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# THE EMERGENCE OF THE QAYRAWĀN JEWISH COMMUNITY AND ITS IMPORTANCE AS A MAGHREBI COMMUNITY

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During the last ten years I have devoted my studies to research in the Medieval North African communities—communities out of the *Reshut* area. The intention of this paper is to present some of the results, more than facts of the investigation; paying particular intention to the most important community in the Maghreb at the 9th to 11th centuries, i. e. Qayrawān.

## A. Method

In the period with which this paper is concerned, the ninth through the eleventh centuries of the Common Era, the Jewish people's leadership was marked by two outstanding phenomena; on the one hand the power wielded by the centers in Eretz Israel and Babylonia was still strong; on the other hand, however, the local communities in the Diaspora were beginning to rise to prominence. Our discussion revolves around the tension between these two phenomena.

Ifriqiya (modern-day Tunisia) had an important role to play in the unfolding of all the trends which took place in the Maghreb at that period, and foremost amongst its cities throughout this entire period was Qayrawān. Ifriqiya's strategic location and the way the political balance of power was arranged in the region made the conditions more favorable there than in neighboring lands for the development of an urban, political culture. Qayrawān, because of its convenient location, remained the realm's major city even when other capitals were declared, and most of Ifriqiya's urban, military, political, economic, and social activity revolved around it.

Thus, if we wish to study the history of a minority group living in this region, whose way of life and social traditions made it dependent upon the existence of a stable government and an urban culture, from an early period, we will do well to choose Qayrawān as the subject of a research.

Any investigation into the rise to prominence of the local community, should not be limited to pinpointing ties between it and the Jewish centers, nor the community's evaluation of itself in halakhic, legal terms. These two courses of investigation must, we believe, be supplemented by the study of the concrete, historic dimension of the community's life. Such an approach

has enabled us to gain an impression of the full breadth of the community's independent activity, and to identify those realms in which it still remained dependent upon the central Jewish leadership.

Clarifying the relationships between the local Jewish society and its institutions in Qayrawān and between these and the Jewish centers, will help to shape our answer to the question of the relative independence of the Diaspora communities, in both chronological and topical terms. Our discussion will therefore be developed first and foremost to the community's life and institutions, and it is from these that we shall draw the conclusions with regard to the community's independence of or dependence upon the central Jewish leadership and its institutions.

Alongside this discussion, we shall have frequent recourse to the two main questions around which the study revolves: (1) the *sources of authority* upon which the local leadership was able to draw in its own place; and (2) the extent to which the local society and its institutions were independent of or dependent upon Jewish centers outside the Maghreb.

Three different degrees of dependence are suggested here to describe the ties between the community of Qayrawān and the Eastern centers: the official, the functional, and the deferential. The sub-questions to the main one will, therefore, be:

(a) Did the members of the local communities and their institutions have a legal or halakhic obligation to accept the authority of the centers, so that a failure to do so was tantamount to a breach of law?

(b) Alternatively, did they need the central leadership in the Mashreq to govern their daily lives? Would they, perhaps, have had some difficulties in administering the communities without the aid of the centers, in that their decisions would lack authority or validity?

(c) The third degree of dependence suggested for the communities' relationship with the Mashreq is the deferential—that is, they acknowledged the supremacy of the center without having any need at all to do so.

The question of the community's dependence or independence thus concerns not only the relationship between the representatives of the community's institutions and the Jewish centers; it also covers the faith in which the community's individual members held their institutions, on the one hand, and the possibilities and restraints governing the institutions' administration of the community's affairs on the other. This goes back to the first question we raised regarding the local leaderships' sources of authority. Earlier studies of the foundations upon which the Jewish community's organization was based in the Middle Ages have already raised this latter question, which may be phrased as follows: did the Jews' social organization in Qayrawān really become the basic cells of the community's national life, able to provide the community's members with all of their needs, in the absence of an alternative political entity?

### B. The Society

Qayrawān was a rabbinic Jewish community, in which those who had dwelt in the region even before the Arab conquest were overshadowed by a rather large and socially influential population of later immigrants. The Jews were an urban population; they pursued a variety of occupations, but our evidence shows that involvement in international commerce was predominant among these. In portraying the structure of the families that made up this society, it comes out how characteristic it was of Jewish society in other Islamic countries, but that it had a few distinguishing marks which were also related to the economic life of its members.

