

GENIZAH FRAGMENTS

The Newsletter of the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit, Cambridge University Library

No. 66 October 2013

Lewis-Gibson success

The front page of the last Genizah Fragments proclaimed 'Cambridge and Oxford join forces to buy the Lewis-Gibson Collection'. With an asking price of £1.2 million, not including the further substantial costs of conservation and digitisation, the purchase of the Westminster Genizah manuscripts was an aspiration rather than a fact. But thanks to the generosity of several major foundations and a number of online givers, we are now very happy to report that, as of 1 August 2013, Cambridge University Library and the Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, are the new owners of the 1700 manuscripts originally collected by Mrs Agnes Lewis and her twin sister Mrs Margaret Gibson.

The campaign to acquire this precious piece of Genizah history got off to a flying start with a generous lead gift of £500,000 from the Polonsky Foundation. It was followed by the writing of a clutch of grant proposals, with varying degrees of success, and a public appeal and press launch. Medieval manuscripts do not always draw the press's attention, particularly when they are in difficult languages and a tattered state, but several of the documents we highlighted stirred the media's imagination,

leading to a number of very positive write-ups on both sides of the Atlantic. Of particular importance was a short mention that the appeal achieved on Radio 4's popular Today programme. This was heard by one of the directors of the Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation, on his farm in Somerset, and it directly led to Cambridge receiving a very large donation of £350,000 from a private family charitable trust. A further generous grant, of £100,000, was pledged by the Bonita Charitable Trust, a philanthropic organisation with worldwide interests.

With the purchase secured, the Lewis-Gibson manuscripts will be undergoing conservation at Cambridge University Library's Conservation Department over the next two years, and will be digitised and made available online. Thereafter, the manuscripts will be divided between the university libraries of Cambridge and Oxford. A public exhibition of the L-G Collection, and of the extraordinary life of the twin sisters who played such a vital role in the discovery of the Cairo Genizah, will be held early in 2016 in Cambridge University Library's Milstein Exhibition Centre.



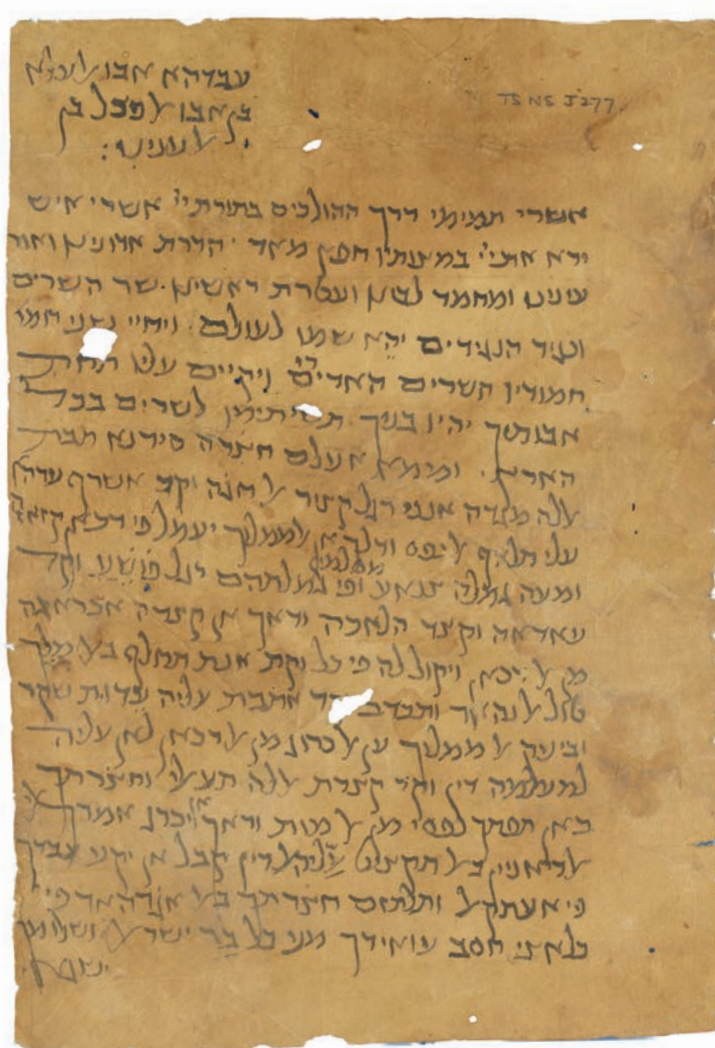
Esther-Miriam Wagner and Ben Outhwaite examine a sixth-century palimpsest from the Lewis-Gibson Collection in the manuscript storeroom of Cambridge University Library.

