

GENIZAH FRAGMENTS

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

Council's confidence in T-S Unit

It is one of the ironies of the Taylor-Schechter Collection that many of the manuscripts regarded by early scholars as the most significant, due either to great age or to rarity, are still largely uncatalogued.

Recent major projects have seen considerable descriptive work being carried out on the New Series and Additional Series, but the T-S Glass binders, the T-S Fs, the T-S K manuscripts and the like — the historical core of the Collection — have never systematically been catalogued.

The Genizah Unit's current major project comes to an end in February. For the past three years, we have been assiduously cataloguing Hebrew and Aramaic documents, liturgical manuscripts, and the Judaeo-Arabic material in the Additional Series, as well as digitising more than 15,000 fragments.

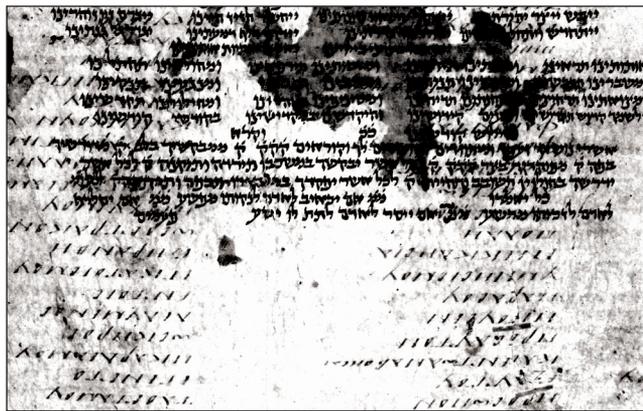
In the middle of last year, I submitted a proposal to the Arts and Humanities

Research Council (AHRC) for the Genizah Unit to begin a new three-year plan, completing the work of the earliest scholars and producing a comprehensive catalogue covering all the remaining remnants of the Old Series, thus opening up the ancient heart of the Collection once and for all.

The reaction to the proposal was promising and, at the very end of the year, we received the welcome news that the Council would support the project with a grant of £575,978. In showing, once again, their confidence in the Genizah Unit, the AHRC is ensuring that our work on making the Collection accessible to all will continue.

This latest funding will enable the description of the remainder of the Old Series, as well as of the Genizah manuscripts in the Library's Oriental Collection, and will also ensure the further identification of parts of the newly recovered Mosseri Genizah Collection.

The project is timed to tie in



Detail of an ultra-violet image of the palimpsest T-S 12.182 revealing clearly a sixth-century copy of Origen's Hexapla

with the Friedberg Genizah Project's ambitious plan to digitise the entire T-S Collection, shortly to go ahead at Cambridge. The catalogue entries will be married with the images and will be made available both through Cambridge's website and through Friedberg's Genizah web portal (<http://www.genizah.org/>).

The lead researcher for the new project was intended to have been our dear colleague,

Dr Friedrich Niessen, who, as reported below, passed away in January. It will be difficult to replace such a hard-working, erudite and pleasant colleague, who was a tremendous ambassador for the Taylor-Schechter Unit's Collection, for the Unit and for the entire field of Genizah Studies.

BEN OUTHWAITE
Head of Genizah
Research Unit



Dr Friedrich Niessen at work in the T-S Genizah Unit

Farewell to Friedrich

It is with profound sadness that the Genizah Research Unit reports the death in January of Dr Friedrich Niessen, the most experienced of our researchers, a conscientious and talented teacher and lecturer, and a much-valued colleague.

Although he had been diagnosed with cancer two years earlier, he continued to work full-time on the manuscripts that he delighted in, and made the daily drive up from his home in Hendon to the University Library in Cambridge.

His last appearance in the office, in July 2008, was characteristic. He was going into hospital the next day for an operation, but assured us that he would do his best to be at work the day after, eschewing any need for recuperation. Unfortunately, this was not to

be, and he suffered a succession of setbacks that prevented him from returning.

Born in the far west of Germany, Friedrich spoke Dutch in addition to his native German, and often claimed that he was as much Dutch as German, particularly in temperament. He read Theology at the University of Bonn, where he gained an MA, before following in his father's footsteps by becoming a schoolteacher.

For more than two decades he taught religion, along with Hebrew, English and — one of the great loves of his life — music, at a number of church schools in Westphalia. In the mid-'90s, he embarked on a PhD at the University of Cologne where, in typically rigorous fashion, he studied a number of demanding

languages, including Middle Egyptian, Coptic, Ethiopic, Samaritan, Aramaic and Classical Arabic. His doctoral thesis examined a Samaritan version of the Book of Joshua, based on a manuscript found in John Rylands University Library, Manchester.