They did, indeed, share these distinguishing factors with many other families in the lands of the southern Mediterranean, but the Qayrawān family was also marked by its unique contractual formulae and local customs, which, whatever the motives for their appearance, certainly had a potentially stabilizing effect on the mercantile families.

While examining three main areas within the community's social life: the formation of the community; the economical activities of its members; and the family life—we meet with the problematic around which our discussion revolves, that is, the delineation of those trends which worked to undermine them. This problematic emerged primarily as we encountered those trends which tended to buttress the local leadership and its institutions and those which had the potential to undermine these institutions, and they were studied in the relation to the extent to which they actually fulfilled this potential.

In relation to the three areas into which we have divided our description of Qayrawān society, these potentially undermining trends may be defined as follows: In the course of the society's formation, the potentially destabilizing factors were differences in customs between various segments of the population, and the dominance of that segment of the population whose members were not permanent residents of the region. In this connection, we found that precisely that authority wielded by the institutions of the central leadership in the east—in Babylonia, from where many of the more recent immigrants to the region had originated—encouraged the adoption of common customs and identification with that leadership's local representatives, the heads of the local communal institutions. On the other hand, the immigrants from Babylonia had no assurance that the power exerted by the center from which they had come would help them gain positions of authority. There is a fair amount of evidence—relating precisely to those matters which might have led to splits within the community on account of the above-mentioned trends—to show that the local leadership proved capable of making the recognition of its authority a common factor amongst all the various sub-groups; the absence of any evidence of the existence of Karaism within the Qayrawān community before the end of the tenth century is particularly striking.

The unstable element in the population was also involved in international

commerce. This intercourse brought with it a number of other potentially destabilizing forces as well—the wealthy merchants with their multiple connections amongst Jews abroad and non-Jews in their own country. An examination of these factors which helped to account for the success of this multi-faceted commercial activity shows, however, that those involved in international commerce and its accompanying phenomena were, in fact, highly dependent upon the Jewish institutions in general, and upon the various communal institutions in their own community and in others—in particular.

As we dwelt upon the function of the family in the community's way of life, a similar picture emerged. The potentially destructive effect of certain trends was never realized, because there was no institutionalized alternative to the leadership which grew up within the framework of the extended family. Nor did the extended family itself become a leadership framework when one of its members took on a primary post in the community; the family would come to the aid of its leading member and benefitted from his status, but it did not itself become identified with the leadership. While the extended family framework did not interfere with and on occasion even supported the local institutions, the nuclear family always worked in their support, if only because of its frequent need of recourse to them.

Alongside the investigation of these potentially destabilizing factors, attention was paid to the social values which emerged from the activity in question, and from the priorities which Qayrawān's Jewish society set for itself. A number of alternative factors that might have bestowed authority upon the leadership were suggested: that its members were autochthonous inhabitants of the area, that they had originated in the Babylonian centers of Jewish leadership, that they were wealthy or had prestigious family connections. All of these classes might have been good candidates to assume the leadership of the community, for they had strong sources of authority which were supported by the community's values. These suggestions, however, were not supported by the evidence. The local leadership did, indeed, include emigrants from Babylonia, people of wealth and highly-placed families, but it was not their origination in these classes that was considered the direct source of their authority: those who wielded authority in the community took on other mantles while serving in the communal leadership, and people possessing none of the sources of authority proposed above, were able to attain leadership positions.

Those trends which might have worked to undermine the local leadership never became strong enough to do so, because of the frequent need of all segments of the community to have recourse to this leadership; those who turned to it most frequently, in fact, were precisely the most "promising" of its potential spoilers. This phenomenon worked indirectly to bolster the authority of the local leadership: the fact that this leadership was founded not upon those sources of authority which stood behind its potential underminers, but upon sources of authority which had their origin in the community's set of values; and the fact that these latter sources of authority

## THE EMERGENCE OF THE QAYRAWĀN COMMUNITY 5

were adopted even by the potential underminers themselves, added greatly to the strength of the leadership, which drew its support from these sources of authority. Thus a study of these alternative sources of authority, and how they enabled the local communal institutions to assume the leadership of the community, is necessary.

