

# GENIZAH FRAGMENTS

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

## Lost culture excavated

A "Genizah Symposium" was recently held at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts of the University of East Anglia as one of the events surrounding the exhibition, "A Lost Culture – Genizah: The Archaeology of German Village Jews".

The seminar focused on the discovery, rescue and study of unique collections of Jewish material. Central to the discussion was an examination of how lessons learned in the case of one set of precious documents and artefacts could be more widely applied and how funding for such vital projects could be harnessed in the future.

Mrs Evelyn Friedlander, Director of the Hidden Legacy Foundation in London, described how she had discovered the German-Jewish material that was on display and her plans for a permanent exhibition that would testify to the literacy of poor Jewish villagers in Franconia in the early modern period.

The range and importance of the Cambridge Genizah fragments were demonstrated by Dr Stefan Reif, Director of the Genizah Research Unit, who used slides to illustrate how the archive was amassed, discovered, conserved and researched.

The remarkable vicissitudes of Jewish communal archives in Russia, particularly over the past 100 years, were outlined by Dr John Klier, of University College, London. The discoveries being made, he said, were destined to be the subject of intensive scholarly activity over a long period.

Leading the discussion was Dr Derek Gillman, Keeper of the Sainsbury Collection. Arrangements for the symposium were made by Dr Veronica Sekules, the Centre's Education Officer.

The editorial board of the widely used and highly respected bibliographical periodical, *Index of Articles on Jewish Studies (RAMBI)*, published annually at the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem, has agreed to index scholarly articles that appear in *Genizah Fragments*. The relevant items have already been identified in Nos. 1–25 of *GF* and twenty-nine will be noted in a forthcoming issue of *RAMBI*.



Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks discussing a Genizah fragment with Dr Meira Polliack of the Taylor-Schechter Unit

## Chief Rabbi views Library treasures

Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth since 1991, visited the University Library while in Cambridge to receive the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity.

Author of a number of challenging books on modern Jewish thought, Cambridge graduate in philosophy and former Principal of Jews' College, Chief Rabbi Sacks expressed great interest in the exhibition of Genizah frag-

ments, Hebrew codices and Bible volumes arranged for him by Genizah Unit staff and by the Rev Alan Jesson, Bible Society Librarian.

After tea with the University Librarian, Dr Frederick Ratcliffe, Professor and Mrs Raphael Loewe and senior Library staff, Rabbi Sacks was shown around the Library, including its impressive new extensions, before making his way to the Faculty of Divinity.

Presenting the Chief Rabbi for his honorary degree, the University Orator, Dr James Diggle, referred to the University's well-established link with Judaic studies and to the "priceless accumulation of Hebrew manuscript material known as the Genizah collection, counted among the literary treasures of our Library."

## Record aid for Unit

Cambridge University's support for the Genizah Research Unit in the financial year ended 31 July was supplemented by a record sum of £73,500 from outside sources.

Further instalments of major grants have been received since April from the Wellcome Trust (£9,983) and the British Academy (£7,500), while important assistance has come from the Harbour Charitable Trust (£2,500), the American Friends of Cambridge University (£1,469), Jewish Memorial Council (£1,250), Sobell Fund (£1,250), and Mr Cyril Stein, Chairman of the Ladbrooke Group plc (£1,000).

Major gifts have also been made by Mr and Mrs David Lauffer (£600), Mr Joe Dwek (£500), Mr Felix Posen (£500), and Mrs Audrey Burton (£400).

Welcome contributions have again come from Mr A. S. Oppenheimer (£289), the Porter Foundation (£265), Mr T. H. Reitman (£250), and Mrs Chinita Abrahams-Curiel (£250).

The Unit is grateful to Mr Michael Rose (£200), Mr S. W. Laufer (£180), Mr Cesare D. S. Sacerdoti (£150), and Mr Geoffrey Ognall (£125).

Among other generous supporters have been Mr Stephen Barclay (£100), Mr Harold Joels (£100), Mr David Pinto

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Editorial: page 3

# Schechters relive Genizah legend

From early childhood, I had heard the legend of how my great-grandfather, Solomon Schechter, brought a treasure trove of manuscripts, fragments and documents from Egypt to Cambridge that would enlighten generations of scholars as to the traditions – and variations on traditions – of the Jewish people.