Following his marriage to Elizabeth (known in her family as Rane), Friedrich moved to London. Academic posts not immediately forthcoming, he worked as a Hebrew teacher and carer before, in 1998, he chanced upon a notice in the *Jewish Chronicle* seeking a researcher to work on Judaeo-Arabic manuscripts in the Genizah Research Unit.

At interview, the Unit's director, Professor Stefan Reif, recognised

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Scholars pay centenary tributes

A day-long seminar at St John's College, Cambridge, in November offered around 100 participants an experience that was, in many respects, unique. Describing the culinary and scholarly fare, one observer remarked that it had been "a feast in more ways than one."

The papers, marking the centenary of the death of Charles Taylor, a former Master of St John's, constituted the first major attempt to assess his contribution to learning in such diverse fields as Genizah-manuscript acquisition, Hebrew studies, mathematics, and University development. Professor Chris Dobson, the College's current Master, who chaired the proceedings, is believed to be the first Cambridge head of house to have functioned in this manner in the area of Genizah texts and related topics.

A magnificent selection of manuscripts was exhibited in the Rare Books section of St John's library. Coincidentally, one of the lecturers, Professor Raphael Loewe, addressed the gathering on the seventieth anniversary of his arrival at the College to study Classics. And the participants themselves constituted a rare – and exceptionally lively – blend of scholars, students, and members of the public.

The two-pronged proceedings were divided into an assessment of Taylor's academic achievements, set against their intellectual, social and historical backgrounds, and an examination of the scholarly significance of the Genizah materials now at Cambridge, discovered in late nineteenth-century Cairo and dating back almost 1,000 years. Most of the lectures were illustrated by a variety of colourful and exotic images.

Focusing on the Scottish twins Agnes Lewis and Margaret Gibson, Dr Janet Soskice, Reader

in Philosophical Theology in the University of Cambridge, related how they had considered it essential to learn numerous languages in order to improve their understanding of European and Near Eastern culture. While on their travels, the sisters had acquired several remarkable Hebrew, Arabic and Aramaic documents from Egypt and the Holy Land, including items from the Genizah, which they brought back to Britain.

On good terms with Taylor and other hebraists, Lewis and Gibson had also enjoyed close friendships with non-establishment figures within and around the University, notably Solomon and Mathilde Schechter. It was after viewing some of the sisters' finds that Schechter had made his celebrated visit to Cairo and delivered to Cambridge University Library almost 140,000 manuscript fragments.

Professor Loewe, now retired from the Goldsmid Chair at University College, London, described how rabbinical Hebrew came to be studied in Cambridge, especially in the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, and how Dr Solomon Marcus Schiller-Szinessy, a Hungarian scholar with impressive classical as well as rabbinic credentials, was engaged to catalogue the Hebrew manuscripts in the University Library and to introduce the systematic teaching of post-biblical Hebrew to Cambridge students.

Taylor had been one of Schiller-Szinessy's pupils and, as a result, had been inspired to a life-long study of rabbinic texts. Other students, too, had gone on to become leading Old Testament scholars in the late nineteenth century.

The mishnaic tractate *'Avot*, replete with ethical maxims and



Professor Chris Dobson, the Master of St John's College, addressing the seminar

apothegms, was the subject of an address by Shimon Sharvit, Emeritus Professor of Hebrew and Semitic Languages at Bar-Ilan University, Israel. Discussing the beginnings of serious manuscript study of this work in the nineteenth century, he noted how the extensive halakhic and liturgical use of the tractate had led to corruptions in its transmission.

Taylor had recognised the significance of *'Avot* in the literary and linguistic history of the Mishnah and had compiled a detailed commentary, assisted in

his early editions by Schiller-Szinessy and, later, by Schechter, although himself familiar with this form of literature and able to offer meaningful insights into unusual words and phrases.

Professor Stefan Reif, former director of the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Unit, Emeritus Professor of Medieval Hebrew at Cambridge, and a Fellow of St John's, dwelled on the manner in which Taylor had related to other Hebrew scholars, demonstrating outstanding kindness and generosity, subsidising the cost of the lectureship in talmudic and rabbinic literature, co-operating in numerous academic projects and, above all, meeting the expenditure of Schechter's historic visit to Cairo.

It now seemed likely, said Professor Reif, that Taylor had contributed a large sum towards the acquisition of the Genizah texts. The Taylor-Schechter Collection not only testified to his munificence but also to his meticulous involvement in the early identification and publication of some of its most exciting finds.

