

GENIZAH FRAGMENTS

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

Cairo restoration nears completion

After some ten years' work by an international team of architects, historians and archaeologists, the project to restore and investigate the "Genizah Synagogue" of Old Cairo is nearing its end. It has been sponsored and supported throughout by Phyllis Lambert and the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal.

Restoration of the building's superstructure was completed a year ago and the final stage of conservation and recording of the contents is well under way. A full report covering all aspects of the project and its results is being prepared for publication in the near future.

The Ben-Ezra Synagogue, as it stands today, is a late-nineteenth-century reconstruction of the former building which partially collapsed and was

subsequently demolished in 1889 (a surviving fragment is pictured on the left).

It is of interest mainly for the fact that its design was extensively copied from the previous eleventh-century building, and as a surviving example of Jewish architecture from colonial Egypt. It was also, of course, the building from which Solomon Schechter extracted the Taylor-Schechter Collection in 1896-97.

When the project began in 1981, the building was in a state of considerable dilapidation, not having been used for worship since the mid-1960s.

Water leaking through the roof on to the painted ceiling, rising ground water threatening the foundations, and settling causing cracks in the walls were among the many problems requiring attention. In addition, all the internal fixtures and contents – curtains, lamps, carpets, carvings, Torah boxes and scrolls – required recording and conservation.

The fundamental structural work got under way in 1988, under the direction of Belgian architect,

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Examining an Arabic fragment in the Cambridge University Library are (left to right) Dr Geoffrey Khan, Dr Mohamed Shaker, Sir Sigmund Sternberg, Lady Sternberg and Mrs Shaker

Egyptian envoy's visit

Dr Mohamed Shaker, the Egyptian Ambassador to the Court of St James's, visited Cambridge University Library in January to see some of its most important Near Eastern manuscripts, both Muslim and Jewish.

Accompanied by Mrs Shaker, by Sir Sigmund Sternberg (Chairman of the International Council of Christians and Jews) and Lady Sternberg, and by Embassy Counsellor, Mr Gihad Madi, the Ambassador was welcomed by the University Librarian, Dr Fred

Ratcliffe, the Deputy Librarian, Mr Roy Welbourn, and the Head of the Oriental Department and Director of Genizah Research, Dr Stefan Reif.

After signing the visitors' book, the guests viewed a special exhibition mounted for the occasion by Library staff. Included among the items on show were important manuscripts from the Library's Cairo Genizah Collection of Hebraica and Arabica, Michaelides Collection of papyri, and Arabic codices.

The party toured the Library and its newest extension and were entertained to lunch, at which the Chairman of the Library Syndicate, Professor Derek Brewer, presided and which was also attended by the Chairman-elect of the Faculty Board of Oriental Studies, Dr P. Kornicki.

Major projects attract funding

Two major projects, one to describe the Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic material and the other to prepare a catalogue of the Hebrew codices, have attracted the necessary funding for their first year. Support has also been maintained for all other parts of the Genizah Research Unit's programme for 1993, including the study of the fragments relating to medicine.

The most substantial support received in recent months has consisted of £5,191 from the Wellcome Trust; £4,257 from the Charles Taylor Fund at St John's College, Cambridge; and £3,750 from the British Academy.

In addition, the Unit has benefited from the generosity of

Aryeh and Raquel Rubin (£3,000); Mr Samuel Sebba (£1,500); the Corob Charitable Trust (£1,257); Dr Ralph Kohn (£1,000); and Mr Cyril Stein, Chairman of the Ladbroke Group plc (£1,000).

Important financial assistance has been received from Mrs Marjorie Glick (£533); Sir Trevor Chinn, of Lex Services plc (£500); Mrs Vivien Duffield (£500); Goldberg Charitable Trust (£500); Jewish Memorial Council (£500); Mr Arnold Lee (£500); Mr Michael Phillips (£500); and Mr A. S. Oppenheimer (£400).

Helpful renewals of their support have been made by Mr Philip Maurice (£350); Mr Conrad Morris (£350); Mr Harry Landy (£300); Mr I. S.