Although my parents and most of my siblings had visited the Genizah Research Unit in the course of their travels, I had delayed such a visit. I resisted the urge to visit the Taylor-Schechter Collection until I felt competent to read and understand these texts in the original Hebrew or Aramaic, rather than in the fine translations available in the writings of S. D. Goitein, G. D. Cohen, L. Ginzberg and S. Lieberman.

My reluctance was rooted in a respect for the uniqueness of the documents and for the challenge that confronts those who endeavour to study Genizah texts in a professional manner.

Thus I delayed until two years of teaching Jewish history and thought had given me the confidence to face the very texts that had been at the core of my rabbinical education at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York.

Last spring, when my wife and professional partner at our New Jersey Conservative congregation, Erica Lippitz – a graduate of the Cantor's Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary – visited

England, we devoted a day to visiting Cambridge to gain a better understanding of how the Schechter family had developed, and to see the Collection in person. Thanks to the indefatigable efforts of Dr Stefan Reif, we feasted our eyes and souls.

Suddenly, the emendations and variations in matters of liturgy about which we teach in our local classes were clearly exemplified by lines crossed through and texts substituted in a prayer-book from the fourteenth century.

The variations on the stories of Moses' death, which illustrate developing Jewish theologies concerning the after-life (and are often a subject of debate in our classes on communal ritual), were plainly legible in a ninth-tenth-century manuscript of *Devarim Rabbah*.

The varieties of liturgical poetry posed a wonderful puzzle for me to solve that afternoon as I suddenly sensed how truncated our inherited liturgy has become for the Days of Awe.

The growth of new ideas concerning the roots and expression of redemption as understood in the Palestinian Talmud were easily read from a twelfth-century manuscript of *Pesahim* – far more readily than from the facsimiles I had studied in Professor B. Bokser's course on the origins of the Seder.

Our puzzlement at the appearance of Judaeo-Arabic and Yemenite documents gave way to



Cantor Erica Lippitz and Rabbi John Schechter reading an 1897 letter from Dr Solomon Schechter

amazement at the richness of expression in these newly available sources.

Every Melinex-enclosed page sparked in me a wish to be not merely a simple bearer and purveyor of these texts, but also a cautious and knowledgeable interpreter of them.

My experience as both a congregational teacher and an instructor to the leadership of American Jewish federations, through my work with CLAL (the National Centre for Jewish Learning and Leadership), has convinced me that the ability to inspire confidence in the process of learning about our civilisation must be based on firm scholarship and committed preparation. Otherwise, our students live only in the perpetual "now", missing the guidance offered by the vastness of the Judaic literary tradition.

Our afternoon's reading tour gave way to a late tea with Dr

Reif, at which we touched on the religious and political propensities of the earlier generations of Schechters and their effects on us. What a joy to trace these patterns with a scholar who also has a lively human side to his interest in manuscripts and the people who study them!

We shall become regular supporters of the Genizah Research Unit not merely because of the strong impression made on us and the energising boost given to our modest teaching efforts by seeing the Collection and listening to Stefan Reif.

Rather, we do so in support of the pursuit of knowledge that this unique collection engenders, and because its study enlarges the base of Jewish culture and the Judaic contribution to civilisation.

**JOHN S. SCHECHTER**  
with **ERICA J. LIPPITZ**  
*Rabbi and Cantor of*  
*Oheb Shalom Congregation,*  
*South Orange, New Jersey, USA*

If you would like to receive *Genizah Fragments* regularly, to enquire about the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Collection, or to know how you may assist with its preservation and study, please write to: Dr S. C. Reif, Director 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 (0223) 333160.

Readers not already supporting the Unit are asked to help ensure the continuity of this publication by making a small, regular gift. The sum of £3 (UK) or \$8 (abroad) is suggested; payment may be made to Cambridge or to the American Friends.

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

In the USA, all contributions may be directed to the president of the American Friends of Cambridge University (USA/Canada), Mr Stephen C. Price, at P.O. Box 7070, Arlington, Virginia 22207, USA.

Transfers of such funds are regularly made from the USA.

The AFCU is recognized by the IRS as a charitable organization and contributions are legally deductible for United States income tax purposes. They are similarly deductible in Canada even if made directly to Cambridge.

## How you can help the T-S Genizah Unit

## Syndicate tribute to Unit's work

The Annual Report of the Cambridge University Library Syndicate for 1991-92, published with the approval of the University's General Board in the *University Reporter* of 27 April 1993, has again paid tribute to the international importance of the Taylor-Schechter Unit and its publications.

