

# GENIZAH FRAGMENTS

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



## British Academy awards £15,000

The T-S Genizah Research Unit has received a further indication of the high esteem in which it is held by leading scholars in this country and abroad.

Responding to an internationally endorsed application from the Unit's director, Dr Stefan Reif, the British Academy has approved an award of £15,000 for the academic year 1992-93 to assist the description of material written in Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic in the Old Series of Cambridge University Library's Taylor-Schechter Collection.

Of 7,000 such fragments, more than half have already received attention through the Unit's other research and publication programmes. The current project

aims to complete the analysis within the next two years.

Although some of the fragments derive from Muslim sources, most reflect the wide interests of the Jewish community of Egypt and neighbouring countries between the tenth and thirteenth centuries.

Jewish scientists are represented by medicine, astrology and the calendar, while the work of Hebrew linguists and literati is exemplified by items exploring grammar, poetry, translation and commentary.

Philosophy, polemics and history indicate the interests of the contemporary intelligentsia; halakhic, liturgical and mystical tracts demonstrate the productivity and spirituality of the rabbinic mind; and everyday life – commercial, educational and social – is described in bills, letters and documents.

Three researchers in the T-S Unit will be closely involved in examining these remarkable testimonies to bygone ages. Dr Geoffrey Khan, Dr Colin Baker and Ms Meira Polliack will each bring a different expertise to their decipherment and assessment.

The cost of the project is expected to be in the region of £50,000 and it is hoped that the British Academy award will shortly be supplemented by other major contributions, thus ensuring its expeditious and successful conclusion.

Professor Michael Klein, Dean of the Hebrew Union College campus in Jerusalem (right), discussing his newly published "Targumic Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections" with Dr Stefan Reif

### SCHOLAR'S CONTROVERSIAL THEORY

## Firkovitch Collection 'not from Ben-Ezra'

A controversial theory about one of Russia's major collections of Jewish manuscripts has been put forward by the Hebrew University historian, Professor Menahem Ben-Sasson, in a recent issue of *Jewish Studies* (No.31, Jerusalem, 1991, pages 47-67).

He argues that, contrary to general belief, the Firkovitch Collection in the National (formerly Saltykov-Shchedrin) Library of Russia in St. Petersburg did not originate in the Ben-Ezra Synagogue in Cairo and was never part of its genizah.

Although full of material of great importance to mediaeval Jewish scholarship, the collection, brought to Russia by the Karaite leader, Abraham Firkovitch, some time after 1865, was acquired from Karaite synagogues and from dealers in antiquities in Egypt.

After studying the Firkovitch Collection in St. Petersburg, Ben-Sasson is convinced that a number of factors militate against

the accepted source identification.

Firkovitch was a Karaite and, as such, unlikely to be given access to the Rabbanite Ben-Ezra Synagogue; the physical state of the Firkovitch manuscripts is very different from that of material from the Cairo Genizah; the bulk of the contents are Karaite, not Rabbanite; and there is little historical documentation relating to the Rabbanite community.

Although some items in the Firkovitch Collection are closely associated with mediaeval manuscript material attributed to the Genizah source, this is probably because the Genizah archive itself did not emanate exclusively from the Ben-Ezra Synagogue.

All mediaeval Judaica from Egypt is important for the study of Jewish history, but there is clearly room for further research about precisely what came from where, and when, and about the degree to which it illumines dark corners of the overall picture.

## US rabbi in Schechter's footsteps

Rabbi John Schechter, great-grandson of Dr Solomon Schechter, accompanied by his wife, Erica Lippitz, recently visited Cambridge University Library and was shown the famous Genizah Collection presented to the University by his ancestor and by Dr Charles Taylor, Master of St. John's College.