Klug (£250); Mr William Margulies (£250); Mr T. H. Reitman (£250); Mrs Helena Sebba (£250); Sir Sigmund Sternberg (£250); and Mr Fred Worms (£250).

Other contributions, gratefully acknowledged, are those of Mr Charles Taubman (£300); Mrs Clara B. Laks (£300); Mr Jeffrey Greenwood (£150); Dr Harold Preiskel (£150); Rabbi John Schechter (£250); Mr I. Raine (£100); Mr Michael Daniels (£100); Mr and Mrs Anthony Rau (£100); Mrs Judith Samuel (£100); and Mrs Miriam Shenkin (£100).

Anonymous and smaller donations amounting to £5,735 have also been received and are much appreciated by all who work in the Unit.

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Pitfalls and pericopes

Unlike most branches of early rabbinic literature, the constituents of the literary genres "midrash" and "aggada" have never been systematically tabulated. Despite the fact that over 150 such tracts have been published – some of minor proportions – numerous others have fallen into desuetude and are no longer extant.

Since almost all the manuscript materials in the major libraries have now been exploited, the Cairo Genizah remains the major source for the recovery of what would otherwise be non-extant aggadic midrashim.

The identification and classification of midrashic fragments, including those at Cambridge University Library, and the reconstruction of the codices and midrashic compilations to which they originally belonged, are thus major aims which I hope partially to fulfil during the course of projected research.

Until the full fruits can be harvested, however, scholars will have to make do with somewhat more general identifications of the midrashic Genizah material. At most, catalogue entries will include the biblical pericope explicated by the midrashic text, with a cross-reference to an extant midrash (if such a parallel exists) – as, for example:

T-S NS 329.729: "A midrash to Numbers 17; cf. Tanhuma *Qorah* 6 = Tanhuma Buber 14, p.90."

In other instances, usually because of the state of the fragment, the pericope will not be definitely determined and an alternate form of identification using certain proof-texts will be employed – as, for example:

T-S NS 288.231: "Midrash quoting Deuteronomy 30:20 and Psalms 20:2."

At times, despite an attempt to postulate a certain pericope, no definite proof can be adduced, so that a general description of the contents (and other pertinent de-

tails) will be included – as, for example:

T-S NS 162.118: "From a midrash dealing with the severity of vows, adducing 2 Chronicles 36:13; Lamentations 2:10; Deuteronomy 23:22; Proverbs 20:25; cf. Tanhuma *Wa-Yishlah* 8."

Numerous objective difficulties prevent an exact identification of fragments in a poor state of preservation. Some remains are so scanty that, even if the original contents are identified, they fail to reflect their true nature.

Three vellum fragments located in T-S NS 178 illustrate this point. The largest (.57) contains a selection based on B.T. *Pesahim* 54b ("[Four] things God willed to come to pass . . ."), while the two smaller ones (.39 and .53) apparently include a rendering of B.T. *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 16b ("Four things cancel the fate of a human being . . .").

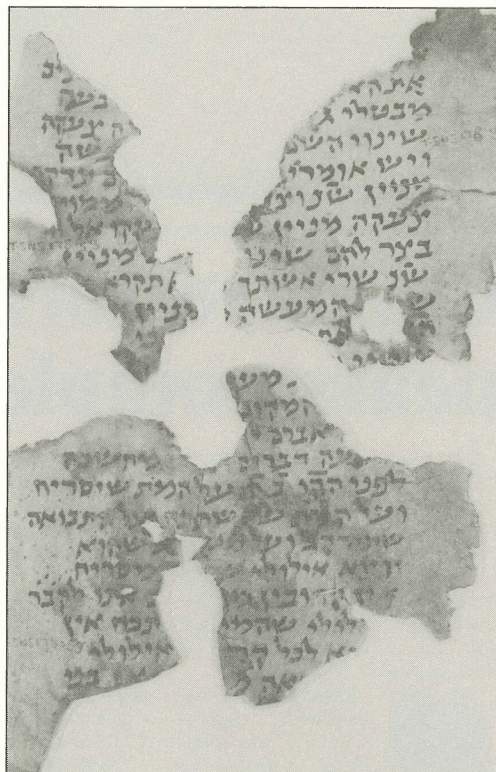
When, however, they are pieced together, one immediately detects the remnant of a novel version of the numerical compilations known, for instance, as *Pirqa de-Rabbi* and *Huppat 'Eliyah*.

