Rabbi Yishaq ben Walid (1777-1870)

“The western luminary” (Ner haMa’arabi). That was the title given by Morrocan rabbis to one of its most illustrious: Rabbi Yiṣḥaq ben Walid (or Bengualid) from the city of Tetuán, in the north (Spanish) of Morocco.

Rabbi ben Walid belonged to a family of Rabbis, who left Spain after the expulsion in 1492. Since childhood, and despite the loss of his father at a very early age, he dedicated himself completely to study Tora. After the death of his father, the financial situation of the family was so desperate that the mother had to sell her husband’s books, a set of the Talmud, to maintain themselves. Rabbi ben Walid worked for years saving penny after penny to buy back what he considered to be his most important patrimony: The Talmud.
He was known for his brilliant mind, his piety and above anything else for his humbleness. In 1830, after the head of the Rabbinical court, rabbi Moshe haLevy, passed away, and knowing that the community leaders will consider him as a candidate, rabbi Ben Walid fled to Gibraltar and hid for a while, running away from honors, as Pirque Abot indicates. Only at the insistence of the community leaders who presented him a petition with the signatures of sixty of the most prominent rabbis of the time, Rabbi ben Walid accepted the new position. His condition, however, was that he will make his Halakhic decisions always with at least two other rabbis, and never by himself.
He had a special inclination for *ḥesed* and charity. He would provide food to the needy, especially before Shabbat and Holidays. One time he gathered the leaders of the community and told them: “My family is starving. I need a raise.” And he proposed to create a tax on kosher meat, the “gabela” (Spanish for community tax) , to generate the extra money. After the community leaders accepted the rabbi’s request he explained that the “starving family” he was referring to, were the needy people of the city, his brothers and sisters. And for many years all the money from the *gabela* was given to the most needy of the city.
√ Rabbi Ben Walid refused to publish his book in order to avoid a financial burden on the impoverished Jewish community of Tetuán. In 1855, his oldest son Shemtob, published his book *vayomer Yiṣḥaq* in the city of Livorno, Italy. This book is a collection of rabbinical responsa which includes the Minhaguim and traditions of Spanish Moroccan Jews. We present HERE one of the first edtitions

of *vayomer Yiṣḥaq* from www.hebrewbooks.org

√ *Those who read Hebrew and are interested in knowing more about the life of rabbi ben Walid should read the introductions/dedications written by his two sons, Shemtob Ben Walid and Vidal ben Walid, at the beginning of the book.*

√ Click here to see the unmarked grave of rabbi ben Walid in the Jewish cemetery of Tetuán.