed by him as *Mošeh b"r*

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed account of 'the story of the Genizah', see Reif 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Kraemer 1991:61. My division slightly differs from that of Kraemer's.

<sup>3</sup> See Fragment No. T-S 10 Ka 4.1

<sup>4</sup> See Fragments Nos.: T-S 12.199; T-S 12.200; T-S 12.201; T-S 12.202. For details concerning their publication, see Reif 1988.

<sup>5</sup> See Fragments Nos.: T-S 12.192; T-S 12.832; T-S 16.290; T-S 10 J 20.5v; for details regarding their publication, see Kraemer 1990 & 1991, and Reif 1988. T-S 12.192 and T-S 16.290 have been re-published by Kraemer in 1990:88-92 and 92-98 respectively; T-S 16.832 has also been re-published by Kraemer in 1991:62-65, while T-S 10 J 20.5v has been published by Goitein 1963 and others. For details concerning the publication of T-S 12.203 and T-S 12.217, see Reif 1988.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g. Fragments Nos.: Or.1081 J 1; Or.1080 J 88; 10 K 8.14; 16.291.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g. T-S 8 J 14.18.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g. T-S 12.199; 12.200; 12.201; 12.202.

*Maimon z.ts.l.* (Moses the son of Maimon of blessed memory)<sup>9</sup>. References to him vary, and are usually containing various honorific titles before and after his name<sup>10</sup>.

To these we may now add a new short letter (T-S NS 327.44) that I have discovered, 'hidden' in a folder mainly containing fragments in Arabic, while cataloguing the Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic fragments which belong to the New Series (NS) of the Genizah collections at Cambridge University Library. The document is written on paper measuring 11.7X7.3 cm and is in a very good condition, except for the first lines which are missing. The recto contains Maimonides' letter, while the verso contains some honorific titles in Hebrew which are very common in correspondence and possibly the name *ha-šofet* (the Judge) *šalōmō b"r Yefet* (the addressee?). It also contains five words in Arabic script which I have not been able to decipher. Since the beginning of the letter is missing we do not know whether it contained the name of the addressee, nor do we find at the end of it the signature of Maimonides. This may be explained by the supposition that it was sent by a courier to someone well-known to Maimonides (a friend, student, etc.), and therefore no names or signature were required<sup>11</sup>.

In arguing that the letter was indeed written by Maimonides I would like to apply the following points:

a. Handwriting.

A comparison with other documents written and signed by Maimonides shows resemblance, if not complete identification, between the shape of most letters of the alphabet used by the writer. Especially the letters *a*, *b*, *t* and the ligature *al*.

b. Stylistic characteristic features which are common to Maimonides writing.

1. Maimonides' letters, excluding some of his official *iggrōt* to various Jewish communities (e.g. *Iggert Teman*, *iggeret Tehiyyat ha-Metim*, etc.), are characterized by their conciseness and succinctness.

2. Although it is quite common to find many letters from the period ending with phrases and expressions mentioning the Hebrew word 'šalōm' in different variations<sup>12</sup>, it seems that Maimonides had, more than others, consistently ended all his

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g. T-S 12.192; 12.203.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g. Kraemer 1991:68-69, fn 34.

<sup>11</sup> Other examples for unsigned letters presumably written by Maimonides are: T-S 12.217; T-S 12.832; 16.290. Another explanation for the unsigned letters of Maimonides is, according to D.N. Baneth and J. L. Kraemer, that all of them "were draft copies (which) were presumably stored in an archive, and were eventually deposited in the Genizah loft". See Kraemer 1990:93.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. e.g. T-S N-S 31.26; Also, Maimonides's son, Abraham, used to sign his responsa in the same way. See. e.g. T-S 12.206, although in T-S 12.204 he signed as *ve-hatav Abraham b"r Mōšeh z.ts.l* (written by Abraham the son of Moses of blessed memory). For other examples, see *Responsa* under 'šalōm'.

letters and responsa with expressions such as: *u-šlomhā yirbeh / yigdal, u-šlomhā / u-šlōmō yirbeh ve-yigdal, u-šlomhem yisgeh*. (May your well-being increase)<sup>13</sup>.

c. Similar views expressed by Maimonides in this letter and elsewhere in his works. For example, the idea that a man is judged by people according to his deeds and his knowledge (= wisdom) is repeated in Maimonides' works<sup>14</sup>.

The Letter (T-S N-S 327.44)

Recto

דלך וקד אעלמתה אן אלאנסאן מא  
 יכרמה אלנאס אלא לאגל עלמה ועמלה  
 ואלמולא לה עלי אלראי פי דלך קנה חכמה  
 קנה בינה ואללה יגעלה אבדן מן  
 אלטאלבין שריעתה ואלמלתזמין בהא  
 שנ' לא ימוש ספר וג'  
 ושלומך ירבה

Verso

שלמה (?) בר (?) הנעלה (?) הדין (?) הנכבד  
 המלמד הנאמן  
 שלמה בר יפת (?) הנאמן השופט  
 המורה  
 المولا (?)  
 سمل (?) وقل (?) وقل (?) يعملوفيه (?)

<sup>13</sup> For other formulae which include the word 'šalōm' used by Maimonides usually at the end of his letters, responsa and essays, see Shailat 1987-89:112, 172, 242, 250, 284, 299, 422, 450, 454, 461, 464, 470, 473; 490; 554; and 562. Also see *Responsa*, under 'šalōm' - *ha-Rambam*, Nos.: 55, 237, 321 (twice), 346, 351, 355. (Some of these references are duplicates).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Maimonides, *Mišneh Tōra, Sefer ha-Madda', Hilhōt Tešuva*, 4:4 (p. 230) and 9:1 (p. 251).

## Translation

.... in this, and I have already indicated<sup>15</sup> it that a man is only respected by people for his knowledge (=wisdom) and his deeds<sup>16</sup>, and the Lord has said (lit. has clearly stated His view about it) "Get wisdom, get understanding"<sup>17</sup>. May God make him ever one of the seekers of His law and adherers to it<sup>18</sup>. As has been said: May this book never cease to be, etc.<sup>19</sup> May your well-being increase.

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<sup>15</sup> Although the form *ʿlamtubu* may be interpreted in more than one way, it probably means here 'I have discussed this matter, I have explained it'.

<sup>16</sup> There is no doubt that both words *ʿilm* (knowledge) and *ʿamal* (deed) are used here as paronomasia (= pun).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Proverbs, 4:5.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Ps. 119:31 and 44.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Joshua, 1:8.