In contradistinction to modern tastes, the *Pirqa de-Rabbi* compilations seem to have been among the most popular midrashic works of mediaeval times, as attested by more than sixty Genizah fragments found in various collections, representing some two dozen codices.

Other works that enjoyed immense popularity are the midrashic compilations on *plene* and defective spellings in the Hebrew Bible (*Midrash Haseerot We-Yeterot*), the various midrashic texts relating to the Decalogue (*Midrash 'Aseret Ha-Dibrot*), and the *Hanukah* Midrash extant in the new edition of *She'eltot de-Rav Ahai Gaon* (ed. Mirsky, 2, pp.183ff).

Among the pitfalls encountered by the cataloguer are numerous fragments initially classified as "midrash", only to turn out as other branches of traditional literature dealing with biblical items

Remnant of a novel version of *Pirqa de-Rabbi* reconstructed from three fragments – T-S NS 178.53, .39 and .57



that also adduce biblical proof-texts.

These include various collections that also adduce talmudic texts (T-S NS 329.566; NS 170.40); biblical commentaries (T-S NS 177.12; NS 175.64; NS 329.722); kabbalistic texts (T-S NS 288.115); and philosophy (T-S NS 167.46).

It is interesting to note that certain fragments deriving from the encyclopaedic commentary of R. Bahya ben Asher to the Pentateuch (T-S NS 162.171; NS 162.174; NS 171.17) have been hitherto identified as midrashic texts.

Fragments stemming from the non-extant midrashim in the New Series do not appear to be abundant. Nevertheless, each folio represents another stone uncovered in the search for ancient Hebrew literary treasures. There is consequently good reason to pursue further research in order to identify them all.

MYRON BIALIK LERNER
Department of Talmud,
Tel Aviv University

Overview of the Siddur

When did prayer become central to Jews, and how are the conflicts and tensions of the talmudic period reflected in the history of its liturgy? Did Christianity and Islam have something to do with the emergence of the first Jewish prayer codices?

What was the fate of the early mediaeval Palestinian rite, and how did its Babylonian equivalent come to dominate the text of the early *Siddur*? How much cross-fertilisation was there between statutory prayer, mysticism and poetry in the prayer-books of the Middle Ages?

In an attempt to answer these tantalising questions, on which the Genizah manuscripts shed considerable light, and others that relate to earlier and later periods, Stefan Reif, in his *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), takes the reader on an intriguing journey through periods about 3,000 years apart and into locations as distant from each other in every sense as Sura in Mesopotamia and Cincinnati, Ohio.

In this first attempt for over 60 years to provide a scientific overview of Jewish liturgical history, the latest scholarship and the most original sources are carefully identified and utilised with both scholars and lay folk in mind.

There are 450 pages and the ISBN is 0 521 44087 4.

Lectureship for Geoffrey Khan

Dr Geoffrey Khan, Research Associate in the Genizah Research Unit, has been appointed to a full-time tenured Lectureship in Hebrew and Aramaic in the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the University of Cambridge.

Dr Khan, who joined the Unit in 1983, has developed an impressive reputation as an

expert in the detailed study of Semitic languages.

In addition to articles and reviews, he has published two books, *Studies in Semitic Syntax* (Oxford, 1988) and *Karaite Bible Manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah* (Cambridge, 1990). A third volume, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents in the Cambridge Genizah*

Collections, is scheduled to appear within a few months.

Dr Khan joins the ranks of researchers in the Genizah Unit who have gone on to important academic positions, both here and abroad, in the fields of Hebrew, Arabic and Jewish studies.

He is currently on a research trip to St. Petersburg in Russia.

Spanish gems on display

Recently on exhibit at the University Library were 91 items reflecting the culture of the Jews of Spain from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries, when they were resident in the Iberian peninsula, and from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries, following their expulsion.