### C. Institutions

The institutions we have studied fall into two groups: those whose activities were entirely within the realm of the community, including the synagogue, the *heqdes* and various charitable institutions; and those whose activities evolved out of their connections with the central leadership institutions abroad, including the *Beit Midrash*, the *Beit Din* and the *Neggidut*.

The synagogue was a central institution in Qayrawān's communal life, but it cannot be said that it held a position of leadership. It may have represented "something of the Temple" within the communal framework, but it did not fulfill those same functions of leadership as had the Temple in Jerusalem and the institutions attached to it, before the great destruction. We propose, rather, to view it as a kind of looking-glass, brightening or dimming according to the state of the Jewish society it reflected, for all the various elements of that society were to be found there. It did not lead the community, but it had its own independent life, guided by halakhic sources and customs. As it pursued its independent course, its own "leaders" emerged, but their leadership role did not extend beyond the confines of the synagogue and its affairs. It may be concluded from this that attaining a prominent position in the synagogue did not necessarily endow one with the authority needed to attain a leadership role in the community at large.

On the other hand, the synagogue did hold a unique, central position in the city's communal life, as the result of the proximity of those who did wield authority within the community and their need of recourse to it: the *Beit Midrash* which was in it or next to it, and the *Beit Din*, which required the gatherings of the whole community which took place there on various occasions, bestowed an aura of authority upon it. It may well be that the synagogue's physical building symbolized the community's leadership in an abstract way in the consciousness of its members, and even though the communal leaders did not draw their power from it, it was one of the more important arenas in which they appeared.

While the synagogue may not have fulfilled a leadership function, it did express, better than any of the community's other authoritative institutions, the nature of the Jewish community—an organic whole whose individual members had responsibilities to one another which demanded their cooperative efforts—and the social and communal identification of those who took part in the services. It fulfilled the community's needs, but it did not direct the course of its life.

Just as the community came to serve as the basic unit of the people's

national life, because of the difficulty of maintaining ties with the Jewish centers, so the *Beit Midrash* took the place of the central institutions of learning, on both the theoretical and practical levels. It was here that most of the vessels needed to preserve the communities' treasured and authentic traditions of learning were kept. The *Beit Midrash* of Qayrawān does indeed seem to have been capable of fulfilling this function, for its own city and for members of other communities as well.

The compilation of the halakhic sources in the *Beit Midrash* aided the development of a local tradition of learning, and this led to the composition of halakhic treatises for the use of the students in the Qayrawān *Beit Midrash*.

The purpose of these compilations and treatises was, first of all, to assist the students of the *Beit Midrash* in their learning, but they also led further, towards independence for the local *Beit Midrash*. The awareness on the part of the teachers which led to the composition of these halakhic works was a significant step in the community's emergence as an independent body, and even an alternative center. This awareness was, indeed, the preserve of an elite, and it did not extend to members of the community, but it created the conditions required for the community to be able to define itself as an independent unit capable of responding to most of the needs of its individual members, even those who were not aware of the fact that the community was gradually liberating itself from its ties with the Jewish center.

When we added our examination of the content of what was studied in the *Beit Midrash* to our awareness of the involvement of its leaders in the affairs of the local community, we were able to arrive at the following conclusions: (1) the ability of the sages attached to the *Beit Midrash* to study those sources for themselves helped advance them towards a situation in which they no longer had need of frequent consultations with the central authorities; (2) the rich and varied sources used by these Qayrawān sages attests to their high level of learning and to their ability to deal with the problems submitted to them on their own; (3) the involvement of the participants in the *Beit Midrash* in the affairs of the community stemmed from their areas of expertise in those areas of life to which the problems submitted for their solution related, and from their ability to deal with these problems; (4) the members of the community saw the authority wielded by the leaders of the *Beit Midrash* as stemming from their ability to interpret the circumstances of the community in halakhic terms and to discern how the requirements of the *halakhah* could be fulfilled in the community's current situation. The authority possessed by these sages to govern the lives of both the individual and the community was thus practically absolute, and it was recognized as such both by the sages themselves and by the members of the community at large.