Taylor's career at St John's occupied the attention of another Fellow of St John's, Dr Andrew Macintosh, who served as President of the College and taught Hebrew in the Faculty of Divinity for many years.

Acknowledging the role played by Taylor, an Anglican priest with a

Unravelling a

Was David always at the centre of medieval rabbinic benedictions that surrounded the reading of passages from the Book of Psalms? In preparing a lengthy article shortly to appear in *Yearbook 2008* of the series "Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature," I encountered some intriguing Genizah evidence.

In the standard prayer texts that had succeeded the earlier Babylonian and Palestinian versions by about the twelfth century, the recitation of a block of psalms in the morning service is concluded with a benediction. The text, which begins שנתבך שמוך לעד מלכנו ("May your name be acclaimed forever, our King"), describes God as worthy of numerous eternal praises.

Such praises are couched in the usual rabbinic vocabulary, but, in contrast to the textual situation in the benediction that introduces the same block of psalms (ברוך שמוך), there is no direct mention

here of David or of the psalms in the body of the benediction.

The concluding formula has the usual first three words, ברוך אתה ה' ("You are blessed"), followed by a description of God as recipient of praise and thanks, who "chooses melodious hymns" (הבוחור בשירי זמרה) and whose existence is eternal.

The uniformity among the rites indicates that they owed this benediction to the global influence of the Babylonian *ge'onim* during the ninth to eleventh centuries.

The Genizah texts testify that some of the Jews who fled the land of Israel during the Crusades included the שנתבך שמוך benediction in their prayer-books, in much the same form, sometimes with the addition of ברוך אלהינו מלך העולם after ברוך אתה ה' (Fleischer, *Eretz-Israel*, 266 and 290; T-S 8H11.13). What is more interesting is that an earlier version used by these Jews is preserved in a brief format, similar



Professor Raphael Loewe (foreground), who marked the seventieth anniversary of his arrival at St John's College to study Classics

to Charles Taylor

conservative love of tradition and learning, Dr Macintosh praised his “open mind” and “cautious courtesy” in enabling religious nonconformists, such as Roman Catholics and Jews, to become members of the University through a change in its regulations.

On a more personal level, he described the young Taylor’s rowing and mountaineering skills; his expertise in Hebrew – acquired in middle age; and his marriage, in later life, to the young Margaret Dillon, who was to continue calling him “my Master” throughout her 54 years of widowhood.

Another Johnian Fellow, Peter Johnstone, Professor of the Foundations of Mathematics at Cambridge, related how Taylor had continued to publish in the field of mathematics throughout his career.

He had produced several editions of text-books on conics, had apparently been the first to refer to the subject in that way rather than as “conic sections”, and had presented mathematical papers to learned societies. Although most of these addresses were in the realm of clarifying Euclidian geometry, he had in his later work also begun to demonstrate a more analytical approach.

Dealing with the Genizah’s contribution to the history of medicine, Dr Efraim Lev, of the University of Haifa, described his

own addition of some 200 items to the catalogue prepared by the late Dr Haskell Isaacs, bringing the total number to 1,800. Details had been forthcoming of the drugs used and of those who traded in them, together with lists of the physicians and pharmacists mentioned.

Dr Lev said that he had discovered a range of text-books – some previously unknown – employed by these specialists. Through them he had been able to analyse examples of common prescriptions, both in Hebrew script and in Arabic, and had distinguished between texts relating to practical materia medica and others concerned with medical theory.

Describing the Genizah texts as “a rich source of data for Arabic and Islamic studies”, Dr Esther-Miriam Wagner regretted that the attention paid to them came mainly from Jewish scholars rather than from Muslim scholars as well.

Working as a Research Associate in the Taylor-Schechter Unit at Cambridge University Library, she had encountered a wide variety of fragments that were not only parts of sacred literature, both Muslim and Jewish, but also filled many gaps in our knowledge of more mundane fields.

The Karaite use of Arabic was an intriguing topic, and the dialect of Arabic reflected in the Judaeo-



Dr Janet Soskice lecturing on Mrs Lewis and Mrs Gibson

Arabic used by the Jewish communities of the Genizah period, especially around the twelfth century, was of major importance towards understanding the development of vernacular, as against Qur’anic, Arabic.

The final paper on the significance of the Taylor-Schechter Collection was given by Professor Gideon Bohak, head of the Department of Jewish Philosophy and Religious Studies at Tel Aviv University, and a specialist in the field of Jewish magic.

Professor Bohak demonstrated how much easier it was for the researcher to deal with conserved Genizah materials, in specific locations and with clear classmarks, than to struggle with artefacts – such as Babylonian incantation bowls – which often had dubious origins and questionable ownership.