The exhibits included early grammars, poetry, illuminated Bibles, scientific literature, incunables, philosophical and theological tracts, and personal correspondence. Many were from the Library's Genizah Collection, and they were in manuscript and printed, on paper and on vellum; their languages included Judaeo-Arabic, Judaeo-Spanish, Hebrew and Spanish.

The exhibition, planned by Dr Eleazar Gutwirth, of Tel Aviv University (formerly of Cambridge University Library), and arranged by the Genizah Research Unit, marked the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain.

A catalogue, entitled *Ten Centuries of Hispano-Jewish Culture*, prepared for publication by Dr Stefan Reif, has been published by Cambridge University Library and contains seventeen pages of introduction by Dr Gutwirth, ten pages describing the exhibits, a

bibliography and five plates. It is available from the Library at £2.50, plus postage and packing.

The exhibition was noted in an article entitled "1492: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly", published in *CAM* (Michaelmas, 1992).

Other recent exhibitions at the University Library utilising Genizah material marked the Sixth International Congress for Syriac Studies, the Fourth International Congress on Christian Arabic Studies, and the performance of Professor Alexander Goehr's new cantata, "The Death of Moses".

Enthusiastic reviews of recent volumes in the *Genizah Series* have appeared here and abroad.

Geoffrey Khan's *Karaite Bible Manuscripts* has attracted the following comments:

"A piece of excellent scholarship, carried out by an expert philologist, well versed in different cultures." – J. Blau, in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 54.

"A major contribution to the work of scholars of the Bible and of the Hebrew language." – D. Rowland-Smith, in *L'eylah* 32.

Published Material . . . A Bibliography, edited by Stefan Reif, has been described in the following terms:

"A welcome work of reference for all aspects of Genizah research." – M. Beit-Arié, in *Pe'amim* (Hebrew) 41.

"A very valuable and indispensable tool." – P. W. van der Horst, in *Theologisch Tijdschrift* (Dutch) 45.

A matter for no regrets

In a review of Amitav Ghosh's *In An Antique Land* published in *The Times Literary Supplement* on 15 January, Ahdaf Soueif expressed her regret that Cambridge University Library should have obtained the treasures of the Cairo Genizah. "The story of how the Genizah Collection came into the possession of Cambridge University Library", she wrote, "is, sadly, the story of so much of the heritage of our so-called Third World."

In the *TLS* on 5 February, the Director of the Genizah Research Unit, Dr Stefan Reif, responded with the following letter:

"...Ahdaf Soueif should not be sad about the fact that the Genizah Collection containing the Hebrew and Arabic treasures of the Ben-Ezra Synagogue in Cairo came to Cambridge University Library in 1897...

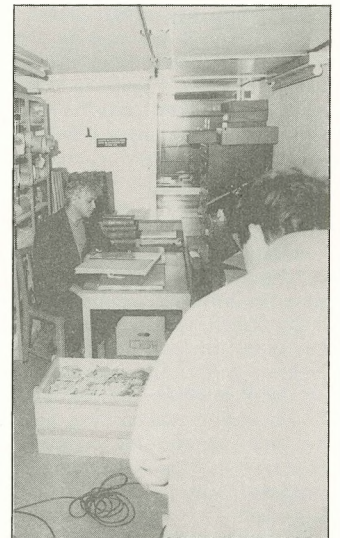
"There is virtually no area of Semitic scholarship and mediaeval Mediterranean history that has not been illuminated by research done on these fragments at the Library.

"In the course of the past twenty years in particular, 140,000 items have been conserved and micro-filmed for international use; about 40,000 fragments have been carefully described; seven volumes have been published in the Library's Genizah Series handled by

Cambridge University Press; and over £500,000 has been raised from external sources to assist the University of Cambridge's efforts. "Amitav Ghosh's charming volume would not have been possible without these developments."

Dr Ghosh's book was also the subject of a feature filmed at the Library by BBC Television and broadcast on Network East in January, 1993.

The report included a description of the book's background and shots of various Genizah texts.



BBC-TV filming Dr Ghosh among the manuscripts of Cambridge University Library

Safeguarding the fruits of scholarship

While recently in Jerusalem to fulfil some lecturing commitments, I was consulted by lawyers involved in a case concerning the allegedly unauthorised publication in the USA of Dead Sea Scrolls text and scholarship.