Rabbi Schechter, grandson of Solomon's only son, Frank (who was born on the day that Schechter was appointed to his Cambridge post in 1890), is a son of Daniel and Sally Schechter, of Chicago. His wife is Cantor of the Oheb Shalom Synagogue in South Orange, New Jersey, where John is Assistant Rabbi, having recently

*Continued on page 4*

### ON OTHER PAGES

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| Genizah folk-tales in 'Arabian Nights' | 2 |
| The earliest known Sefer Torah         | 3 |
| Charitable trusts support T-S Unit     | 4 |
| Traveller's story of love and intrigue | 4 |

Editorial: page 3

# Cats, mice, thieves and heroes in 'Arabian Nights' Genizah tales

Precious material preserved in Genizah collections comprises not only all kinds of mediaeval Hebrew and Judaeo-Arabic literature, but also specimens of purely Arabic treatises. The authors of these may be Muslims or Christians.

In addition, there are many mediaeval Arabic tales and stories and a group of lengthy multi-volume romances of uncertain authorship, such as *Banū-Hilāl*, *'Antar* and *Beibars*.

This kind of literature is virtually identical with folklore, and some manuscripts are nothing more than the repositories of mediaeval folk-tales.

My interest in such manuscripts was aroused 30 years ago. As a student at Leningrad University, I wrote a paper about a Judaeo-Arabic manuscript of the *'Antar* romance. That manuscript had been discovered in the Firkovitch Collection by Dr Abraham Eliyahu Harkavy (1839–1919), but no one had written anything about it until my own modest work was published in Russian in *Brief Communications of the Institute of Asian Peoples* 86 (1965).

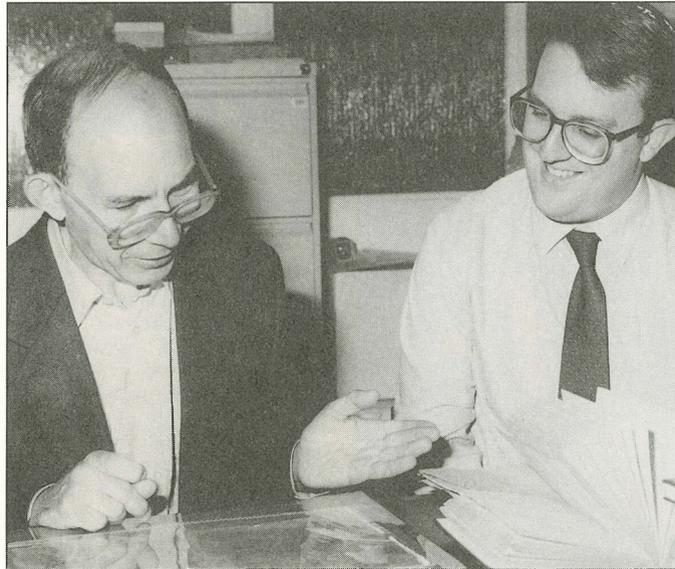
I was also fortunate enough to find two other manuscripts of the *'Antar* romance in the same collection housed at the Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg).

Between 1962 and 1965, I discovered there – and subsequently published – some unknown records of mediaeval Arabic tales about the golden gazelle and Abū 'l-Ḥasan the gardener, as well as poems that included the monologue of an Egyptian soldier.

While Professor Shelomo Dov Goitein (1900–1985) was in Leningrad on a short visit in June, 1965, he told me that he had seen many similar items in the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Collection. He helped me to contact Dr Henry Knopf, then custodian of the collection. Through him, I was able as early as 1968 to receive a microfilm of some fragments containing Arabic tales and stories, mostly in Hebrew characters.

Some years later, when Dr Stefan Reif had become director of the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit, I received more microfilms of this kind.

It was especially important for me to have supplementary fragments of two tales partly found in the Firkovitch collection: a tale in



Dr Victor Lebedev (left) and Dr Colin Baker examining one of the Arabic folk-tale manuscripts in the Cambridge Collections

verse about a war between cats and mice, and the story of a night-thief and a day-thief.

The first fragment (T-S Ar.6.12) may date from as early as the twelfth century, and the second (T-S Ar.6.24) belongs to the seventeenth century. Both are Judaeo-Arabic, with some Middle Arabic and Egyptian dialectal features.

Among the microfilmed matter, there was also a fifteenth-century Arabic fragment of the *Bishr* and *Hind* love-story (T-S Ar.52.158).