The authority of the Qayrawān *Beit Midrash* extended to other communities as well; this was partly owing to the city's location in the heart of the Maghreb, its importance and the size of its population, but above all, because of the fame it had acquired on account of its unique system of learning, the expertise of its sages and the large number of halakhic texts in its

collection. This authority was evident not only from a technical point of view—that is, from the fact that funds and questions on matters of *halakhah* were channelled through Qayrawān to be sent to Babylonia—but from the readiness of members of other communities to recognize the primacy of its *Beit Midrash*. The halakhic questions to be passed on were corrected there by Rabbi Ya'kov ben Nissim ibn Sha'ahin, so that they would be well and clearly phrased when they reached the great sages in Babylonia. The regional sage, sitting in judgement, had the status of a high court for the surrounding communities.

The *Beit Midrash* of Qayrawān was recognized as a leading institution by the non-Jewish inhabitants of Al-Mahdiya as well, and even the regime and its functionaries seem to have recognized its importance. This recognition, however, did not make it into an alternative for the maintenance of continuous ties and massive support of the Babylonian center. Its primacy and importance stemmed, rather, from its high standard of study and the wealth of halakhic tradition it had compiled. Once this reputation had spread amongst the communities around the Mediterranean, students began to reach it, as individuals and in groups, from the surrounding communities. By now they were maintaining their multi-faceted system of ties with Babylonia—which was also controlled by Qayrawān—more as an honorary tribute to the primacy its sanctity still gave it, than out of a need to receive authoritative answers to their halakhic problems from there; and the day was not far off when these outlying communities would depend more on Qayrawān, their local center of learning, than upon the far-off centers to the east. The Babylonian sages, too, nurtured Qayrawān as an organizational center for the Maghreb, and this, too, helped to raise the standard of the *Beit Midrash* and turn it into a substitute for the yeshiva.

When Rav Hai Gaon asked Rav Yehuda ben Yosef, the Rosh Hasseder, to influence Rav Hushiel, Rav Bahalul, and Rav Hanoch to help organize a renewed recognition of the supremacy of the Babylonian yeshivas, he was, paradoxically, only emphasizing the fact that the organizational powers and political authority of the latter would ultimately work toward the primacy of the Qayrawān *Beit Midrash*; for if the local leadership indeed had the power to do what he asked, it would obviously not be long before it came to be used on behalf of the local center. And this is indeed what came to pass: Rav Hushiel, Rav Elhanan/Hananel, and Rav Nissim came to serve as authorities for answering halakhic and academic questions, thus performing the same functions as had previously been fulfilled by the communities' ties with Babylonia. Questions reached them from communities around the Maghreb, from former Maghrebi students of the *Beit Midrash* who were now in other Mediterranean countries, and even from the land of Israel. And it was not only their halakhic opinions that made Rav Hananel and Rav Nissim prominent beyond the borders of their own land; by a short time after their deaths, the binding authority of their decisions, too, was accepted.

The *Beit Midrash* of Qayrawān was thus able, by virtue of its high standard, the quality of its legal decisions and its method of learning to serve



the needs both of the local community, as it confronted its practical problem, and its leadership of the surrounding communities.

The sources upon which the authority of the Qayrawān *Beit Din* was based included: the age-old tradition of seeking its assistance; its knowledge of the halakhic sources; and the fact that its members were viewed as wise and learned men—and these, of course, are the same foundations upon which the choice of Jewry's leaders has usually been based. Though it may at first have seemed to be merely a body set up to deal with quarrels erupting within the community, the full breadth of the *Beit Din*'s influence and involvement in communal affairs emerges from many events over three centuries; it was indeed of primary importance to the leadership of the community.