He explained the trade in amulets, the historical continuity of magical traditions, and the degree to which this kind of material illuminated social history, cross-cultural borrowings, and the struggle between popular and authoritative religiosity.

In the concluding section of the seminar, the current head of the Genizah Research Unit, Dr Ben Outhwaite, said that both the Unit and the University Library were keen to find the funding necessary to continue ongoing projects and undertake new ones. He referred particularly to the most recent project – the newly loaned Mosseri Collection – and to its specific problems of conservation.

Updating the gathering on another exciting project, Dr Outhwaite stated that funding of £1 million had been promised by the Friedberg Genizah Project of New York to ensure that, within three years, every Cambridge Genizah fragment would be

Friedberg aid for catalogue

The Genizah Research Unit acknowledges with thanks the ongoing support of the Friedberg Genizah Project in funding the digitisation of the Collection, as well as in giving more than £22,000 for cataloguing and research in the first half of this academic year.

Major funding was also received from the Arts and Humanities Research Council of the UK.

We are grateful for substantial assistance from the Cyril & Betty Stein Charitable Trust (£1000); the Manifold Trust (£300); Michael Rose (£250); Mrs H. E. Alexander MBE, FRSA (£200); Mrs Miriam Shenkin (£200); the Society for Old Testament Study (£200); the Williams Family Charitable Trust (£200); and £100 each from Rose Leigh and the Harry and Gertrude Landy Charitable Trust.

We also express our warmest thanks for the many smaller or anonymous donations lately received.

digitally scanned and made available online both by Friedberg and by Cambridge University Library.

Summarising the proceedings, Professor Reif said that, as a result of the seminar – and especially its focus on the life and work of Charles Taylor – “scholars should promote a love of learning and an industrious enthusiasm for explaining its ramifications and publicising their findings. They should encourage co-operative research, rise above their religious and national differences, and leave a legacy significant enough to ensure the future continuity of their scholarship.”

Extending thanks to the Master and College for their generous support, to the lecturers for their contributions, and to the audience for its participation, Professor Reif added the hope that it might be possible, as a tribute to Taylor and with a Johnian connection, to raise sufficient funds to endow another research post in the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit.

Davidic enigma

to שְׁתַּבַּח שִׁמְךָ in its function and content.

This short formula begins with the words הַלְלוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְכָל מַעֲשֵׂיךָ (“Let all those whom you have created praise you, Lord, our God”), and the overall message is of God being worthily praised. There are, however, two important respects in which it differs from שְׁתַּבַּח שִׁמְךָ.

In their simplest form, the final words of the benediction describe God as recipient of praise, sometimes by way of a single participle המְשֻׁבַּח (“acclaimed”). More arrestingly, the first phrase, noting the praise offered by those whom God has created, is paralleled by a second phrase, inviting those devoted to God to bless his name יְשִׁי עֲבָדְךָ דָוִד בֶּן יִשִׁי עֲבָדְךָ.

The first word could mean “together with,” or “for,” or “beyond,” or “through,” and the remainder clearly alludes to the “songs of David, son of Jesse, your

servant” (Add.3160.3; T-S H2.115 and 123).

This יהללוך passage has survived in the concluding paragraph of the selection of Psalms 113–18 known as Hallel and widely used on various major and minor festivals, including the Passover Seder service. In that formulation, there is a greater plethora of words describing the praise of God; but, more to the point here, there is no mention whatever of David or his songs.

The Jewish communities of the early Middle Ages were apparently uncertain about how central David should be in such contexts. Were some of them interested in polemicising against the Karaites’ exclusive use of the Davidic psalms for their liturgy by themselves playing down the role of the “sweet singer of Israel”?

STEFAN C. REIF

Emeritus Professor of Medieval Hebrew, Project Consultant, Cambridge University Library

Recasting the Rambam

Professor Joel Kraemer has long been a celebrated historian of Islamic thought and a scholar of mediaeval Jewish philosophy. His articles on Maimonides contain acute observations which contextualise the *Guide for the Perplexed* and show how to interpret it against the wider background often neglected by those who write or speak about the "Great Eagle".

Kraemer's new book, *Maimonides: The Life and World of One of Civilization's Greatest Minds*, published by Doubleday, 2008 (ISBN 978-0-385-51199-5) is a complete biography by an historian accomplished in all the languages needed to read the pertinent primary sources.

As an established Genizah scholar, Kraemer brings to the work a deep knowledge of manuscripts that have come to light relatively recently. He manages throughout to evoke the ambience of Maimonides' life, from his earliest years in Cordoba through the heights of his fame in Egypt, by rich descriptions of the physical environment and explanations of the surrounding intellectual world.