I realised that the study of all the relevant material in the Taylor-Schechter Collection needed a special trip to Cambridge and I tried for many years to arrange this. It became possible only in September, 1991, thanks to the efforts of Dr Reif and the sponsorship of the British Academy.

For two weeks, I examined many Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic items in the Taylor-Schechter Collection. A detailed study was not, of course, possible in such a short time, but I now have a better idea of the Arabic literary texts (especially popular literature) in Cambridge.

First, there are not only fragments. Of special interest is a complete Judaeo-Arabic volume of the *'Antar* romance (T-S Ar.13.3), written, I believe, early in the eighteenth century and part of a multi-volume (perhaps originally a complete) copy of this popular romance.

Other volumes of the same copy are to be found in the Firkovitch

Collection, the Günzburg Collection (Lenin Library, Moscow), and the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, and fragments are known at the Jewish Theological Seminary (New York), Annenberg Research Institute (Philadelphia), and Cambridge University Library (T-S Ar.52.154, T-S NS 90.31).

Also at Cambridge is part of a seventeenth-century Judaeo-Arabic manuscript of the *Arabian Nights* (T-S Ar.36.68), comprising *Nights* 168–170 and perhaps belonging to the same manuscript as some fragments in the Firkovitch Collection. There is also a Judaeo-Arabic fragment of a tale of a smith named Bāsim (T-S Ar.6.16), sometimes included in the *Arabian Nights*.

Some texts need special research for identification; for example, a seventeenth-century Judaeo-Arabic fragment of four folios (T-S Ar.52.155) mentions "Ḥasan Shūmān."

He was a well-known thief in Mameluk Cairo and became a hero of some stories, partly included in the *Arabian Nights*, partly independent of that brilliant encyclopaedia of tales. He also appeared in romances about other famous thieves of the same period, Aḥmad al-Danaf and 'Alī al-Zaybaq (Zibaq).

This fragment must be compared with numerous stories and lengthy romances. It is not impossible that we have here a unique part of an unknown romance or lengthy story about Ḥasan Shūmān.

Such thief stories were typical of Egyptian folk-literature from ancient times and are not a surprising find in the Genizah. In the same style is a story about a Muslim judge (*qāḍī*) and a sly man (*ju'aydi*) from the end of the seventeenth century (T-S NS 224.137).

Fairy tales were also very popular. One example is a sixteenth-century Judaeo-Arabic fragment (unfortunately only one leaf, partly damaged), with Aladdin as a hero, but quite different from other heroes of known tales with the same name (T-S AS 159.22).

By way of summary, and pending further investigation, it may be said that there is almost one complete volume and about 30 fragments (altogether about 200 folios) of Arabic romances, stories and tales in the Taylor-Schechter Collection.

There is also at least one fragment of such a kind in another part of the Cambridge Genizah Collections. It comprises two pages from a story about the Mameluk sultan, al-Malik al-Nāṣir ibn Qalā'ūn, and his vizier, Argun (Or.1081 2.7).

Different genres of folk literature are represented here: romances, stories and various kinds of tales (fairy tales, animal tales). In fact, it is a valuable source for the history of Arabic folklore.

All this material testifies to the great interest of Oriental Jews in Arabic literature and folklore. Jews in Egypt and other countries not only copied Arabic manuscripts, but also heard Arabic story-tellers. In addition, the records are of considerable importance for the history of Arabic dialects, especially of Egypt.

A specific project is required to locate all the records of Judaeo-Arabic mediaeval folklore and to publish them. It could be part of a wider programme of co-operation between Genizah scholars all over the world.

Such co-operative research, with plans for joint publication, has indeed already begun. I have tried to help Dr Haskell Isaacs and Dr Colin Baker in their research and I am grateful to them, as well as to the Genizah Research Unit in general and to the Manuscripts Reading Room staff, for all the assistance they have given me.

VICTOR LEBEDEV  
formerly of the Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library,  
St. Petersburg, Russia

# Future of Jewish studies under spotlight

At the annual gathering of the British Association for Jewish Studies, and at the committee meeting that preceded it, activists expressed concern at the lack of recognition being accorded their subject by the Universities Funding Council (UFC).

