No. 55 April 2008

GENIZAH FRAGMENTS

The Newsletter of Cambridge University's Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit at Cambridge University Library

Friedberg £1m for online archive

Some thirteen years ago – several generations in digital terms – Dr Douglas De Lacy, then Research Assistant in the T-S Genizah Unit, wrote that "recent developments in information technology, particularly the World-Wide Web, mean that the potential is unlimited. My dream is of a Web page containing full catalogues and bibliographies, texts and images of all the [Genizah] documents. Imagine the possibilities!" (*Genizah Fragments* 30, 1995).

Others have shared this vision, and in recent years the Friedberg Genizah Project (FGP) has led the way towards the achievement of this ambitious goal.

The world of Genizah research has already been revolutionised by the Project, founded and financed by the Canadian businessman, Albert D. Friedberg, with many programmes of cataloguing, description and publication in various Genizah collections around the world under its belt.

Most recently, however, Rabbi Reuven Rubelow, who manages the FGP for Mr Friedberg, and Professor Yaacov Choueka, the Project's head of computerisation, have set their sights on digitising the manuscripts themselves and placing all of the images online.

Genizah fragments being digitised at the University Library

A substantial number of the world's Genizah manuscripts have now been photographed by the FGP and are being made available through its web portal (http://www.genizah.org/). But, until now, the mass digitisation of Cambridge's almost 200,000 manuscript fragments was seen as an impossible dream, with one early estimate suggesting that the task would take 27 years!

Recent advances in digital imaging technology, coupled with the valuable experience gained by both Cambridge University Library – through its digitisation project (30,000 images) funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council – and the FGP, mean that this ambitious project is now a realistic one.

The Genizah Unit is therefore pleased to announce that the Project will be providing funding of over £1 million to digitise the remaining manuscripts in the T-S Genizah Collection.

This intensive work will be carried out by the Library's Imaging Services Department, and the images will be delivered to the FGP's Jerusalem offices on a monthly basis over the next three years.

The end result will be an archive exceeding 312,000 high-quality, life-size images, depicting every leaf, every fragment and every scrap from Cambridge's T-S Collection, as well as those items from the Library's Oriental and Additional Collections that are also thought to have emerged from the Ben Ezra Synagogue.

Once the FGP has mounted Cambridge's images online, together with those of the other digitised collections, it will be possible for the researcher to call up a picture of any fragment; to compare it to similar fragments in other collections; and, by these means, eventually to complete the dreamed-of task of piecing together the myriad manuscripts that have, until now, been scattered in libraries, universities and collections around the globe.

The world of Genizah research will never be the same again, and we shall all owe a great debt of gratitude to Albert D. Friedberg and the FGP for this stunning achievement.

BEN OUTHWAITE
Head of Genizah Research Unit

Gifts to T-S Unit

The T-S Research Unit gratefully acknowledges the continued valuable support of the Friedberg Genizah Project, which will amount to more than £50,000 this academic year.

Major funding has also been received from the Arts and Humanities Research Council towards the ongoing projects of description and digitisation.

The Unit has received $20,000 through Danny Gershon from the estate of his aunt, Miriam Wieder, in memory of the renowned scholar Professor Naphtali Wieder, of Jews' College and Bar-Ilan University. In keeping with Professor Wieder's interests, the sum will be used to further liturgical research in the Genizah.

We are also grateful for a generous benefaction of £1,000, arranged by Philip Maurice from the estate of Muriel Turk.

Other substantial assistance in recent months includes $2,000 from Victoria J. Elenowitz; £500 from Cyril and Betty Stein; £500 from Mark Goldberg; £300 from the Manifold Trust; £250 from the Sidney and Elizabeth Corob Charitable Trust; £200 from the F. & D. Worms Charitable Trust; $250 from J. C. Weber; £100 from Jack Lunzer; and smaller or anonymous gifts.

The continued support of our many friends is much appreciated.

