

# GENIZAH FRAGMENTS

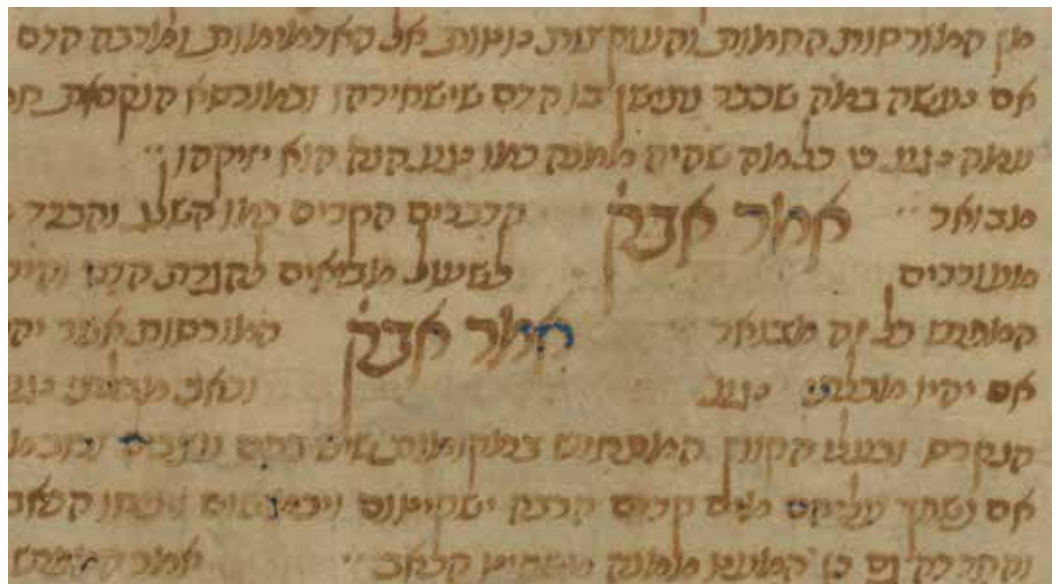
The Newsletter of the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit, Cambridge University Library

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## Wellcome Trust Grant fosters further research on the Genizah Medical Corpus

Supported by  
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*During the Middle Ages the medical profession was one of the most popular and sought after occupations for Jewish intellectuals living under Muslim rule, and, indeed, many Jewish physicians – including Moses Maimonides himself – were successfully employed by caliphs, sultans, and Muslim notables as private doctors.*



This is clearly mirrored in the roughly 2,000 Genizah manuscript fragments that are relevant to the study of medieval medicine. These include a large number of Judaeo-Arabic renditions of Arabic translations of Greek medical texts and of Arabic medical works, often annotated by their medieval users, together with original works by prominent, and less well-known, Jewish physicians. Uniquely, the Genizah preserves numerous prescriptions, druggists' notes, and lists of *materia medica*, that shed light on the common ailments and the actual cures prescribed by medieval physicians.

work on the Collections, most notably Haskell D. Isaac's printed 1994 catalogue, the project will make the medical corpus of the Cairo Genizah freely available through Cambridge University's digital library platform, in the form of an updated and highly detailed electronic catalogue of all the items of medical content alongside images of the manuscripts

themselves. These will form a unique source of research on the study, transmission and practice of medicine by Jews and Muslims in the medieval Mediterranean world, and the medical humanities community will greatly benefit from their enhanced availability.

**Melanie Schmierer-Lee**  
Genizah Research Unit

T-S K14.11 Maimonides' Commentary on Hippocrates' Aphorisms (II:51-III:9; V:23-41) in Moses ibn Tibbon's Hebrew Translation. The abbreviated phrase אבך אבך (Abuqrāt/ 'Hippocrates said') introduces the Greek physician's aphorisms.