The research assessment exercise currently being conducted by the UFC will have a major effect on the funds allocated to research in the immediate future. Members of the Association warned that the tendency for Jewish studies to be represented not only in oriental departments, but also as an adjunct to theology, his-

tory, classics and law, might lead to their being overlooked or given insufficient independent attention.

Research being conducted in libraries, museums and other institutes not immediately associated with the teaching process might also fall between stools, both in recording its contribution to learning and in the allocation of resources to ensure its continuity.

In the light of these strictures, the Association has made formal representations to the UFC and has had some promising responses on subject assessment; but the issue of research on special collections

of Judaica remains a troublesome one.

Will library and museum posts continue to be open to scholars willing to devote themselves to promoting their special collections in the wider world of scholarship?

Does the tendency in some centres to engage technocrats and bureaucrats, rather than learned curators mean that members of faculties will ultimately have to take responsibility for the scholarly treatment of such collections?

Is any degree of funding to be channelled to the institutions that house such precious archives? If so, how are the

funds to be assessed and earmarked?

If no special funding is forthcoming, what is to become of the Hebrew and Jewish treasures in Britain, which are among the world's most outstanding and numerous?

While external fund-raising can assist with the problem, it cannot fully solve it. When plans are made for the future of academic Jewish studies, some practical attention must also be given to the fate of the manuscript riches without which such studies would be poorer.

STEFAN C. REIF  
Director, Taylor-Schechter  
Genizah Research Unit

## Earliest known Sefer Torah

The type of letter ornamentation identified by Ada Yardeni in one of the two Genizah scrolls discussed in the first part of this article (*Genizah Fragments* 23, p.2) already existed in documents written in calligraphic letters dating from the first Christian century, but in an unsystematic and irregular form.

When the lines were being reconstructed by her, the "open" and "closed" paragraphs (*parashah petuhah* and *parashah setumah*) had to be taken into consideration.

In fragment T-S NS 3.21, there are two points at which a paragraph begins. The first is at Genesis 17, where the MT (= Massoretic Text) has a *parashah setumah*, with the new section starting at the end of the line, following a lacuna.

In the scroll, the scribe has ended the *parashah* with the first word in the line. He has left the next line blank, but has started at the end rather than at the beginning of the third line, with the word *wayehi*.

Is this a *parashah petuhah* or a *parashah setumah*? Whatever the explanation, this method is not mentioned in the sources.

Another new paragraph preserved in this fragment is found in 17:15, where MT has a *parashah setumah* indicated by a blank space in the middle of the line.

Using a different definition of *parashah setumah* given by Maimonides many centuries later, the scribe has concluded the previous paragraph at the end of the line

and left a lacuna at the beginning of the next one.

In the second scroll, fragments from every book of the Torah are preserved and provide us with the earliest known *Sefer Torah*. It is also a large scroll, at least 57 cm high (upper margin: 7 cm; column: 40–42 cm; lower margin: 10 cm).

The columns are 7–8 cm wide, with a space of 2–2.5 cm between them. Each column has 49–50 written lines.

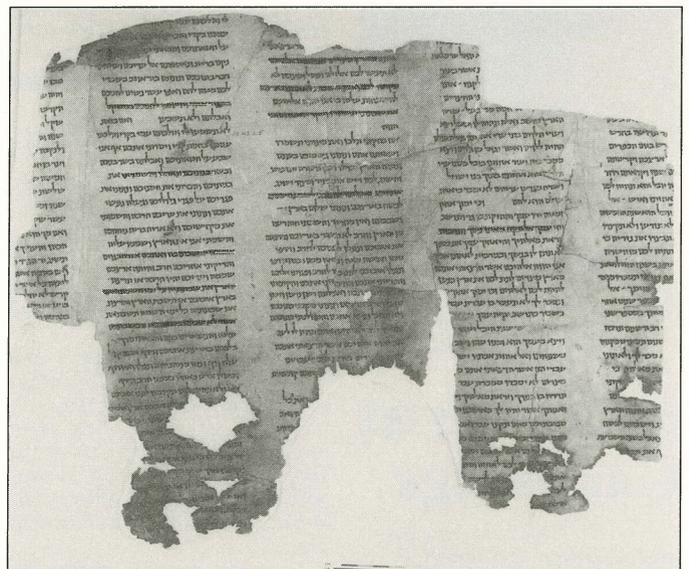
The whole scroll had 280–285 columns and was 28–30 metres long. It is written on fine parchment, apparently on the flesh-side.