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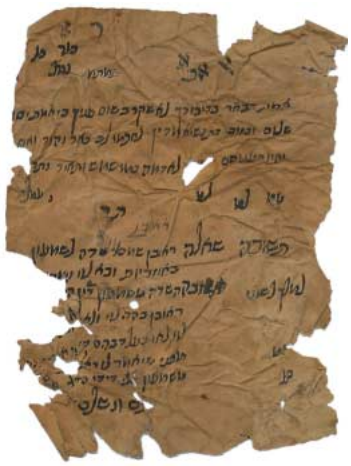
From cradle to grave

Within the framework of a joint project between the JTS-Schocken Institute for Jewish Research in Jerusalem and the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit, I was invited to spend a six-month sabbatical at Cambridge aimed at preparing a catalogue devoted exclusively to responsa literature in the Cambridge Hebrew manuscript collections.

Responsa (*shutim,* a Hebrew abbreviation meaning "questions and answers") span some 1,200 years. The quantity of the material is beyond our imagination: responsa filled communal and educational needs by providing answers from eminent rabbis and



Mosseri V.199.2 before conservation

judges (as well as lesser-known personalities) to official questions sent on behalf of Jewish communities and to private queries.

From the end of the nineteenth century, scholars began to recognise that responsa literature was a vital and novel resource for historical research. While studying fragments of such material, one travels through a time-tunnel of Jewish history uncovering the rich and hidden facets of private and public Jewish medieval life.

From the cradle to the grave, responsa vividly describe domestic affairs reflecting human merits, convictions and flaws. Certain responsa contain vivid accounts of household intrigue, infidelity, solemn oaths, and sibling rivalry.

As legal missives, the contents reveal how rabbinic and secular leaders maintained community stability and personal harmony during times of daily stress. Our basic knowledge of private and institutionalised education likewise stems from responsa documents. From the prosaic issue of a tutor's salary to burning questions of faith and theology, responsa in the Genizah fragments and other manuscripts have had their say.

Although we are enamoured with responsa literature's potential for future research, the sober question remains: how to provide superior access to this material and to describe its contents for a new generation of students and scholars. A fundamental obstacle for investigating responsa has been our ignorance regarding which Genizah fragments contain responsa and what their subject matter is.

To solve this problem, the joint project will prepare a detailed, descriptive catalogue devoted to the numerous responsa in the Hebrew manuscript collections housed at Cambridge. In addition, for the first time in a catalogue of this nature, it will provide transcriptions of responsa that have yet to be published, with each entry supplemented by biographical and bibliographical information.

Thus far, I have examined fragments and manuscripts from the Mosseri and Taylor-Schechter collections and from other selected manuscripts in the libraries of Cambridge University and Westminster College.

To date, more than five hundred and eighty responsa from the tenth-eleventh to the nineteenth centuries have been documented. Only forty per cent from the classical Genizah period (the tenth to the thirteenth centuries) has, however, been transcribed and published, and material from the thirteenth century onwards has barely been touched.

Working with fragments from the Mosseri collection has been an extraordinary experience. Although much of the material has still to meet Cambridge's rigorous conservation standards, the support provided by the conservation department has considerably improved my research.

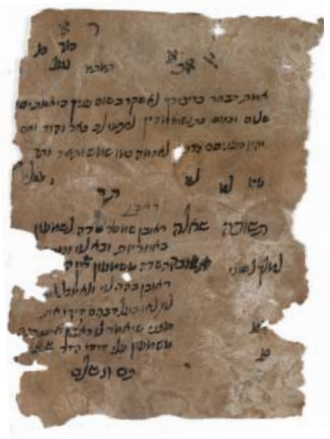
In the hands of Nagio Vince-Dewerse, one of the Library's conservation experts, ancient fragments are renewed, faded handwriting becomes legible, and anaemic paper and parchment restored to life. To touch a delicate and ancient manuscript from the erstwhile Genizah is to make contact, physically and intellectually, with the rich and diverse Jewish culture of the Middle Ages and beyond.

Although the study of responsa offers fertile ground for Jewish law and historical research, sometimes a hand-copied responsum can contribute unexpectedly to other disciplines. For example, MS V.199.2 from the Mosseri collection, which at first glance resembles a standard responsum, enables us to observe more about the copying methods of an anonymous scribe than about an author's response.

