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## THE LEGEND OF THE APOSTASY OF MAIMONIDES.

THAT Maimonides at an early period of his career, in order to save his life, professed Mohammedanism, is an assertion which has found favour with some eminent Jewish writers, such as Grätz, who even accuses those who doubt it of "critical imbecility." In spite of this many have done their best to disprove the charge, and the arguments that can be urged against it have probably been stated most forcibly by Dr. Friedländer in the excursus which is appended to his Introduction to the English translation of the *Moreh*. The latest monograph on this subject is probably that by H. Kahan, called *Hat Moses Maimonides dem Krypto-Mohammedanismus gehuldigt?* (M-Sziget, 1899). I cannot find that this writer adds anything but rhetoric to what has been said before many times; but he advocates the cause represented by Friedländer warmly. That the story told by Mohammedan writers of Maimonides' temporary apostasy was untrue seemed to me to follow from the fact that Islam has no mercy for renegades. Ṭabari (iii. 1434, anno A. H. 242, A. D. 856) gives us a characteristic case of their treatment. "In this year the Caliph put to death a certain 'Uṭarid, a Christian who had turned Moslem, and having remained a Moslem many years, apostatized. He was summoned to repent, but refused to return to Islam, and was executed." Hence, if Maimonides had really become a Moslem, he would have had to remain one, or else change his identity.

This difficulty was felt by those who brought the charge, and they tried to meet it. In the story told by Al-Kifti, Maimonides is acquitted on the ground that his conversion had been *forced*. But Mohammedan law would not countenance such an excuse. A Moslem who has been forced to join another religion may plead *force majeure* (*Mihaj al-Ṭalibin*, ed. Berg., III, 207), but not a convert to Islam. The unpublished Biographical Dictionary of Ṣafadi (Bodleian MS. Arch. Seld.) contains another suggestion for meeting this difficulty, which may be examined.

"When Maimonides came from the West he prayed the *Tarāwiḥ* prayers out of the Koran with the people of the boat, it being the month of Ramadan. He came to the Egyptian territory and went to Damascus. There the Ḳaḍi Muḥyi'l-din Ibn Al-Zaki happened to be ill; Maimonides attended him, and took great pains with the case. The Ḳaḍi was grateful, and wished to remunerate him. Maimonides,

however, swore a solemn oath that he would take nothing from him. Presently he bought a house, and asked the *Ḳaḍī* to *antedate the contract by five years*. The *Ḳaḍī*, seeing no harm that could arise, readily granted this request. He accordingly attested the contract with the false date. Maimonides presently went to Egypt, where he entered the service of Al-*Ḳaḍī* Al-Faḍīl. Some of his fellow passengers on the boat then came and said: 'This man came with us from the West, and prayed the *Tarāwīḥ* prayers with us in such and such a year.' Maimonides produced the contract, saying: 'I was in Damascus long before that year, and bought a house there, and here is the writing of the *Ḳaḍī* Muḥyi'l-din Ibn Al-Zaki.' Al-*Ḳaḍī* Al-Faḍīl recognized the writing of Ibn Al-Zaki, and saw that the deed was properly attested as having been drawn up at the earlier date. So the case was quashed, all through Maimonides' acuteness."