From Genesis 25:7–26:3; 47:23–49:9 we have fragments of four columns (T-S NS 4.8, 2.16 + 3.1); from Exodus 32:29–34:23, a fragment of three columns (T-S NS 5.7 + 5.8); from Leviticus, fragments of 21 columns (T-S NS 4.11, 5.10, 3.14, 1.4, 6.17 + 1.5).

Since the whole of Leviticus had 39–40 columns, the text preserved, even in its fragmentary form, is extensive: 9:18–17:13; 23:4–27:13.

From Numbers, we have fragments of 15 columns (T-S NS 3.8, 1.20, 2.19, 2.20 + 1.6). These fragments are not so large and the text 3:31–11:10 is very fragmentary.

From Deuteronomy, fragments of two columns (T-S NS 3.10) provide the text of 11:9–12:1.



T-S NS 1.5, part of the Leviticus section of the scroll, described by Professor Sirat as the earliest known *Sefer Torah*

The text conforms to MT, with only three exceptions. In Genesis 49:8 (T-S NS 3.1), a *maw* is attached to the word *wayish-tahamu*. In Leviticus 11:21 (T-S NS 4.11), the insertion of the word *lo* has made a prohibition of the first phrase, an error caused by the occurrence of the same expression in nearby verses.

In Numbers 5:7 (T-S NS 2.19), the last letter of the word *hata'tam* is missing, probably an error caused by the presence of the same word in the preceding verse. The *setumot* and *petuhot* are as in MT and are marked in a similar way.

These two early scrolls are not the only ones in the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Collection. At

least one other dates from the first Islamic period.

We have also begun the codicological and palaeographical study of the numerous biblical codices from the Genizah. The great variety of size, lay-out and handwriting will ultimately enable us to draw a picture of the Bible as a book in the early Middle Ages.

Further details, especially about the "crowns" that she identified in the first scroll, appear in Ada Yardeni's article, "A New Fragment of a Genizah Genesis Scroll", in the *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division D, Volume 1 (Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 173–80, and in a paper by Michele Dukan and me, shortly to appear in *Vetus Testamentum*.

COLETTE SIRAT  
Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire  
des Textes, Paris, and Institute for  
Advanced Studies, Jerusalem



Haifa's Chief Rabbi Shear-Yashuv Cohen during his visit to the Genizah Unit

## Schechter at Cambridge

*Continued from page 1*  
graduated from the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York.

John is the first of his family to take an active interest in the rabbinate and in rabbinic literature since his famous ancestor – as president of the Seminary from 1902 until his death in 1915 – trained rabbis and published rabbinic texts.

During his visit, he expressed enthusiasm for the manuscripts that his great-grandfather had researched, as well as some of his letters, while his wife took a particular interest in the liturgical items.

John's brother, David, visited the Unit some years ago and recorded his impressions in *Genizah Fragments*, No.12, page 2.

Other recent visitors to the Unit included Professor M. El-Hawary, of the Hebrew department at Cairo's Ain Shams University; Rabbi Shear-Yashuv Cohen, Chief Rabbi of Haifa, and his wife, Naomi; and Dr Ronny Reich, of the Jerusalem Archaeological Authority.

# Aid from charitable trusts

Major financial support for the Unit's activities has come this year from the British Academy, for the Unit's Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic project; from the Wellcome Trust, for the medical catalogue; and from the American Friends of Cambridge University, for the general research programme.

The British Academy's award represents the first half of a £15,000 grant (see page 1), and the Wellcome Trust's contribution of £4,500 is the first towards the cost of preparing for publication the computerized descriptions compiled by Dr Haskell Isaacs and Dr Colin Baker.