This fragment, probably from Egypt and copied in a Sephardic (*circa* fifteenth-century) hand, offers the contents of an abbreviated responsum:

A question where Reuven sold Shimon a field with a guarantee [*the text reads* be'achrayut*, literally "with responsibility," a legal instrument protecting the purchaser against any liens on the property*]. *A third party, Levi [Reuven's creditor], seizes the field from Shimon.*

The answer follows: the law is that Reuven can argue the case with Levi. Levi cannot counter "as the land is no longer yours, you are not my legal opponent in this manner," because Reuven's response, "if [*the field is*] *seized from Shimon, it comes back to me," is considered*



Mosseri V.199.2 after conservation

acceptable [*in other words, Reuven retains his legal status to litigate the debt with Levi*].

There is nothing unusual about this case as it appears in the Talmud and rabbinic literature in various contexts (*cf.* Ketubot 92b, Baba Qama 8b and Baba Mezia 14a). What is unusual are the extraneous writings surrounding the text of this so-called "question and answer."

We find three lines of short aphorisms, followed by partial words representing practice pen-strokes. Moreover, the scribe wrote an unusual expression, *lamelech leshoni* (perhaps a corruption of *lamed leshoni*, "study language," or "study writing").

The bottom line reads, *tam venishlam* ("completed"), a concluding formula popular among copyists for completing a codex, but not appropriate – nor in the correct textual position – for the end of an individual responsum. It is more than likely, therefore, that we are looking not at an authored "question and answer," but at a case-study illustrating the art of responsum writing.

SHMUEL GLICK
Head of JTS-Schocken Institute

Discovering the secrets

During my second year of doctoral research, I started working as an assistant in the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Unit for one day a week. I expected that the additional workload, although in many respects associated with my research, would slow down the completion of my thesis. In the event, the opposite proved true.

Through steady contact with the manuscripts and constant interaction with my colleagues, I developed a keener sense of the Genizah material than I would otherwise have done, discovering many of the "secrets" and details accessible only to those who have dealt closely with Genizah sources for many years.

These insights helped me enormously in my research into language change within Judaeo-Arabic letter-writing. I observed, for example, a fascinating phenomenon related to the verb "to send."

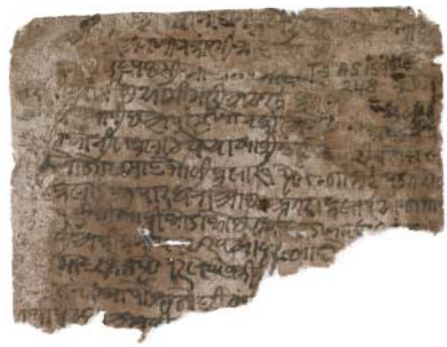
The eleventh-century writers used the word *nafada* to denote "sending," while those in the following two centuries employed the term *sayyara*. From the fifteenth century onwards, "to send" was expressed by *arsala*.

The verb can thus act as a shibboleth for assessing the period in which a letter was written. This and many other philological phenomena that distinctly mark the letters from the different centuries were collected and analysed in my thesis.

And so there was a happy ending for me. I finished writing my thesis (*A Linguistic Analysis of Judaeo-Arabic Letters from the Cairo Genizah*) within the regular time-frame of three years – not least thanks to the help I received from my Genizah colleagues – and I am happy to work now in the T-S Unit as a Research Associate.

ESTHER-MIRIAM WAGNER

The ultimate dream



T-S AS 159.247, a Genizah manuscript recently discovered by Dr Bohak containing an unidentified Indian language

A sabbatical in Cambridge is the ultimate dream of every Genizah scholar. Having spent the past five years studying the Genizah magical fragments (see my brief report in *Genizah Fragments* 49) and reading them from hazy microfilm copies, I cherished the opportunity to work with the original documents.

With sabbatical funding from Tel Aviv University, and additional assistance – through the Genizah Research Unit – from the John S. Cohen Foundation and the Friedberg Genizah Project, I have been enabled to bring my family to Cambridge for an entire year, during which I plan to catalogue all the magical, astrological, divinatory and alchemical fragments in the Cambridge Genizah collections.

