Marriage Contract

**Title:** Marriage Contract  
**Date:** 1870  
**Artist:** Unknown  
**Dimensions:** L. 18 1/4 x W. 14 1/8 in. (46.4 x 35.9 cm)  
**Medium:** [Tempera and ink on parchment](http://ncartmuseum.org/art/search?search:cf_works-of-art_medium=%3DTempera+and+ink+on+parchment)  
**Credit Line:** Purchased with funds from Temple Beth El, Wilson, North Carolina, and the Hanchrow family in honor of Joseph H. Hanchrow  
**Object Number:** 82.9  
  
**Culture:** [Moroccan, Tetuán](http://ncartmuseum.org/art/search?search:cf_works-of-art_culture=%3DMoroccan%2C+Tetu%C3%A1n)  
**Inscriptions:** [FOR FULL TRANSCRIPTION / TRANSLATION CLICK ON SMALL BAR BENEATH OBJECT IMAGE THAT SAYS "9 MEDIA ON FILE," THEN CLICK ON THE DOCUMENT JPEGS, OR THE ROUND DISC IMAGE TO ACCESS WORD DOCUMENT] Translation: With good fortune and the best of luck in this time of joy, blessing, prosperity, and success On Wednesday, the 25th day of the plentiful month of Elul, in the 5630th year since the creation of the world, the era we use here in the city of Tétouan, may the Lord watch over it; The bridegroom, a goodly and pleasant young gentleman, new grain and glory among men, the intelligent Yom-Tov of pure Sephardi descent, son of the honored, enlightened, notable, and charitable Rabbi Massoud of pure Sephardi descent; who himself is son of the esteemed, renowned, and charitable Rabbi Yehuda, may he rest in peace; who himself was son of the respected, charitable, and venerable Rabbi Massoud, may he rest in peace; all of the Chetrit family; Said to this pleasant Miriam, a loving doe, a graceful mountain goat: "My virgin bride, daughter of the honored and esteemed Rabbi Menahem, of a most learned family, son-in-law of a rabbi and son of the honored, wise, and notable Rabbi Isaac, may he rest in peace; who himself was son of the wise, notable, and venerable Rabbi Menahem, a man who came to synagogue early and left late, may he rest in peace; all of the Pariente family; "Be my wife according to the practice of Moses and Israel, and I, with help from above, will cherish, honor, support, sustain, maintain, and protect you, following the custom of Jewish husbands who truly cherish, honor, support, sustain, maintain, and protect their wives. And I will set aside your virgin bride-price of 200 zuz, which equals 25 silver zuz and befits you, and provide your food, clothing, and necessaries, and live with you in conjugal relations according to the universal custom." And the bride consented and she became his wife. The groom wished to add to the standard bride-price the equivalent of 7,000 oka of pure silver in the coinage traded here in Tétouan, may the Lord watch over it. He also gave her four amah of land and the equivalent of 7,000 more oka of pure silver in the said coinage. This was given solely as a gift within this marriage contract. The bride brought a dowry consisting of clothes, jewelry, and bedclothes from the house of her father and mother. It is worth 4,000 oka of pure silver in the said coinage, according to the consent and agreement of the groom, of pure Sephardi descent. Thus, the entire marriage contract-the standard bride-price, the groom's addition and gift, and the dowry-is worth the equivalent of 18,000 oka of pure silver in the said coinage. The groom, of pure Sephardi descent, vowed not to marry another woman, in addition to his bride, unless the latter should give her consent and approval; and not move her from country to country, unless she should give her consent and approval. If he should, heaven forbid, marry another woman against her consent and approval, or should move her from country to country against her consent and approval, he should pay her from his property and give her a valid divorce contract immediately. This agreement will be upheld and maintained like the agreement between the sons of Reuben and Gad. The groom also agreed to mortgage his property as a security for this marriage contract according to the institution of our sages, of blessed memory. The lien is on all real and material properties that he owns now or should own in the future, and properties he should bequeath to his heirs. The contract is not to be seen as an indecisive contractual obligation or as a stereotyped form. We have performed the act of symbolic acquisition from the groom, of pure Sephardi descent, of all the property stated above by transferring an object suitable for this purpose. An oath was also taken with the binding of the hands, and with the consent of the Holy One Blessed Be He and according to the will of those swearing on His lofty, virtuous, and truly awe-inspiring name to uphold, perform, maintain, preserve, support, and reinforce, without treachery and deceit, all that is written above, from beginning to end. All is in accord with the custom that was practiced, the agreement that was reached, and the institutions that were put into effect among the holy [Jewish] communities expelled from Castile; may the Lord take vengeance on their behalf, and may He show mercy, pity, compassion, and grace toward the remnant of the expulsion. Let Him guard over them in their cities, watch them, keep them, and rescue them, He who is the true eternal protector for now and for all eternity. Thus the groom, of pure Sephardi descent, gains possession