The *Beit Din*'s source of authority—the profundity of its learning and its sanctity—did mean that it controlled many aspects of communal life, but before we come to any firm conclusions as to its relative status, many other aspects of communal life and several alternative sources of authority have yet to be discussed. It is really no wonder that the local *Beit Din* fulfilled a leadership role, and not only a judicial one, in the affairs of the community, for the central leadership in Babylonia and Eretz Israel, too, also combined the functions of learning, judgement and leadership. It was in no way revolutionary that the kinds of authority attendant upon learning and leadership should have been attached to the *Beit Din*, rather than the functions of the judiciary and of learning being seen as devolving from a person's leadership role. On occasions when the local judiciary institutions should have been "swallowed up" by the system of courts set up by the central leadership, the Qayrawān *Beit Din* was able to preserve its independence. This may have been a matter of conscious effort, or it may have come about for a number of other reasons, such as the severance of the community's geographical and political connections with the central institutions, the growing strength of the local community as a result of the increase in its population brought about by emigration, or by the absence of alternative institutions, which gave the local *Beit Din* its sense of power.

Whatever the case may be, the central fact emerging from our description is that even at times when Qayrawān's judicial institutions suffered attacks upon their authority, they remained, in the great majority of cases, independent in the way they went about their judgement, in their decisions, and in their use of halakhic sources. Such independence is, indeed, as important to the functioning of a Jewish community as the erection of synagogues and ritual baths, but it was not always given formal and absolute expression.

The last matter mentioned above—the court's use of both early and contemporary halakhic sources in making their decisions—was a crucial factor in determining the public's faith—or lack of it—in the capability of their judges, and also in determining the willingness of the judges to act decisively. Its ability to establish and act upon precedents and to use all the

## THE EMERGENCE OF THE QAYRAWĀN COMMUNITY 9

means at its disposal thus stemmed from the depth of its relations with the local academic institution, that is the *Beit Midrash*. Its authority, then, was founded to a large extent upon these connections, which were based both on the fact that the same people participated in both institutions, and on the frequent consultations they held with each other in order to clarify problems and exchange halakhic sources.

At this point in our discussion, then, we would suggest that the ability of the local community to run its life independently, based upon the halakhic sources and their adaptation to the community's contemporary situation, depended to a large extent upon the level of learning and the judicial authority of the leaders of the local academic and judicial institutions, and the way they put these into practice as they guided the community.

As for the *Naggidut* in North Africa: it is accepted that the *Naggid* did not acquire his office by the official appointment of the Moslem ruler, but rather bore an honorary title bestowed upon him by the Jewish centers in Babylonia and the land of Israel; their intention in honoring him with this most dignified of titles was to influence the person whose position was highest in the community—on account of his connections to the court of the ruler and his involvement in the affairs of the leadership and the judiciary—to act on behalf of the centers. Even when these centers were still active, however, the bearer of this title was not merely their assistant, but also influenced their course of action. The importance of the Maghreb region as a whole to the Jewish centers in Babylonia and the land of Israel did not obscure the special status of the Jewish center in Ifriqiya, and this enhanced even more as the power of the centers deteriorated. The latter, and others as well, then came to view the *Naggid*, not because of his title but on account of his status within the local community, as an unofficial representative of all the Maghreb Jewry.

The independent powers that characterized their office did not stem from the title they bore, but from the fact that their personal status in the court of the ruler had combined with their strength within the Jewish community at a specific point in history to put them in a very powerful position. The authority of the *Naggid*—that is, of the specific person who held this title, whether it was Ibn Ata or Jacob ben Amram—stemmed primarily from his status in non-Jewish society.

Achieving a high status in the surrounding Gentile community was, indeed, an unrivalled source of power if one belonged to a minority group in the Middle Ages, and this was as true in the Islamic countries as it was in the Christian world. While it may have had a basis in the Jews' need to protect themselves, however, this source of their authority was not supported by any specifically Jewish values. From the point of view of the latter, then, the member of the *Beit Midrash*, the halakhic scholar, superseded even a person who was more powerful than him, and this was expressed in the forms of address used by members of the community in their petitions and letters.

## D. Qayrawān's Independence

It would seem, then, that for the period of our study, the local community's ties with the Babylonian center were not based merely on ritual gestures designed to show that the former still recognized the importance of the latter; they were, rather, functional in nature, and concerned the variety of problems which the community's members encountered as they pursued their affairs. When a response reached them from the Babylonian sages, they provided the community and its scholars with tangible evidence of the center's continued supremacy. However, the initiative and responsibility for sending questions on to Babylonia lay with the members of the community themselves. There was no fixed or obligatory system of referral, nor was the community bound to accept the conclusions following from the decisions handed down from Babylonia. The factors we have elucidated which did encourage the referral of such questions were social and academic in nature, and they led in various different directions. While the referral of questions to the center made people more aware of its supremacy, the Babylonian sages also acted to strengthen the local leadership, in ways that were both subtle and direct.