I have so far identified more than 200 new fragments, most of them relatively small and insignificant, but some large and important enough to be worthy of further study.

I have also endeavoured to find partnerships between separate fragments which once formed a single page or single quire. This task is difficult when working directly from microfilm, or microfilm-prints, but becomes much simpler when handling the original fragments, studying the "suspect" pieces together, and checking whether they join or if the handwriting matches.

In this way, I am seeking to improve my understanding of their contents, especially in areas – such as alchemy or astrology – where my familiarity with the sources is insufficient to identify or classify a fragment accurately. To that end, I have sought the advice of experts on the medieval Muslim scientific tradition and have learned much in the process.

On one occasion, I showed some of the Judaeo-Arabic fragments to Professor Charles Burnett, of the Warburg Institute, who identified a particular text (T-S Ar. 29.51 and Ar. 30.91) as a copy of Thabit ben Qurra's *On Talismans*, of which two medieval Latin translations are known but whose original Arabic text no longer exists. The Judaeo-Arabic version of this important text would be a most welcome addition to the study of Thabit's works and of the transmission of Muslim talismanic lore.

On another occasion, Bink Hallum – who is writing a doctoral thesis (under Burnett's supervision) on the Arabic alchemical texts known as Zosimus – identified T-S Ar. 43.267 as a text known, in its Latin version, as Ps.-Aristotle, *On Stones*.

Once again, the identification of a fragment in its original Arabic text (written, of course, in Hebrew letters) made an important contribution to the study of medieval alchemy. And as this is but one of many alchemical fragments in the Genizah, I have little doubt that many similar discoveries are bound to follow.

The greatest joy, however, comes from unexpected fragments, those about which even an experienced Genizah scholar has never heard.

On one of my first days at Cambridge, I was staring at a well-preserved bifolium (T-S 10K9.2) containing the last three pages of a book entitled *Kitab Yuhana*. My first thought was that this might be an Arabic version of the *Book of Jannes and Jambres*, a Judaeo-Greek composition of which only tiny fragments exist. But a more careful reading convinced me that it was a Christian hagiographic work.

After a quick search for all the Saint Johns of early Christianity, the fragment – soon be published by Dr Friedrich Niessen and myself – turned out to be the *Life of St. John of the Golden Gospel*, a work which enjoyed some popularity in Christian Egypt but whose presence in the Cairo Genizah, in a Judaeo-Arabic version copied on parchment by an experienced scribe, came as something of a surprise.

Surveying the Genizah fragments is a little like gold-mining, since one knows what one is looking for, but is never sure what one will find. And it is as addictive as gambling, since one spends fruitless hours in the hope that the next attempt will produce a really spectacular result.

GIDEON BOHAK
Tel Aviv University

Variations in the Haggadah text

At this time of the year, most Jewish families celebrate the first evening of Passover by recalling the biblical story of their ancestors' exodus from Egypt at a domestic service called the *seder* ("order"), by way of a narrative entitled the *haggadah* ("recital"). This has, from at least the earliest rabbinic times, been a popular ritual, and it is therefore hardly surprising to find many relevant texts from the Genizah.

What may be surprising for those thoroughly familiar with the version as handed down in printed *haggadah* editions, and as chanted at the table through the generations, is that there are some remarkable variations between what came to be standard from about the twelfth century and what circulated in and around Egypt and the land of Israel in the period immediately beforehand, as documented in Genizah texts.

The *qiddush* toasts the festival over a glass of wine and introduces the proceedings. Its simple and standard format concentrates on God's relationship with Israel and his gift of the festival.

In a number of Genizah texts (for example, T-S H2.124), it also contains a lengthy piece with detailed and poetic remarks about the historical origins of the festive day, including the sentence "on that day he brought his servants out of the iron furnace and rescued us" (כי בו הוציא את עבדיו מכור הברזל ואותנו מילט). The custom is noted but not forbidden by Sa'adya Gaon in his prayer-book (pages 141–2).