As owners of similar material, we were asked what we regarded as the correct attitudes by which to decide its availability for academic study.

The issues are not simple. To the argument that the owners of manuscripts retain their copyright, the obvious retort is that texts written by a scribe many hundreds of years ago must surely by now be public property.

On the other hand, if an institution invests a great deal of time and money in the reconstruction, conservation and analysis of its treasures, there must be some justification for its claiming the results of its

work as its own intellectual property.

If a lengthy programme of research is undertaken by a group of scholars with privileged access to manuscript material, are others duty bound, by convention if not by law, to respect the prior interests of that group?

Given that an inordinate length of time has passed without results being published and that a suspicion is growing of a closed shop and restrictive practice, does this somehow entitle other interested specialists to make rival claims for rights?

There is also the matter of how one decides that information has been disseminated and is therefore available for public use. The results of scholarship are transmitted to students in closed lectures, to the interested public at open meetings, and to the wider world through the media. At what stage do these re-

sults cease to be the intellectual property of those who produce them? Is the copying and distribution of notes an infringement of their rights?

The Genizah Research Unit, as part of Cambridge University Library, follows a policy of making available to scholars, as soon as its resources permit, the originals (in the Library) or copies of their holdings (anywhere else). It makes efforts to conserve these items, so that they can be safely handled, and to prepare descriptions of them to assist scholarly research. Whenever apt, details of important discoveries are made known to lay folk.

Where information is being compiled for a research publication of its own, such information may be shared with readers before its publication, if they undertake to credit it to its originators.

The private projects of individual scholars are a

matter of confidence, but every effort is made to warn scholars of possible duplication of effort. At the same time, there are no exclusive scholarly rights to any parts of the Collection.

Photographs of the original material may be made only by the Library's photography department, and where such photographs are provided, it is on the understanding that acknowledgement is made to the Syndics of Cambridge University Library, a full classmark published, and a copy of the publication received.

The aim of the regulations is to ensure that only quality reproductions are used that will assist further research and that future scholars in the field will find it easy to identify such items and to obtain information about their contents.

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

Busy time for Genizah staff

Cambridge Genizah researchers have not only been busy with their various projects in the Unit; they have also been conveying the results of their research at academic conferences and public lectures.

Both Dr Stefan Reif and Dr Geoffrey Khan accepted invitations to speak at a conference devoted to *Artefact and Text* at the John Rylands Research Institute in the University of Manchester.

The theme of the meeting – at which ten scholars from Britain, Israel, the USA, France and Germany gave papers – was the manner in which the physical form of the mediaeval Hebrew manuscript had a direct effect on the development of its literary content.

Dr Khan discussed Cambridge Genizah fragment T-S K25.230, consisting of a letter from an eleventh-century Karaite scholar in Jerusalem, in which he offered to write, in either Arabic or Hebrew script, the commentary on the Pentateuch commissioned by his wealthy patron, thus proving that he and his colleagues (contrary to what has often been supposed) were at home in both languages.

Dr Reif's paper dealt with the medium used for the transmission of Hebrew prayers, not only in the Middle Ages but also in those periods preceding and following them, and how changes had left their mark on Jewish liturgical development.

The Genizah also figured prominently in a conference devoted to *The Aramaic Bible* held at the

Royal Irish Academy in Dublin, with many speakers touching on the texts of Targum to be found in the collections emanating from mediaeval Cairo.

Professor Michael Klein spoke on the discoveries he had made in Cambridge while compiling his recently published catalogue, *Targumic Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections*, and Dr Reif assessed the significance of the Genizah discoveries for biblical scholarship over a period of almost a century.

Dr E. J. Wiersberg attended the Second International Congress of Yemenite Studies at Princeton University and returned to his old interest in calendrical matters, discussing the mean length of the synodic month according to the Yemenite interpretation of a relevant passage in Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*.