"The Genizah Research Unit [it stated] continued to make an important contribution to Hebrew scholarship. Highlights were the publication of *Genizah Research after Ninety Years*, by J. Blau and S. C. Reif, and M. L. Klein's *Targumic Manuscripts*, both submitted to the publishers last year.

"Income from Foundations and friends was in excess of £37,000

and the Library is deeply grateful to all involved.

"Visiting scholars to the Unit came from many parts of the world and reflected the world-wide circulation of the Unit's newsletter, *Genizah Fragments*. Hardly any exhibition with a Jewish theme takes place anywhere without requests to borrow from the Collection."

At the last meeting to be chaired by Professor Derek Brewer before his retirement, the Unit's Steering Committee, comprising representatives of the University Library and the Faculty of Oriental Studies, warmly thanked him for the efficient and enthusiastic manner in which he had conducted their business since 1978.

## Excited and enthralled

Dvora Ben-David, the recently appointed Counsellor for Cultural Affairs at the Israeli Embassy in London, visited the Genizah Unit together with Dr Risa Domb, Lecturer in Modern Hebrew at the Faculty of Oriental Studies in the University of Cambridge. She was shown around the Library, and introduced to the most exciting items in the Genizah Collection, by Dr Stefan Reif (picture, page 4).

Ms Ben-David was particularly interested in fragments relating to the twelfth-century convert to Judaism, Obadiah the Proselyte (formerly the Christian priest, John Oppidans), and the Jewish liturgical music of which he left "scores". She was also enthralled – as are so many visitors – by manuscripts in the hand of Moses Maimonides himself (1135 or 1138–1204).

Another distinguished visitor was Mrs Phyllis Lambert, who recently directed the Canadian Centre for Architecture's project to restore the Ben-Ezra Synagogue in Cairo, original home of the Genizah texts.

Mrs Lambert is editing a volume devoted to that synagogue and was anxious to examine manuscripts relating to its history. She also discussed with Dr Reif the possibility of identifying and photographing various items in the Library of relevance to the synagogue for inclusion in the volume.

Professor Emanuel Marx, an anthropologist from Tel Aviv University and currently Director of the Israeli Academic Centre in Cairo, was another recent visitor. He was especially interested in the conservation, microfilming and cataloguing of Genizah material



Mrs Phyllis Lambert at work in the T-S Genizah Unit

## Bright prospects for research

Some academics are so absorbed in their research that they cannot conceive of anyone who may be totally unacquainted with its significance. Such introversion can lead to a degree of complacency about the survival of their subject, and a misplaced confidence in its future funding from the public purse.

Having to attract a substantial proportion of its budget from sources outside the University of Cambridge, the Genizah Research Unit has to remain consistently aware of the need to interest the wider world in its activities. There is therefore little prospect of its resting on its laurels, in optimistic expectation of support, or of its confidently presupposing that popular and scholarly interest in its activities will be maintained.

Yet, after some twenty years, one may perhaps be forgiven for being at least a trifle sanguine about the future, in the light of a number of promising developments currently being observed.

The remarkable discover-

ies made among the Genizah texts have inspired new expeditions to locate similar material in other locations, dating from different periods.

Ephemera from the Jewish village life of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century southern Germany have been uncovered and exhibited. A systematic search in Italy has revealed the existence of thousands of leaves from Hebrew manuscripts – of between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries – that were cannibalised by non-Jews for use in bindings and as wrappers.

The recent upheavals in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and other East European states, now again independent, have given scholars access to many nineteenth-century records of Ashkenazi Jews long thought lost forever.

Conservation, microfilming and cataloguing projects are now no longer the exception, and other collections, particularly from the Genizah, are receiving attention at various institutions in Europe, America and Israel.

Numerous lectures at the recent World Congress of Jewish Studies, held in Jerusalem, focused directly on Cairo Genizah material; there were, indeed, few areas in which its importance did not receive at least some attention. Researchers from the Cambridge Unit were involved in chairing meetings, participating in plenary sessions, and delivering lectures.

Here in Cambridge, the departure of Dr Geoffrey Khan to full-time duties in the Faculty of Oriental Studies will not be permitted to slow down progress. With the assistance of new and major awards from the British Academy, St John's College, Cambridge, and the American Friends of Cambridge University, as well as other anonymous foundations, full-time appointments are assured for Dr Colin Baker and Dr Meira Polliack (awarded her doctorate a few weeks ago for a dissertation on Karaite Bible studies in the early Middle Ages).