Equally interesting is the addition at the conclusion of the *qiddush* not only of the blessing thanking God for our survival until this festival (שהחיינו), but also of the one used on Hanukkah and Purim, which offers gratitude for the miracles divinely performed for us (שעשה נסים לאבותנו), as in T-S H2.124, 152.

While the Exodus story is traditionally recited in Hebrew, there are Genizah texts in which parts of it appear in Aramaic (T-S H2.152). Many Genizah texts also include instructions in Judaeo-Arabic to guide the one leading the *seder* (T-S H2.112).

Most intriguing of all is the *mah nishtanah* passage traditionally recited by the youngest participant. From the early Middle Ages, this has consisted of four questions about the *matzah* (unleavened bread), the sharp-tasting vegetables, the two instances of dipping one item into another before eating it, and the custom of reclining at the table.

The passage is recorded in the Mishnah (*Pesahim* 10.4) and dates from at least the first century. Its earliest form probably referred to only three topics: the dipping, the *matzah* and the roast meat, the last-mentioned referring to the consumption of part of the paschal lamb just sacrificed in the Temple. Order and content then gradually underwent change.

Obviously, at some stage, the inclusion of this question about the roast lamb became dubious, because it was no longer relevant. But some Jews in the tenth-century land of Israel still included it, though in a different form, as recorded in Genizah text T-S H2.152: "On normal nights, we eat meat that is either roasted, stewed or boiled; but tonight we used to eat, in the Temple, only roast: והלילה הזה היינו אוכלים בבית המקדש כולו צלי.

The custom of eating roast lamb had apparently continued in some communities in post-talmudic times, but those responsible for this amendment had evidently ceased the practice and considered the question illogical. They could not, however, bring themselves to eliminate it completely.

Most of the Genizah versions are noted by the Babylonian geonic authorities as customs (often followed in the Jewish homeland) that should be discontinued. Their view prevailed in practical liturgy, but the Genizah texts have preserved the evidence.

STEFAN C. REIF
Emeritus Professor of Medieval Hebrew; Project Consultant, Cambridge University Library

Cairo goes back to future

Medieval Fustat's Ben Ezra Synagogue, the depository of many of the Genizah manuscripts now housed at Cambridge University Library, was one of the venues for internationally sponsored celebrations arranged over several days last autumn by Cairo's small but lively Jewish community.

Representatives of several embassies, Government officials, civic and Jewish leaders, scholars and native Cairenes – many now resident in Israel, France, Britain and the United States – marked the centenary of the city's Adly Street Synagogue and the completion of its handsome restoration.

Welcomed by Carmen Weinstein, the community's president, the guests were entertained by a choir from Thessaloniki, Greece, who performed Jewish music, and by the Egyptian baritone, Gaber El Beltagui, who sang an ode to peace in French, English, Hebrew and Russian. The American Ambassador, Francis Ricciardone, headed the panoply of distinguished speakers.

One of the days was devoted to the Cairo Genizah, the contents of which were revealed in the nineteenth century and brought to various centres of scholarship in Europe and the United States – some seventy per cent, through Solomon Schechter, to Cambridge.

The Ben Ezra Synagogue has been magnificently restored and

Sign at the entrance to the Ben Ezra exhibition

is now one of the capital's foremost tourist attractions. On Carmen Weinstein's initiative, a permanent exhibition centre has been opened in an annex, with the co-operation of Professor Stefan Reif, former director of the Taylor-Schechter Unit at Cambridge, and London architect Michael Mallinson.

Representing – with his wife, Shulie – the Unit, the University and the Library at the celebrations, Professor Reif addressed a large audience on the history of the synagogue and its world-renowned manuscripts.

It was, he said, a superb idea to link the treasures once again with the Ben Ezra Synagogue, and with Cairo, through a set of facsimiles and explanatory panels, and it was the organisers' hope that the exhibition would serve as a testimony to the major discoveries made through manuscripts amassed over a period of one thousand years, and analysed by scholars over many decades.