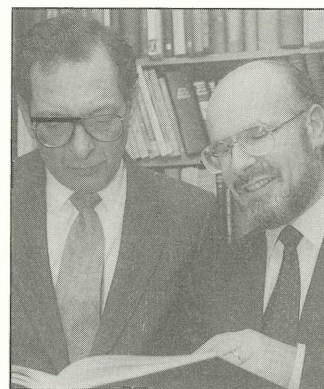
Among the specialized linguistic studies presented at the conference of the International Organ-

ization for Masoretic Studies, held in Paris, Dr Khan described how Karaite transcriptions of the Hebrew Bible into Arabic provided important insights into the way Hebrew was pronounced in the Middle Ages.

At the annual meeting of the British Association for Jewish Studies, held in Cambridge, one seminar was devoted to reporting progress in the work of the Genizah Research Unit.

Dr Haskell Isaacs spoke on the medical material, Dr Khan on Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic fragments, and Ms Meira Polliack on Karaite Bible translations and commentaries. Dr Reif then referred to other developments in the fields of Bible, Targum, rabbinica, mysticism and *piyyut* and outlined plans for future research and forthcoming volumes in the *Genizah Series*.

On the basis of recent manuscript discoveries, Dr Khan was able to indicate how the Hebrew language



The Israeli Ambassador, Mr Yoav Biran (left), with Dr Stefan Reif during a visit to the University of Cambridge

was pronounced in Tiberias over a thousand years ago and how this pronunciation differed from that described in standard grammars of biblical Hebrew.

In his presidential paper, Dr Reif summarized some of his conclusions on the nature of Hebrew prayer in the geonic and mediaeval periods, especially on the basis of the Genizah evidence.

Completion of Cairo restoration

Continued from page 1

Johan Bellaert. Since then, the roof has been entirely resurfaced, the walls restored, and much stone and woodwork replaced, using traditional materials and techniques.

The vexed problem of rising ground water containing corrosive minerals has been combated with the use of a replaceable sacrificial render.

Meanwhile, Professors Menahem

Ben-Sasson and Joseph Hacker, of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, have traced the history of the synagogue from its origins until the present day, using a variety of sources.

Ben-Sasson worked largely on the period up to the fifteenth century, sifting through the Genizah documents for all references to the building. Joseph Hacker concentrated on the more recent history, derived partly from a survey of rabbinic texts.

British archaeologists, Peter Sheehan and Charles Le Quesne, had the job of recording all the structures on the site and setting them into an historical context. Initially, excavation inside and around the synagogue was contemplated, but it was unfortunately not possible to obtain from the Antiquities Service the required permission to dig.

Information regarding earlier stages of the synagogue's history was gained from pits dug to assess the condition of the building's foundations. A full measured survey of the encircling Roman fortifications was also carried out.

Owing to these limitations on archaeological activity around the synagogue, it has been difficult to come to any definite conclusions about its early history.

Menahem Ben-Sasson's work has evoked a picture of densely crowded and cramped conditions around an agglomeration of buildings of which the synagogue formed the centre. His work, to be

published in the project's report, will no doubt be of great interest to Genizah scholars.

It seems clear that the location has not changed since the Genizah period. Indeed, the walls of the present building stand directly on those of its predecessor.

As the Genizah archive originates from around the same time as the building's reconstruction in 1040, following its total destruction by Caliph al-Hakim, it provides little evidence for the date of the synagogue's original foundation. This may not have been much earlier – perhaps in the tenth century.

After this new foundation, however, there is no evidence to suggest that the synagogue was rebuilt until the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence of major reconstructions around 1500, following a serious fire, and again around 1860.

Assuming this to be the case, the many accounts of the Ben-Ezra Synagogue from the nineteenth century, written by Benjamin II (= Israel Joseph Benjamin), Alfred Butler and Jack Mosseri, describe essentially the same building that Maimonides knew. Sadly, extensive research has failed to turn up a single illustration of the building as it was.

As the project draws to its close, many questions remain. The answers must wait for the day when excavation becomes possible.

CHARLES LE QUESNE
Archaeologist for the Ben-Ezra Synagogue Restoration Project

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) per annum is suggested, and payment may be made to the Unit's Cambridge office or to the American Friends.

How you can help the T-S Genizah Unit

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 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.