over the dowry, according to the full and stipulated conditions. The sum of 18,000 oka of pure silver stated above is equivalent in every generation to 20 oka of Spanish coinage of pure silver. The groom, of pure Sephardi descent, therefore explicitly assumes responsibility for the said marriage contract, deed of acquisition, and promissory note. Everything is valid, clear, and established. [Signed witnesses] Yizhak Navon Avraham Gabizon, of pure Sephardi descent [Signature of groom] 82.9 Moroccan, Marriage Contract Notes: (a) Abbreviated words and acronyms are spelled out in brackets in the transcription after their first appearance only. Brackets are also used for some of the faded and illegible signatures or text at the bottom of the contract. (b) We would expect two signatures of witnesses and at least the groom's signature (if not the father of the groom as well, or even the bride); I was able to transcribe the names of the witnesses but am not sure of the words preceding their names. I am also not sure if the faded letters and decorative signature below the name of the first witness was made by the groom or by the witness. I am assuming it must be the groom's signature, for the document would seemingly require it. (c) The only other reading in question is the title for the bride's father in line 12; I have included a question mark in brackets in the transcription and an underline in the translation. I would expect a letter ? in place of the initial ?, giving ???"? for ?????? ???, "our teacher, the rabbi." But I simply cannot justify reading that first letter as a ?, and have given my best estimate for what ???"? may mean, namely "the esteemed rabbi." (d) The script is a Sephardi cursive script everywhere but in a few key words or phrases given in the traditional block script; I've put the latter in bold in both the transcription and translation. The script employs about a dozen ligatures, which are relatively rare in Hebrew scripts. Once I was able to read the script, the translation went smoothly and presented few problems. Its language is the typical mix of Aramaic and Hebrew very prevalent on Jewish marriage contracts. (e) The date given for the document is equivalent to September 21, 1870. A Wednesday evening wedding would have allowed for the customary blessings of the groom during the Torah reading on Thursday morning. The wedding must have been no small affair given that two rabbinical families were involved, the Chetrit and Pariente families. I used online genealogies of Moroccan Jewry to ascertain the English spellings of these surnames, as well as those of the witnesses. I haven't performed any more research on the history of the families, as intriguing as such a project may be. (f) Since this document includes rather lengthy genealogies for both bride and groom, as well as long, flowery modifier chains preceding the name of each individual mentioned, it opens with an extremely long first sentence. That sentence utilizes the standard ketubbah formula: "On such and such a date....the groom of such and such family....said to his bride of such and such family... 'Be my wife...'." The use of repetition for rhetorical effect, as in the modifier chains, continues throughout the document. I have consistently provided one-for-one equivalents in these instances, even if they produce overly pleonastic sentences in the English. (g) The phrases "of pure Sephardi descent," "may he rest in peace," "of blessed memory" and "may the Lord watch over it," among others, appear as acronyms, but in the English they must be spelled out. The abbreviation for "of pure Sephardi descent" appears after nearly every mention of the word "groom" and I debated over whether I should include a translation of it in every instance. In the meantime I've left them all in, as cumbersome as they may be in English, particularly because they reflect the cultural values of this community and fit well with the mournful recollection of the Spanish Inquisition, which appears toward the end of the document. (h) This contract mentions units of measure (zuz, oka, amah) that were apparently of nostalgic value only, hence the need, for example, to convert the oka to Spanish coinage at the end of the document. The virgin bride-price of 200 zuz, as stipulated in the Talmud, is artificially employed in traditional communities even to this day; its conversion to silver coins became necessary in antiquity as well. This too is included in the contract, as is common custom. The artificial amount of 18,000 is significant because the number 18 in Hebrew numerology spells the word ch-y, or "Life," and appropriately those characters are enlarged in the ketubbah. (i) Some noteworthy phrases in the document include the "new grain" metaphor in line 6, based on Zechariah 9:17; and the "loving doe, graceful mountain goat" metaphor in line 10, which is from Proverbs 5:19 and draws on Song of Songs imagery as well. The charming phrase, "a man who came to synagogue early and left late," is an Aramaic expression taken from the Babylonian Talmud (Tractate Berachot 8a). [Translation: March 2011 by Benjamin D. Gordon, Ph.D. Candidate, Duke University]  
**Classification:** Paper  
**Department:** [Judaic](http://ncartmuseum.org/art/search?search:cf_works-of-art_rights=%3DJudaic)