"Through the scholarly study of these testimonies to early medieval Jewish life, it has become possible to reconstruct social, economic, religious and cultural developments in the eastern Mediterranean. Active research projects at Cambridge and elsewhere, some now supported by the Friedberg Genizah Project, are continuing to uncover fascinating data and, if funds can be raised, all the manuscripts will soon be available online by way of digitised images."

Those manuscripts, Professor Reif added, included the Mosseri Genizah Collection, some 7,000 fragments acquired by a well-known Cairo family, which were currently being conserved, described, digitised and made available in Cambridge, a process that had attracted major financial support.

Among the activities during the celebrations were visits to the city's synagogues, now mostly unused but still preserved intact and carefully guarded. The events were sponsored by the Cairo Jewish community, Spain's Casa Sefarad Israel, Association Nebi Daniel of France, and the Joint Distribution Committee in the United States.

On merchants and medics

Two important volumes of Genizah research have recently been published by Brill of Leiden. The anticipation for the first, S. D. Goitein and Mordechai Akiva Friedman's *India Traders of the Middle Ages. Documents from the Cairo Geniza. The "India Book"* (ISBN: 978 90 04 15472 8), has been building since 1954, when Goitein announced his intention to examine evidence found among the manuscripts for the extensive medieval Jewish trade with India.

The Genizah is, in fact, almost a unique source for this area of medieval trade. The evidence is abundant in hundreds of letters and other texts, documenting the lives and work of figures such as the Tunisian-born Jewish merchant Abraham ben Yiju, who spent years on India's Malabar coast.

Although Goitein gave tastes of the work to come among his many articles and books, most notably in his *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders* (Princeton, 1973), on his death in 1985 the *India Book* was unfinished.

The heavy responsibility for completing the work passed to Friedman, his former student, who has produced a remarkably clear and comprehensive work on this fascinating area of medieval history, bringing us the fruits of Goitein's many years of research together with his own important insights. It is a volume to be celebrated.

The second work, *Practical Materia Medica of the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean According to the Cairo Genizah*, by Efraim Lev and Zohar Amar (ISBN: 978 90 04 16120 7; ISSN: 1570-1484), has appeared remarkably quickly, considering that it builds in great part on the work done during Lev's sojourn in Cambridge just a few years ago.

Another hefty volume, it examines the numerous medieval prescriptions and lists of *materia medica* found among the Genizah manuscripts to describe the practice, as distinct from the theory, of medieval medicine and the – often bizarre – substances prescribed by medieval practitioners.

An important work of medical history, it owes much to the fact that the Genizah manuscripts preserve so many examples of everyday medicine in use — scribbled prescriptions, medical asides in letters, physician's notes — without which any study would have to be based mainly on the idealised practice preserved in the theoretical medical works of the medieval Arab world.

How you can help

IF YOU would like to receive *Genizah Fragments* regularly, to inquire about the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Collection, or to learn how you may assist with its preservation and study, please write to Dr Ben Outhwaite, Head of the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit, at Cambridge University Library, West Road, Cambridge CB3 9DR, England.

THE LIBRARY may also be reached by fax (01223) 333160 or by telephone (01223) 333000. The internet access is at http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/Taylor-Schechter. Inquiries by e-mail should be addressed to genizah@lib.cam.ac.uk.

ALL CONTRIBUTIONS to the Unit, whether for research or other activities, are made to the "University of Cambridge," which enjoys charitable status for tax and similar purposes.

IN THE USA, "Cambridge in America" supports the Taylor-Schechter Collection with its unfunded grant number 7/78. Please contact the Director of the Annual Appeal at 100 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-0271 (tel: 212-984-0960).

"CAMBRIDGE in America" is recognised by the IRS as a charitable organisation, and contributions for the benefit of the Genizah Research Unit are legally deductible for USA income tax purposes. Contributions are similarly deductible in Canada even if made directly to the Development Office at the University of Cambridge.

The T-S Unit thanks the Lauffer Family Charitable Trust for helping to make possible the production of this newsletter. The Trust was founded in memory of David Lauffer, who took a keen interest in Jewish history, particularly Genizah studies. He is warmly remembered in the Unit, and his family's continued support is much appreciated.