The Genizah Research Unit is grateful for the generous support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Friedberg Genizah Project and the British Academy Small Research Grant Scheme (Leverhulme Funds). We are also extremely grateful for the help of our supporters and to all who have given towards the Lewis-Gibson appeal: Friends of Cambridge University Library (£10,000); Anstruther Memorial Trust (£6,000); Education Services (£1,000); S. C. Reif (£450); Hadley Wood Synagogue (£312); J. Schechter (\$500); B. Visotzky (\$500); Young@Herts (£175); A. Shapiro (\$250); Chabad of Cambridge (£150); Spiro Ark (£150); Kinloss Education Trust (£136); R. Landy (£125); A. Shenkin (£125); M. Amin (£100); Emjaysea Charitable Trust (£100); A. Kaye (£100); B. Spolsky (£100).

The Genizah hits the airwaves

The last week of May 2013 saw members of the Genizah Research Unit taking over the popular BBC Radio 3 documentary programme 'The Essay', with a series of five programmes under the title *Life in Fragments: Stories from the Cairo Genizah*. Written and presented by Esther-Miriam Wagner, Ben Outhwaite, Melonie Schmierer-Lee, Daniel Davies and Gabriele Ferrario, the programme was produced by Miranda Hinkley and Michele Banal of Nightjar. For five consecutive nights, Radio 3 listeners had the chance of enjoying a fifteen-minute audio trip to medieval Cairo, guided by the mellifluous voices of the Unit's researchers.

The series took off with Esther-Miriam Wagner weaving the history of the discovery of the Genizah fragments into her own personal experience first as a student of Arabic travelling in Cairo and then as a graduate student and researcher at Cambridge. Ben Outhwaite hosted the second episode, tracing personal, commercial and inter-religious connections all around the Mediterranean basin, thanks to his expertise on the rich epistolary material preserved in the Genizah. Private letters as well as synagogue records, ketubbot and pre-nuptial agreements were at the heart of the third Genizah 'Essay': Melonie Schmierer-Lee focussed on the condition of women in the Middle Ages and brought to the ears of the listeners the very voices of medieval women, with their surprisingly modern complaints, requests and marital problems. In the fourth episode, Dan Davies presented three lively portraits of famous characters living in the times of the Genizah: the



Episode 2 of 'The Essay' dealt with Jewish-Muslim relations in medieval Egypt and included mention of this letter, which describes a Jew working alongside a Muslim and a Jewish convert to Islam in a silk-weaving workshop (T-S NS J277)

polymath and religious leader Maimonides, the artful India trader Ibn Yiju and the austere and hard-pressed community leader Solomon ben Judah. Gabriele Ferrario concluded the series on a more mysterious note. He led the listeners into the obscure worlds of alchemy and magic and showed how these two disciplines were a daily presence in the life of the Jewish community of Al-Fustât.

The series was a great experience, providing an entry into the fascinating world of the Genizah to a larger public and giving the researchers the thrill of hearing their voices, and their work, broadcast nationwide.

For those who missed the series, the five episodes of *Life in Fragments: Stories from the Cairo*

HOW YOU CAN HELP

To receive *Genizah Fragments*, to inquire about the Collection, or to learn how to assist with its preservation and study, please write to Dr Ben Outhwaite, Head of the Genizah Research Unit, at Cambridge University Library, West Road, Cambridge, CB3 9DR, England.

The Library can be reached by fax (01223) 333160 or by telephone (01223) 333000. Inquiries by email should be addressed to the Unit at: genizah@lib.cam.ac.uk

Contributions to the Unit are made to the "University of Cambridge," which enjoys charitable status for tax and similar purposes.

In the USA the Collection is supported through "Cambridge in America." For further information please contact them on 212-984-0960 or see their website: www.cantab.org

"Cambridge in America" is recognized by the IRS as a charitable organization, 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.

Genizah will be made available for listening online. Keep an eye on the Unit's website for the link when it is available.