This is a very circumstantial story; it is unfortunate that Ṣafadi does not say whence he got it. It is, however, utterly false. Ibn Al-Zaki became *Ḳaḍī* of Damascus in the third month of the year A. H. 588; this is attested by Al-*Ḳaḍī* Al-Faḍīl himself (Ibn Khallikan, Cairo, 1299, I, 592), and since Al-*Ḳaḍī* Al-Faḍīl was at Damascus in that year (*ibid.*, II, 539), he had good opportunities of knowing. But Al-Faḍīl himself died in A. H. 590; if therefore Maimonides had brought him a document antedated by five years with the signature of Ibn Al-Zaki as *Ḳaḍī*, he must have known it to be a forgery. Moreover, Maimonides was in Egypt in 563 (*Letters*, ed. Lichtenberg, I, 30 d), whence the story clearly contains an anachronism of twenty-eight years! If we imagine Ṣafadi's authority to have confused the *Ḳaḍī* Muḥyi'l-din of Damascus with the *Ḳaḍī* Muḥyi'l-din of Aleppo, who became *Ḳaḍī* there in 555 or 556 (Ibn Khallikan, I, 599), we are confronted with another difficulty. Maimonides, in a passage to which attention was first called perhaps by Munk, and which has been copied by succeeding writers, dates his voyage very exactly, and says he reached Acre on Sivan 3, 4925. This date is translated by Chwolson (*L. B. des Orientes*, 1846, 342-351) as May 16, A. D. 1165. Ramadan in that year began on July 1; how then could Maimonides have joined in the *Tarāwīḥ* prayers of Ramadan on a voyage which ended a month and a half before Ramadan commenced?

The elements of truth which the anecdote contains are that Ibn Zaki was a friend of Al-*Ḳaḍī* Al-Faḍīl, that the former was *Ḳaḍī* of Damascus, and that Al-Faḍīl was a patron of Maimonides. Otherwise it is a fiction of which the purpose is to explain how Maimonides, being a renegade from Islam, could rise to eminence at the court of a pious Mohammedan. Since Ibn Al-Zaki was not *Ḳaḍī* of Damascus till 588, when he was thirty-eight years of age, the story must be as late as the year 600, and we shall probably be right in supposing it

to have originated after Maimonides' death. The reason why the voyage was selected as the scene of the apostasy is probably the fact that Maimonides is known to have left his native land in order to avoid having to embrace Islam. If therefore he was a Moslem neither in his native country nor in his adopted country, when can he have been one? Evidently on the journey between the two. The month of Ramadan and the *Tarāwīḥ* were probably selected as a particularly characteristic form of Mohammedan worship. Moreover, it is probable that the ordinary ceremonies were often neglected on board; Ibn Khallikan (II, 49) mentions it as an unusual circumstance that a saintly passenger happening to be on a vessel forced his fellow passengers to say their prayers. The ceremonies of Ramadan would probably be more regularly observed.

The *ruse* of getting a deed antedated may be either an invention of the author of the anecdote, or a real ruse employed by some one on some occasion. It strikes one as a peculiarly expensive device.

It seemed worth while to publish this anecdote with a complete refutation of it, in order to show how little the charge against Maimonides bears examination when details are given. Some one to whom the honour of Maimonides was dear asked for details, and they were provided. Since the details are certainly fictitious, it is reasonable to suppose the charge itself fictitious. It was probably started originally by some less favoured physician who envied Maimonides' success at the Ayyubids' court.

Dr. Friedländer devotes much of his artillery to discrediting the *Iggereth Ha-shemed*, but not all his weapons seem to me to hit the mark. That the work is a translation from the Arabic surely follows from the use of the phrase לְדַבֵּר בְּחֶק הַחֲכָמִים (ed. Lichtenberg, II, 13c) with the sense "to speak concerning the sages," which is evidently a literal rendering of the Arabic *fi ḥaq* "concerning," of which examples are given by Dozy, *Supplément*, I, 306b, and which is indeed a very ordinary expression. The employment of the word גְּבוּל for "penalty" (14c מִגְּבוּלֵי הָעוֹשֵׂה) is surely proof of the same; the Arabic *ḥad* which properly means "boundary" is also regularly used for "a penalty which is definitely determined by the law" (Dozy, I, 255a). The rest of the evidence brought to prove that the Epistle is not by Maimonides assuredly contains much that is subjective; and since the writer claims to be one whose advice would be asked on such a matter, he must have been a person of importance. The fact of his taking a lenient view of the act of pronouncing the Mohammedan profession of faith, and thinking the matter one not worth dying for, surely need not prove that he had himself followed that course.