Transatlantic assistance amounted to almost \$10,000, the main benefactors being the Georges Lucy Charitable and Educational Trust, which sent \$3,000 through its trustee, Mr

Seth E. Frank; the Aryeh and Raquel Rubin Philanthropic Fund, which contributed \$2,500 and promised support for future projects; and the Joseph Meyerhoff Fund, which awarded \$2,000 after correspondence between the Unit and its vice-president, Mr George B. Hess Jr., and executive vice-president, Dr Louis Kaplan.

The Unit has benefited from the generosity of the Sobell Fund (£1,250); the Corob Charitable Trust (£1,000); the Harbour Charitable Trust (£1,000); Mr Felix Posen (£1,000); and Mr Cyril Stein, chairman of the Ladbroke Group plc (£1,000).

In these financially trying times it is gratifying to acknowledge the continued support of Mr and Mrs David Lauffer (£600); Penmarric

Securities (£500, sent by Mr Joe Dwek); the Ronson Charitable Foundation (£500); the S. H. Burton Charitable Settlement (£400, sent by Mrs Audrey Burton); Mr and Mrs Conrad Abrahams-Curiel (£250); the Ellison-Marsden Trust (£200, sent by Mrs Vera Ellison); and Mrs Hazel Alexander (£200, from the sale of Maimonides bronzes).

Other contributions were made by Mr Cesare Sacerdoti (£150), Mr Geoffrey Ognall (£125), Mr David Pinto (£100), Mr Michael Rose (£100) and Mr Stephen Rubin (£100).

Anonymous and smaller contributions amounting to over £4,500 have also been received, and all those in the Genizah Unit are deeply grateful for the support and interest of their friends around the world.

## Traveller's tale of love and intrigue

A Jewish businessman from Cairo, of Tunisian origin, establishes commercial links between Aden and south-west India, building up a lucrative trade in spices from the East and manufactured goods from the West.

He settles in Mangalore and falls in love with a local Indian girl, who bears his two children, a boy and a girl. His Indian agent makes repeated voyages across the Indian Ocean to maintain his import/export activities, often handling thousands of pounds' worth of goods.

But all is not plain sailing. Pirates are a constant danger; the Indian has a drink problem; an Adeni partner reneges on a large payment. A member of his Indian lover's family fails to provide a consignment of cardamom promised at an unusually low rate, and a speculation goes awry.

Matters deteriorate further. The premature death of his son breaks his heart, and his rejection of a friend's child as a suitor for his daughter sours relations between them.

News from his Tunisian family tells of antisemitic attacks and of flight to somewhere in Sicily. Attempts on his part to help are thwarted by a dishonest brother, who absconds with a huge sum of money.

The troubled businessman returns to Aden and eventually moves back to Cairo, still in search of his refugee family, a suitable match for his daughter, financial security...

The Indian novelist and social anthropologist, Dr Amitav Ghosh, has spent over ten years piecing together the story of the Jewish businessman who settled in India in 1132 and remained there for

seventeen years (see *Genizah Fragments*, No.22, page 4).

The result is a cleverly constructed tale in which he weaves his modern involvement with Egyptian villagers, spoken Arabic and immigrant labour in the Middle East with the mediaeval life, language and commerce of that area as experienced by Abraham Ben Yiju, his slave Bomma, and his lover Ashu.

Ghosh's traveller's tale is based on a close study of thirty Genizah fragments, conducted with the assistance of the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit and enlivened by spells in India and America and by lengthy stays in Egypt.

The book, entitled *In an Antiqued Land*, is published this month by Granta Books at £14.99 (ISBN 014 014 22037) and available from most bookshops.

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

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 Stefan Reif, Director of the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit, at Cambridge University Library, West Road, Cambridge CB3 9DR, England (fax number 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) per annum is suggested, and payment may be made to the Unit's Cambridge office 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 American Friends of Cambridge University, c/o its President, Mr Stephen C. Price, at P.O. Box 7070, Arlington, Virginia 22207, USA. Transfers of such funds are regularly made from the USA to Cambridge.

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.