

# GENIZAH FRAGMENTS

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

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## Cairo Genizah takes Paris by storm

*'Jewish and non-Jewish cultures in contact' was the theme of the European Association for Jewish Studies conference held in Paris July 20–24.*

One of the largest conferences of its type, it was gratifying to see the Genizah so well represented there. A number of Genizah researchers attended the conference and the GRU organised a whole day of Genizah sessions. These were very well attended, and included highlights such as Philip Ackerman-Lieberman on the rabbinical court in Egypt and its accommodation of Islamic legal norms as well as local customs, and Mordechai Akiva Friedman on contacts between Jews and non-Jews in the India trade. Edna Engel's paper, comparing the Cairo Genizah fragments with their newly emerged Afghan cousins, was strategically placed at the end of the day. From Cambridge, Professor Geoffrey Khan and Ben Outhwaite gave a keynote evening lecture on 'The reception of Biblical Hebrew in the Middle Ages' in the splendid Amphithéâtre Richelieu at the Sorbonne.



L-G Talmud 1.42: a vellum leaf of Babylonian Talmud tractate Yevamot. The conservation of this and other fragments from the Lewis-Gibson collection is well underway.

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## Three new Genizah conservators

The last year has seen three new conservators join Cambridge University Library to work on the newly acquired Lewis-Gibson (formerly Westminster) Collection.

**Mary French** joined Cambridge University Library in September 2013 as a book conservator on the Lewis-Gibson Genizah Collection shortly after completing her MA

in the conservation of books and library materials at West Dean College. Her previous experience includes exhibitions and book conservation contract work at Harvard Business School's Baker Library, a conservation internship at the Boston Athenaeum, and bookbinding, letterpress printing and general collections conservation at Wellesley College's Clapp Library.

**Rebecca Goldie** joined the UL's Conservation department in September 2013 to work on the Jacques Mosseri Genizah Collection and in April this year began working on the Lewis-Gibson Collection. Rebecca completed her MA Conservation at Camberwell College of Arts, specialising in Books and Archival Materials. During her studies she worked

as a bookbinder's apprentice and took up conservation work placements at a number of cultural institutions across the UK. Before training as a conservator Rebecca worked in film production and spent several years teaching English in Spain and Italy.

**Emma Nichols** studied for her MA in Conservation of Books and Archival Materials at Camberwell College of Arts in London. She began working in the Conservation Department at Cambridge University Library a couple of weeks after graduating from her MA in July 2013. Upon starting at the UL Emma initially worked on a wide variety of projects including designing housing for fragile mica paintings. Emma introduced the Conservation, Manuscripts and Genizah departments to the parchment venture 'Books and Beasts' which has subsequently made the UL one of the biggest contributors to the project. Emma began working as one of the conservators of the Lewis-Gibson Collection in January 2014.



Conservators Rebecca Goldie, Mary French, and Emma Nichols examine a Lewis-Gibson fragment.

## Conserving the Lewis-Gibson Collection

Unlike the Jacques Mosseri and Taylor-Schechter Genizah Collections, which arrived at the UL very dirty, crumpled and stored loosely in crates or boxes, the fragments of the Lewis-Gibson Collection were cleaned, flattened and repaired in the late nineteenth century and adhered into 15 large bindings. Although this prior treatment makes some aspects of conservation easier, it also presents our team with new and unique challenges.

The approach, techniques and materials employed in the repair of the fragments in the nineteenth century were very different to contemporary conservation. At the time, these repairs may have offered some support and protection to the fragments, but now often increase the risk of degradation to these already fragile pieces. The nineteenth-century volumes are tightly bound, obscuring text and restricting movement, and turning the

pages requires direct contact with the vulnerable fragments. Furthermore, many of the previous repairs use unsuitable materials and obscure the text. In order to better improve the survival of the fragments and enable their digitisation, it was decided that the fragments would be removed from the bindings and that any existing repairs would also be removed unless doing so would actively harm the fragment beneath. These historical repairs are an

important part of the past of the Lewis-Gibson Collection and also provide insight into past conservation techniques. We assess each nineteenth-century repair prior to removal and if it is deemed stable we leave it intact in order to preserve remnants of earlier repair work, expedite the conservation process and avoid introducing additional moisture to the fragments.