Gabriele Ferrario
Genizah Research Unit

Text mining manuscripts

When Solomon Schechter brought the Cairo Genizah to Cambridge in 1897 one wonders if he expected that efforts to catalogue the Collection would still be ongoing over 100 years later. An iconic picture of Schechter surrounded by boxes of fragments greets visitors to the Genizah Research Unit, and his weary posture suggests that he might have had an inkling. Over the years, library staff along with many notable Genizah scholars have contributed significantly to our understanding of the Collection. However, its size and complexity means that the dream of a searchable content-

based catalogue still remains elusive. As more of the Collection becomes available online the absence of full text transcription and translation is now the main barrier for those looking to explore this rich archive.

In 2013, with funding provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation through its Scholarly Communications and Information Technology strand, the Library embarked on the 'Discovering history in the Cairo Genizah' project, which aims to investigate novel computing techniques to aid in the cataloguing and digital curation of the T-S Collection. Text mining is a new branch of computing that looks to analyse large volumes of written material and draw out knowledge, relationships and patterns from the text. The past 100 years have seen a wealth of academic research carried out on the

Genizah fragments, and text mining offers an opportunity for automated analysis of this work. Using citation information and a corpus of over forty scholarly works we have analysed which words are most commonly associated with each fragment and these are recorded in our digital catalogue as key terms which can then be used as a basis to search the Collection. We have also looked to automatically associate names, dates and places with fragments based on the wealth of academic opinions expressed in the literature. Whilst the

dream of having computers independently read, transcribe and translate fragments remains somewhat off that's not to say that modern computing doesn't have a role to play in library cataloguing. There is also an appealing symmetry in that the work of the many scholars who built their careers around exploring the Genizah is now being used to help direct the next generation of Genizah scholars to relevant source materials.

Christopher Stokoe
Digital Services

Among the first results of a search for the key word 'pirates' are T-S 10J27.8 and the associated tag cloud. It's part of a letter describing how a group of Byzantine Jews had been captured by pirates.

Discovering History Project

The Discovering History project will run through to February 2015 with the resulting catalogue information being incorporated into the Cambridge University Digital Library. This work would not be possible without the generous support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.



Maimonides project launched

The intellectual output of Moses Maimonides is scattered throughout the Genizah, including draft copies of his written works as well as documents relating to his life and times, exposing his major public role as a pillar of

the Jewish community. Until now, discoveries of these texts have tended to rely on chance (see, for instance, our online Fragment of the Month for a number of examples of such finds). Thanks to funding from the Leverhulme Trust, disbursed through the British

Academy's Small Grant scheme, the Genizah Unit, together with Dr Amir Ashur (Ben Gurion University of the Negev), are embarking on a project to systematically identify, collate and classify all copies of Maimonides' works found in the various Genizah collections,

as well as all documentary sources relating to his life. In its first phase, this project will focus on the 100,000 folios of the Additional Series. The chance discoveries of recent years suggest that much more awaits discovery in a systematic search.

New bibliography online

As part of our push to put more digital resources at the fingertips of Genizah researchers, the bibliography of the Cairo Genizah now has a new online home (<http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/bibliographies/genizah>). Fully up to date, the new bibliography is searchable by author, classmark and keyword, and provides full details of all publications related to Cambridge Genizah manuscripts. It has an updated look and feel in line with the new design of Cambridge Digital Library, and relies on more robust