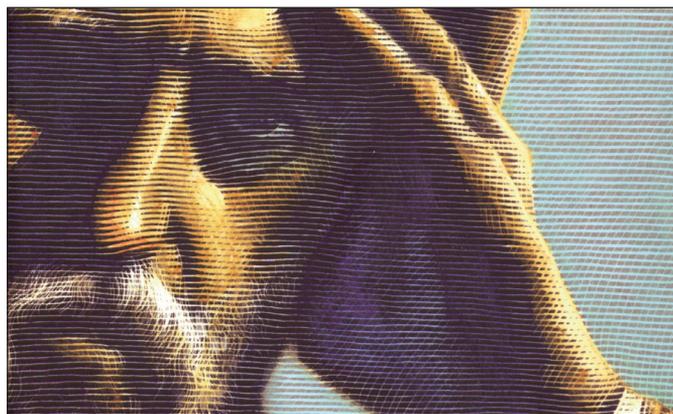
Details are fleshed out through accounts of the practices of the time, and Maimonides' rulings are tied to concrete events in order to consolidate the portraits of the societies concerned.

One of book's most striking features is the way Kraemer readily upholds unpopular views if the evidence supports them. The Rambam's reported conversion to Islam in Morocco, and the nature of his position as "head of the Jews" in Egypt, are two notable examples that have been subject to considerable debate over the years.

Kraemer accepts the view that Maimonides did indeed live as a crypto-Jew under Almohad rule.

While many details and arguments in this biography will be of particular benefit to scholars, Kraemer's clarity and style will additionally appeal to a wider audience. At last, there is a book encompassing the whole of the Rambam's life that deserves its place alongside the great biographies of other world figures.

DANIEL DAVIES
Research Associate



Farewell to Friedrich

Continued from page 1
in him an immense talent, appreciated his prodigious command of languages (living and dead), and discerned, through Friedrich's rare combination of learning and discipline, his eminent suitability for the demanding task of deciphering countless faded, tattered and stained Genizah manuscripts.

For ten years, Friedrich pored over Genizah fragments. Initially working with Dr Avi Shivtiel, he identified nearly 10,000 Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic fragments from the New Series, published in 2006 as *Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections: Taylor-Schechter New Series*.

Thereafter, he set to describing the considerably more demanding Judaeo-Arabic texts in the Additional Series and, most recently, identifying Hebrew and Aramaic documentary manuscripts. He had a remarkable knack for wringing information out of the most scrappy fragments, refusing to describe them as "unidentified" until he had exhausted every possibility of identifying them.

Even manuscripts possessing no more than a single legible word would very often be assigned to a specific textual genre, and, over the years, Friedrich's skill at identification became legendary. Although employed primarily to catalogue, and to produce a certain number of descriptions day in, day out, this did not prevent him from recognising the significance of many of the items he identified.

In addition to lecturing in the Faculty of Asian and Middle-Eastern Studies, and speaking regularly at conferences, he published a number of academic papers, highlighting some of the rarer texts – in particular, Samaritan and Christian texts – one would not expect to turn up in a Jewish archive.

The text he found most fascinating was a previously unknown commentary on Hosea (though originally part of a commentary on the entire "Twelve"), written by a nameless Karaite. In typical fashion, he recognised its scattered remains – hundreds of fragments – throughout the T-S Collection and meticulously pieced them together to re-create the text.

Since he was unable to complete this study before his death, his colleague Professor Geoffrey Khan at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies has undertaken to finalise it and see it through to publication. Other friends and colleagues from around the world will also ensure that his prodigious academic output sees the light of day.

Within the Genizah Unit, and in the wider world of the University Library, Friedrich was recognised as an ever-helpful colleague, an always cheery companion, and a true gentleman. His boundless energy and optimistic outlook were constantly remarked upon, while there was often speculation over his age – one of the few subjects he refused to discuss.

His premature death has come as a great shock, and we all feel a deep sense of loss, both of a talented colleague and a friend. He is survived by his widow Elizabeth, and their nine-year-old twins, Daniel and Benjamin.

Friedrich is buried in the Cheshunt Jewish Cemetery at Bulls Cross Ride, Hainault.

BEN OUTHWAITE
Head of Genizah Research Unit

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 email 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 Lauffer Family Charitable Trust has once again generously provided a grant to the T-S Genizah Research Unit to help meet the costs of producing this issue of *Genizah Fragments*. Its kind assistance comes in memory of David Lauffer, who recognised the Genizah's importance for the study of Jewish history, and was an enthusiastic supporter of the Unit.