**Rebecca Goldie**  
*CUL Conservation Department*

## What does the future hold?

Although Genizah manuscripts are regarded as one of the most relevant sources for social history, divinatory fragments have often been overlooked. They mirror the innermost worries, hopes and fears of the users, thus offering a unique insight to the Genizah society. Medieval peoples' desire to know about the future was no less intense than our own desire to learn about the past. Their eagerness to know about the future gave rise to a range of diverse practices and techniques, and manuals were written that broadened transmission channels beyond oral learning and facilitated the spread of these technologies.

The legitimacy of divinatory practices relies strongly upon tradition (the older, the better) and it is an accumulative type of knowledge in which an opinion can coexist with another despite possible contradictions. Therefore, these types of texts are also remarkable examples of transmission processes, particularly in the many cases where they attest to intercultural phenomena. This literary production was considerable, and divinatory texts form a significant part of the pseudo-scientific fragments found in the Genizah. For example, Gideon Bohak's initial survey of the material found 247 divinatory fragments compared with 68 alchemical fragments.

Divinatory handbooks dealing with geomancy are the most common. This scarcely known but rather popular technique was first codified between the tenth and twelfth centuries in Arabic, and was translated into Latin, Romance Languages and Byzantine Greek shortly after. It spread to Europe's Renaissance, nineteenth-century Germany, American Voodoo and is found in



T-S Ar.44.15, verso.

**This bifolium provides short descriptions of the sixteen geomantic figures bearing Berber names and begins with a series of interpretations of Triads.**

well-established religious rituals on the West African coast and in Madagascar. In North Africa and the Near East, it remained a tradition uninterrupted to the present day, both for Muslims and Jews.

The technique is named geomancy, 'earth divination', after the Arabic term *'ilm al-raml*, 'sand science', because sand was the surface on which castings were traditionally performed (though paper was also used extensively). The technique employs sixteen figures, each consisting of four lines that combine odd and even values, represented by one or two dots, with each given a name and a meaning. The first step in a geomantic casting is to obtain four figures following a random process. Then, the four figures – called mothers – are placed in a chart forming the first four of the 15 or 16 positions in it. Next, according to specific laws of derivation, the rest of the figures to fill the chart are obtained. The final step – predictions – involves interpretation of the chart, taking into consideration several aspects that grow in number as the science becomes more and more complex.

Cambridge Genizah collections contain 11 fragments of geomantic manuals in Judaeo-Arabic, 4 in Hebrew and 3 in Arabic. In addition to this, there are another 5 fragments that consist of drafts to build a chart,

hence pointing to the actual practice of this art. Study of the Judaeo-Arabic compositions has helped with the process of reconstruction using fragments from other Genizah collections. It has also allowed the identification of Arabic works and citations of the most relevant authorities in the field, such as Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Zanātī, Abū Sa'īd al-Ṭarābulusī and Ṭaumṭum al-Hindī. Moreover, at least four other manuscripts suggest an identification with a less-known Mamluk author named Ibn al-Maḥfūf and his unpublished work *al-muṭallaṭ fi 'ilm al-raml* ('The Triad in Geomancy'). Manuals of this type are highly significant because, unlike other manuscripts, they offer answers to specific questions that are often collected in them. Prognostications deal with personal concerns such as missing persons, marriage, pregnancy and the gender of an expected child, voyages, inheritances, the weather, business prospects and commercial transactions, as well as geo-political affairs: sultans and alliances, the government of a qāḍī or a faqīh, and war. These questions shed light on what worried the users of these manuals. For example 'If the question was about a robbery, the owner will be lying and nothing from him can be trusted', 'If the question was about the encounter between two armies, agreement is

**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](mailto: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](http://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.

closer than hostility', and 'If the question was about a pregnant woman, she will give birth to a boy and he will be the happiest of children'.