Although Ifriqiya, according to an ancient demarcation of those regions—the *Reshut*—which were to be subject to the centers, should have been subordinate to Babylonia, it did not become so, despite the indirect efforts of the Sages to keep it within their sphere of influence. This shows the degree to which these communities' institutions were formally independent, and the maintenance of this independence depended upon the local institutions themselves. When historical circumstances combined to diminish the power of the central leadership, these institutions were able to make their communities independent on the practical level as well.

Our study of several aspects of the society's needs, of the way the community was structured and its institutions, showed that Qayrawān's communal institutions were, indeed, capable of undertaking the tasks which the society in which they functioned set for them. While we were not able to discover what the internal structure of these institutions was like in the period of our study, we did find that the circumstances surrounding this structure appear to have supported it, not only from the perspective of hindsight, but also from the point of view of the people of the time. Their frequent recourse, in many different kinds of situations, to the judiciary institutions and to the *Beit Midrash*, and the reputation enjoyed by these institutions throughout the Jewish world, show that the local leadership was able to realize its potential for independent action, despite the ritual gestures and consultations by which they maintained their ties with the Babylonian center.

It is not really all that surprising, one might say, that local institutions should have taken on the administration of the everyday affairs of a community so far away from the center. In the East, however, there was a center which had an authentic tradition of learning and was considered the "high court" of world Jewry, and which itself, on the basis of these two factors, demanded the retention of its supremacy and authority over the

outlying communities. Thus, we might easily have been misled by the lip-service that continued to be paid to the supremacy of the center into claiming, without even attempting a theoretical and halakhic discussion of the "legal personality" of the community and its institutions, that the type of strong communal organization which has already been recognized as having existed in Europe during this period had still not come into being in the eastern and southern regions of Jewish settlement.

By studying precisely those institutions which paralleled those represented by the central Babylonian leadership, the *Beit Din* and the *Beit Midrash*, we have been able to show that these were able to provide a solid basis for the development of other local leadership institutions, despite Babylonia's continued claim to exclusive supremacy. Moreover, our investigation of the way Qayrawān's community and society and their individual members lived provided evidence of the realization of their independent potential, which was supported not only by the *Beit Midrash* and *Beit Din*, but also by various other institutions and prominent persons. The sense that this community enjoyed a special status, as expressed in its local customs, the praise it received from others and the esteem in which it was held in other centers of Jewish emigration, was thus supported by its strong communal life, fitting the general definition laid down by this study according to which "It was right and necessary for each small communal entity to take upon itself all those offices and functions which were meant to serve the community as a whole."

One might have thought that once the community had reached this stage of functional independence and supremacy, and given its members' own consciousness of their priority, it would have moved on to developing a clear definition of itself, officially and in principle, as an independent body which not only sustained but also delimited itself and the scope of its independence. The existence of so many conditions favoring such a proclamation of independence, however, was not necessarily sufficient, in the period and society with which we are concerned, to bring it about. There were several reasons for this, some of them connected with the principle of inertia at work in a society's definition of its own situation, and others connected with the community's ever-renewed acknowledgement of the supremacy and importance of the center.

This tendency not to stray away from its subordinate self-definition was not exclusive to Jewish society. It was common to the social structure of the Middle Ages, which had its roots in a powerful religiosity that was focused toward eternity and the absolute. This was reflected in the relationships between the central Caliphates and their subordinate states. The local rulers were quite capable, in functional terms, of administering both the internal and external affairs of the areas under their domination with a great deal of independence, and they indeed did so; when it came to their official posturing, however, they continued their show of belonging to the united Caliphates. This was true of the relationships between the Abbāssid Caliphate and the local Aghlabid rulers, and also of those between the Fātimid Caliphate and the Zirids throughout most of the period of the latter's rule in Ifriqiya.

The period of their break with the Fātimid Caliphate was exceptional, but even then Al-Mu'iz did not remain outside the framework of Islamic unity, for he accepted the authority of the Abbāsids.