STEFAN C. REIF

Director, Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit

and the arrangement of the *Genizah Series* of publications.

The Genizah Unit's connections with the pioneers of Genizah research continued through visits by members of the Schechter and Wertheimer families. Professor Israel Schechter, grandson of Solomon Schechter's twin brother, Israel, came with his wife, Dr Bilha Schechter, from the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot; and Mrs Mina Evron, great-granddaughter of Israel Schechter, also visited.

It was Rabbi Solomon Aaron Wertheimer of Jerusalem who sold Genizah fragments to Cambridge University Library before Schechter's famous trip to Cairo in 1896–97. His great-grandson, Shelomo Leshem, together with his wife and family, came to the Library to see some of the Genizah treasures.

Other recent guests included Bar-Ilan University Librarian, Mr Yaakov Aronson, and Jews' College Librarian, Mr Ezra Kahn, as well as the Rev Canon John W. Rogerson, Professor and Head of the Department of Biblical Studies at the University of Sheffield, and Professor Joseph Dan, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

## Mysticism and magic

A recent book by Lawrence Schiffman and Michael Swartz, *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts from the Cairo Genizah: Selected Texts from Taylor-Schechter Box K1* (Sheffield, 1992), contains important information about the Cambridge Genizah Collection's contribution to our understanding of Jewish magic.

Twentieth-century scholarship, unlike its nineteenth-century predecessor, has come to appreciate that Jewish religious practice in the Middle Ages was not wholly a matter of systematic thought, codified ritual and authoritative literature.

Particularly as the result of a new respect for the roles of mysticism and magic, a wider understanding of the spiritual dimensions of mediaeval Judaism has become possible. Close study of the rich sources emanating from the Cairo Genizah has provided insights into more popular forms of religiosity.

This study of sixteen Cambridge Genizah fragments

(with twenty plates) demonstrates clearly, in both its introduction and its annotated transcriptions, translations and descriptions of texts, how Oriental Jews of 1,000 years ago utilised the services of scribes to produce carefully formulated incantations that were designed, by magical means, to bring success, health, love or disaster.

Drawing heavily on an ancient tradition of Palestinian folklore and magic, as well as on biblical and rabbinic material, such manuscripts are shown to have employed a variety of texts, names and symbols to achieve the required effect. Parallels existed in the incantation bowls emanating from Jewish Babylonia.

Taken together with ongoing studies in Israel and Europe being conducted by Joseph Naveh, Shaul Shaked and Peter Schäfer, this welcome monograph, by two American scholars, records the "voices of magical practitioners" and points the way to further research.

# Witnesses to tradition

It was a privilege to spend part of my sabbatical last summer as a visiting scholar at Cambridge University Library.

My task was to research the Genizah fragments of vocalised manuscripts from important works of talmudic literature, including the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds, Alfasi's digest of the Talmud (*Rif*), *Sefer Halakhot Pesuqot*, *Sefer Halakhot Gedolot*, and the commentary of the eleventh century North African scholar, Rabbenu Hananel ben Hushiel.

My research supplements Morag's *Vocalised Talmudic Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections*, published by Cambridge University Press for Cambridge University Library in 1988 (*Genizah Series*, 4), which examines the fragments of talmudic literature in the Old Series of the Taylor-Schechter Collection.

Initially, the purpose of my research was to collate all the vocalisations in the fragments of the New Series, but I later decided to give some attention to the Additional Series too.

It is well known that only a few talmudic manuscripts are vocalised, even in part. Examples of vocalised Hebrew and Aramaic words in this literature are very important, therefore, since they are a witness to older traditions of language in use in the Jewish communities of the past which later disappeared almost everywhere. Only a few survive in the Yemenite reading system.

It is also important to note the accentuation signs that occur in a few fragments, since talmudic manuscripts that possess accentuation signs are also rare.

My work was facilitated by the existence of brief descriptions of Genizah fragments in the New Series prepared by Professor Jacob Sussmann and Dr Robert Brody, of the Department of Talmud at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. These

lists deal with some 900 fragments of talmudic literature.

Due to their poor physical condition, the fragments have been read systematically at least twice in an attempt to extract the vocalisation. Vocalisations have been found in 200 fragments; in some only a few letters are vocalised, especially those letters that had been wrongly copied by the scribe.