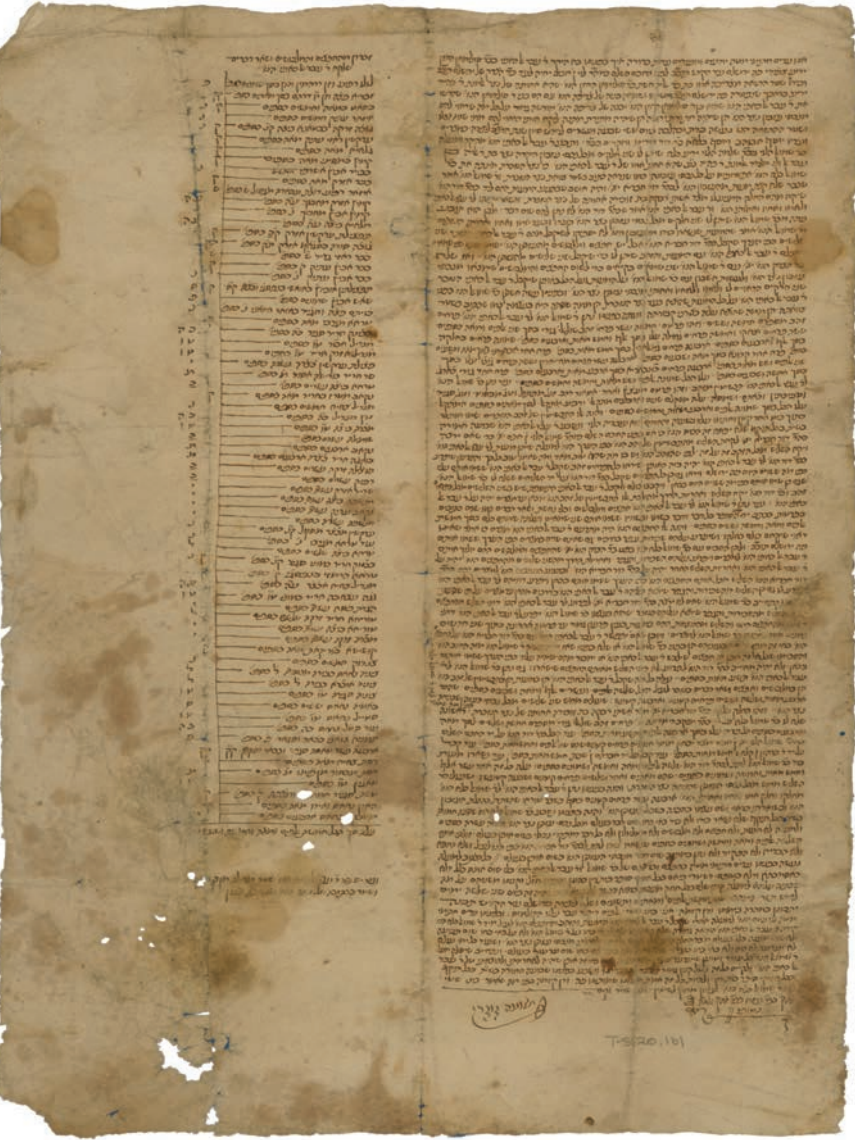
programming technology. Future updates to the service will link the bibliography more closely to the manuscripts in Cambridge Digital Library, as well as providing links to online versions of the publications where these are available. The bibliography is maintained by the Genizah Research Unit with funding from the Friedberg Genizah Project, and it is one of the most useful tools we produce, facilitating access to more than a hundred years of published research.

The new bibliography has an improved, more methodical coverage of earlier (pre-2004) publications, thanks to better online resources supplied by publishers. It is also richer in non-English material, thanks to our efforts to cover a wider panorama of international research: many publications in German, Spanish, French and other European languages have recently been added. The Israeli scholarship is, of course, thoroughly represented.

Last but not least, the new bibliography is wider in coverage than our previous printed versions, with coverage of other Cambridge-based collections, such as the Mosseri and Lewis-Gibson. The new online version is a work in progress, and it will be updated with new content and improved features. We would welcome any feedback from users as to how it could be improved.

Julia Krivoruchko
Genizah Research Unit

Jewish settlement in the Ottoman period



The numerous Ottoman period documents preserved in the Cairo Genizah include this magnificent legal deed from the Jerusalem court of Rabbi Levi ibn Habib, T-S 20.161, dated 1532.

Abraham David should be a name familiar to all who are interested in Genizah Studies as someone who has worked tirelessly on the less-well trod parts of the Genizah. David's forty years of work on the documents of the Ottoman period are scattered among a plethora of Hebrew language journals, with the odd English publication too. For those who seek a better understanding of just what the documents can tell us about Eretz Israel in the sixteenth century, then his new volume of collected articles, *Jewish Settlement in Eretz ha-Zvi: texts and studies on late medieval Jewish history in the land of Israel* (Rubin Mass, Jerusalem, 2013), is an essential read. It contains 21 articles in Hebrew and 5 in English on the subjects of Jerusalem, Tiberias and Safed, and on immigration and pilgrimage to the land of Israel in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The Lauffer Family Charitable Trust has generously contributed towards the cost of producing this newsletter in memory of the late David Lauffer, an enthusiastic student of history and supporter of the Genizah Research Unit.



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