**Blanca Villuendas Sabaté**  
*Spanish National Research Council*

## Pilot Bible project launched

The tens of thousands of Bible manuscripts deposited in the Genizah vary considerably in quality, and include small format compilations for personal use, large, finely produced codices, Torah scrolls, as well as leaves from later printed editions.

Thanks to a donation in April 2014 through Graham Davies, Emeritus Professor of Old Testament at Cambridge, the Genizah Unit, together with Kim Phillips and Samuel Blapp, are embarking on a pilot study of the biblical manuscripts in the Genizah. The project will

identify the oldest large-format, high quality codices of the book of Exodus, analysing all the variations between these fragments and the best extant representative of the Tiberian masoretic tradition: Firkovich B19a (the Leningrad Codex).

The primary aim of the study will be text critical, as a contribution to Professor Graham Davies' forthcoming I.C.C. commentary on Exodus. The project will first involve classifying the Exodus fragments according to the size, format, quality and age of the

codices from which they derive.

As part of this process, fuller descriptions will be produced of the layout and physical state of each fragment than those currently available, such as more precise delimitation of the visible text (including lacunae), and indication of the position and layout of masoretic notes. The resulting catalogue information will be incorporated into the Cambridge University Digital Library.

**Kim Phillips**  
*PhD Candidate,*  
*University of Cambridge*

## How to read the Bible

The earliest complete Bible manuscript, the 11th-century Leningrad Codex B19a, is vocalised with a system of vowel points and accentuation signs developed

by the Masoretes of Tiberias to represent the Tiberian pronunciation tradition. But if many of the Bible manuscripts in the Genizah could speak, they would do so in differently pronounced Biblical Hebrew. My PhD research focuses on the vocalisation and accentuation of Bible manuscripts vocalised according to the so-called Non-Standard Tiberian tradition. This and other terms are used to describe a kind of usage of the Tiberian vocalisation and accentuation signs that deviate from Standard Tiberian as it is represented in the Leningrad Codex and the Aleppo Codex.

The distinction between the Standard Tiberian and Non-Standard Tiberian traditions is not very clear cut, however, and the initial findings from my PhD research suggest that vocalisation itself is not the

most common distinctive feature of the Non-Standard Tiberian tradition. Rather, it is the use of rafe. This flimsy and often neglected horizontal stroke above the letters, which marked in the Standard Tiberian tradition the lack of a dagesh on a limited number of letters, is considerably different in the Non-Standard manuscripts. In these, rafe appears over all manner of letters and many of its functions are – for the time being – somewhat mysterious. By the end of my PhD I hope to have plumbed the depths of this and other intriguing features of the rich and varied Non-Standard traditions of Biblical Hebrew.

**Samuel Blapp**  
*PhD Candidate,*  
*University of Cambridge*



**The Genizah Research Unit was very sorry to learn of the death of Robert (Roby) Littman in April of this year. We could not have acquired the Lewis-Gibson Genizah Collection last year without Roby's crucial assistance, and our sympathy goes out to his family.**

## Genizah goes to Limmud

The researchers of the Genizah Unit are keen to share the outcome of their research with the general public, and a unique outreach opportunity arose in February when I was invited to give a presentation at the Manchester Day Limmud 2014. Limmud is an international charity that creates events for Jewish learning around the UK and further afield, and its Manchester chapter organised a full day of parallel sessions on Jewish history, thought and culture. Over 50 speakers gave presentations on topics from the conservation of lost Iraqi Jewish treasures, to Jewish meditation, from the role of dance and comedy in Jewish culture, to the environment in which Gustav Mahler developed his musical world, from contemporary British and Israeli politics to some street awareness tips and a demonstration of Krav Maga, and much more. My presentation, *The Sun, The Scorpion and the Eagle: alchemy and magic from the Cairo Genizah*, attracted a full audience enthusiastic to hear the story of the discovery of the Genizah manuscripts and my presentation of some of the least known aspects of its content – alchemical and magical texts. We hope that the day's success will pave the way for further collaborations between the Genizah Unit and Limmud.

**Gabriele Ferrario**  
*Genizah Research Unit*

**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.**