The Jewish society of these Islamic countries, too, was accustomed to its ties with the central leadership institutions. These had existed even before the Moslem conquest, and when the conquest made possible the strengthening of these ties, the Jews found it convenient to do so. Even without the factors favoring the maintenance of this connection, to have proclaimed an official break with the center without having an extremely serious reason for doing so, would have run counter to the behavior patterns prevailing in Medieval society, both Moslem and Jewish, in the regions with which this study is concerned.

However, it was not only inaction which preserved the ties between the center and the outlying community. There were several active reasons for their continued vitality, from the community's functional needs for links with a center where the people's authentic traditions of learning were continued, to its acknowledgement of the continued sanctity of these centers, their institutions and the men and families which stood at their head. There was good reason on both sides for continuing to nurture the ties between the center and the outlying communities and abstaining from official proclamations of independence. It may well be that the central leaders' apprehension of their own status stopped them from defining the outlying communities as fully independent units that were to constitute a leadership for Jewish society in the Diaspora.

The communities' links with a center whose authority was based upon its sanctity also strengthened their awareness of the importance of another kind of link between points on a Jewish map, which calls to mind the awareness prevailing in Moslem society of the need for cooperation and unity within the Caliphates. We are referring here to the communities' expressions of unity with one another, and their strengthened sense of the existence of a "Klal Israel" which continued to function as an organic unit. More than the small community, it was the community of Qayrawān which maintained these links, that felt this sense of cooperativity. This sense acted as a further brake upon the development of any tendencies officially to express and delimit the power of the most central community in Ifriqiya and in the Maghreb as a whole, though such trends might have gathered strength precisely from the centrality of the community charged with maintaining inter-communal links.

To have officially proclaimed their independence would thus not only have constituted an aberration from accepted custom; it would have been an open rejection of some fundamental, sacred and concrete elements—that is, the supremacy of the halakhic scholars and judges—that were of direct significance to the inner life of the community. By denying the operation of these values in its external relations, the community stood to knock the foundations out from under the derivative values which supported its own functioning.

However, the Qayrawān community had no need to proclaim its

independence officially, for alongside its gestures of subordinacy, it enjoyed official and functional independence in all those areas that concerned the administration of its everyday affairs, even if the source of authority underlying the operation of its communal institutions had not been defined precisely in halakhic terms. Since these institutions needed their authority mainly to respond to the practical problems they encountered, they had no need to define it on the theoretical level, though they did from time to time need help with formulating *ad-hoc* solutions to the problems with which they were presented. We found that there was practically no opposition to the fact that these institutions governed the affairs of the community, and, moreover, that the community and its individual members had frequent recourse to these institutions. This latter shows they were able to keep their place in the community by virtue of their constant availability to it.

The status of Qayrawān's institutions and leaders had two main bases: their power, which had various sources, and the fundamental values of their community. The underpinnings of their status were thus both practical—in that they had the power to accomplish what had to be done—and ideological—in that this power was justified by the community's values—and they thus lacked nothing to maintain their status as the community's leadership. On all three levels on which we set out to examine it: the relationship between the society and its institutions, the effectiveness of these institutions and the links between them and the institutions of the central leadership, we found that the Qayrawān community did indeed have the ability to function independently, and that this ability grew ever stronger as the period of our study progressed.

Almost the only thing that was lacking was for the community to define itself as an independent body. This lack, however, is apparent only from the perspective of our modern-day world, and not from that of the period with which our study is concerned. There was no contradiction between the practical, functional and official independence and a continued dependence and loyalty expressed through ritual gestures—for them, the two were complementary. Crisis in the centers would encourage Qayrawān to cut its connections and to rely upon its own powers. A period of crisis like this occurred in the third decade of the 11th century. The only problem for developing this 'golden' period were the Bedouin invasion and the destruction of the main urban centers in the Maghreb.

Note: No annotations are attached to this paper. Detailed documentation for it is found in my book: *The Jewish Community of Qayrawān 800–1057—Society and Leadership*, Magnes Press [1996]; and my article: 'Inter-communal Relations and Regional Organization in the Maghreb,' *Pe'amim* XVII (1984), pp. 3–37 (both in Hebrew).