While collating the vocalised material, I identified a few fragments belonging to one codex but scattered throughout various boxes. Some of them are from the Old Series: for example, the continuation of T-S F1(2).93 is to be found in T-S NS 329.125.

Having completed the collation of the material in the New Series, I moved on to examine a section of the Additional Series (sorted in 1974) where I identified another 100 vocalised fragments of talmudic literature.

While examining the fragments of the Additional Series, I realised how important it was during the conservation process to preserve the minute pieces of leaves that have been placed together at the end of every binder.

On one occasion I was able to complete a word in an old, mutilated leaf. The word is now found in a minute piece of which the classmark is T-S AS 81.160, part of a manuscript leaf of *Sefer Halakhot Gedolot* written on vellum that had been torn in two. The classmarks are T-S AS 81.118 and T-S AS 81.119.

There can be no doubt that publication of all the vocalised material from talmudic literature will further our knowledge of Babylonian Aramaic in talmudic and geonic times. Although much progress has recently been made, especially by Professor Shelomo Morag and myself, there are still gaps in our understanding of the language and its history.

YECHIEL KARA

Lecturer in Hebrew Language  
at the University of Haifa



Ms Dvora Ben-David (right), Counsellor for Cultural Affairs at the Israeli Embassy in London, with Dr Stefan Reif and Modern Hebrew lecturer Dr Risa Domb during a visit to the Cambridge University Library (report, page 3)

## Ben-Ezra restoration

Another report on the reconstruction of the Ben-Ezra Synagogue, by Jabar Sarrāg Nabawī, appeared in Arabic in the *Bulletin of the Israeli Academic Center in Cairo*, No. 16 (May, 1992), pages 81-84. The following is an extract, translated into English by Dr Geoffrey Khan:

The original structure of the synagogue consisted of two rows of marble columns that divided the main hall into three areas, the

middle being the largest; this was surmounted by a skylight. The seats of the worshippers were arranged around the central dais of the prayer leader.

The ark was in the eastern wall, which faced Jerusalem. The women's gallery was on the upper floor. The walls were decorated with frescoes, and the windows and ceilings were adorned by decorations of Islamic design.

The recent restoration work covered all parts of the synagogue, as well as the walls and surrounding pathways. New tiles were added to the roof. Lotus flower decorations were placed along the tops of the walls.

Guttering was placed on the roof to ensure proper drainage of rain-water. The external walls were painted in the original colour.

The stone staircases and wooden grills were rebuilt, and repairs were carried out on doors and windows. The electrical appliances of the building were completely rewired. The broken marble tiles on the floor were replaced, and the marble bases of columns repaired.

The external walls and paths were also repaired, while the out-house on the south-western side of the synagogue was rebuilt and adorned with decorative work.

## Mosseri work is published

The recently published *Catalogue of the Jack Mosseri Collection* (Jewish National and University Library), edited by the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in collaboration with numerous specialists, describes, with extensive indices, the 5,600 "bibliographical units" of mediaeval Hebrew and Arabic Genizah material found by Mosseri in 1909, removed to Paris by his widow, and microfilmed there in 1970.

Mosseri (1884-1934) was a member of a wealthy and influential Egyptian Jewish family who had been inspired to search for additional mediaeval material in the Basātin cemetery and in Fuṣṭāṭ (Old Cairo) after Schechter's successful expedition of 1896-97.

Professor Israel Adler, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, as Director of the Jewish National and University Library, located the Mosseri Collection in Paris. The new catalogue includes an introduction by him describing its history and importance.

## Record aid for Unit

Continued from page 1  
(£100), Mr Maurice Khalatschi (£100), Mr E. M. Rosenbluth (£100), Mr Stephen Rubin (£100), and Mrs Miriam Shenkin (£100).

Particularly welcome among the American contributions are those of the Joseph Meyerhoff Fund (\$2,000) and Mrs Anne Schechter Hertzberg (\$100), in memory of Jeanne and Morris Schechter.

Other smaller donations and

anonymous gifts have amounted to £5,435 and are much appreciated. A seminar on the effect of Genizah research on Hebrew Bible study was arranged by Barbara Green and resulted in new support.

Contributors are reminded that all gifts should be made payable to the University of Cambridge and sent to the Director of the Genizah Research Unit at Cambridge University Library.

### IN NEXT ISSUE

New descriptions of  
Byzantine material

Targumic fragment  
on circumcision

History of geonic codes