Thanks to a generous Wellcome Trust Research Resources Award of £100,073, Dr. Gabriele Ferrario has now started work on the project *Medicine in medieval Egypt: creating online access to the medical corpus of the Cairo Genizah*. Building upon previous

*The Genizah Research Unit is grateful for the generous support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Friedberg Genizah Project, the British Academy Small Research Grant Scheme (Leverhulme Funds), the Wellcome Trust (Research Resources), and the Parasol Foundation. We are also grateful for the help of our supporters, including Graham Davies (£4000), Hamakom Synagogue (£400), Edgware Masorti Synagogue (£300), the Rofeh Trust (£250), Sukkat Shalom Reform Synagogue (£140), and other smaller or anonymous donations.*

**ON OTHER PAGES:** testing Genizah parchment | Zvi Stampfer joins the Unit



## Zvi Stampfer joins as first Parasol Foundation Research Associate



**Dr Zvi Stampfer**

In October 2014 Dr Zvi Stampfer joined the Genizah Research Unit as the first Parasol Foundation Research Associate – a one-year post funded specifically to research the social history of women in the medieval world of the Genizah.

Dr Stampfer holds degrees in Law, Bible and Jewish Thought as well as an MA and PhD in Talmud. His doctoral thesis dealt with the Laws of Divorce by Samuel b. Hofni Gaon. His area of expertise is gender and family law in the Middle Ages, and is based largely on the judicial works in Judaeo-Arabic that are found in the Cairo Genizah.

By funding this post, the Parasol Foundation has allowed Dr Stampfer to bring a valuable level of expertise in Jewish law (Halakha) and Judaeo-Arabic jurisprudence to the Genizah Unit. He has already made a number of very interesting new discoveries among the fragments. During his year in Cambridge, Dr Stampfer



will also lecture to Jewish and Muslim student groups in Cambridge on the relations between Islamic culture and Jewish law. In July 2015 he is convening a workshop entitled 'Language, gender and law in the Judaeo-Islamic milieu'. The participants will include historians, linguists, religious experts and a practicing judge, covering Late Antiquity up to present legal practice.

**Ben Outhwaite**  
*Genizah Research Unit*

**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)

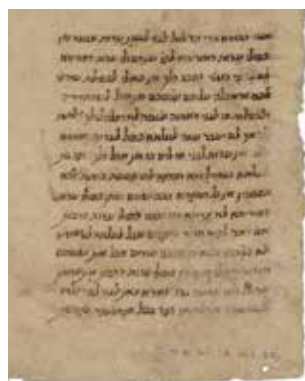
"Cambridge in America" is recognized by the IRS as a charitable organization, and contributions for the benefit of the Genizah Research Unit are legally deductible for USA income tax purposes. Contributions are similarly deductible in Canada even if made directly to the Development Office at the University of Cambridge.

## Applying Islamic theology to the Jewish marriage ceremony

Between medieval Judaism and Islam, there exist many commonalities in the fields of biblical philosophy, theology, philology, poetry, belles lettres, history, and also religious law. In the first six months of my research I have focused on identifying and analysing judicial works relating to gender and family law among the Genizah fragments. A closer look reveals the mutual influence between theology and religious law. A particularly interesting discovery concerns the status of non-Jewish witnesses attending the wedding ceremony.

T-S Ar. 18(2).35 is a Judaeo-Arabic work on family law, from the end of the 11th or the beginning of the 12th century. In it the author creates a distinction between two kinds of testimony: the first kind of testimony is when one needs to reveal the truth. In

this case any reliable person - whether a Jew or non-Jew - can be a witness. The second kind of testimony is when the testimony is an integral part of the judicial act. In this case the witness must be a Jew. This is not clarified in the Talmud, which explicitly states that a judicial decree made by any official court is valid, and that the only witnesses to divorce or deeds of gifts and slave emancipation should be



**T-S Ar. 18(2).35, a Judaeo-Arabic work on family law**

Jewish. But the author of this work reinterprets the rationale behind the Talmudic ruling, and concludes that witnesses to the wedding ceremony must also be Jewish. To support his observation, the author uses several assumptions regarding the nature of truth and the human being. In this step he must have relied upon the insights of a Muslim theologian. And indeed we can trace back his 10th-century Muslim source, 'Abd al-Jabbar ibn Ahmad, through the uses of unique terminology in his conception.

This fragment is a surprising discovery, but perhaps not wholly unexpected given what else we know about the nature of interfaith relations in the 'Mediterranean Society' from whence the Genizah fragments derive.

**Zvi Stampfer**  
*Genizah Research Unit*

