

GENIZAH FRAGMENTS

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

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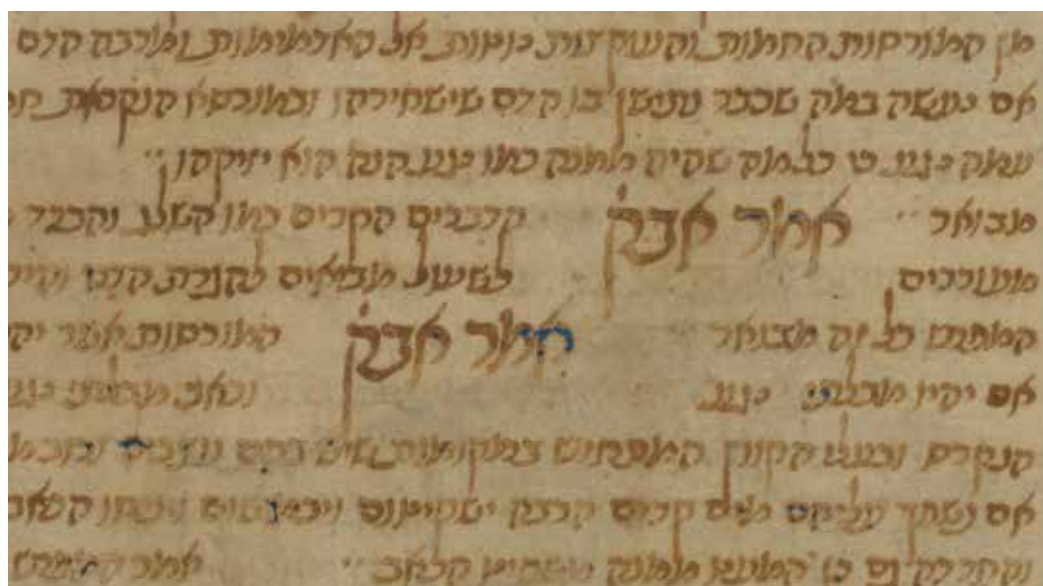
Wellcome Trust Grant fosters further research on the Genizah Medical Corpus

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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.

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



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 Schmieder-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 אמר אבן (Abuqrāṭ/ 'Hippocrates said') introduces the Greek physician's aphorisms.**

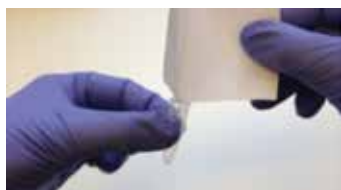
The Genizah Research Unit is grateful for the generous support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Friedberg Genizah Project, the British Academy Small Research Grant Scheme (Leverhulme Funds), the Wellcome Trust (Research Resources), and the Parasol Foundation. We are also grateful for the help 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.

Hide and Sheep

Handwritten documents are immensely important to the heritage of any country. Focus is usually given to the content of a document, however the materials on which texts are written have their own story to tell. Parchment, more so than paper, can provide a unique insight into the lives of people at the time due to the fact it was once a living animal. Different countries and communities used different animals to make their parchments, depending on what was available. Determining the species of animal of a parchment manuscript can lead one to discover information about agricultural developments, climate, trade and animal husbandry.

Parchment is most commonly made from calf, sheep or goat skin. Although these are clearly identifiable from one another while alive, after the skins have gone through the aggressive processes needed to turn them into parchment it is almost impossible to determine one skin from another. The DNA testing of skins can provide a wealth of information as to species, gender and even age but, unfortunately, to do the analysis a sizeable piece of the original manuscript is effectively destroyed. Thankfully a new non-destructive technique, enabling species type to be determined through collagen analysis, has been devised by scientists at the University of York. The BioArCh (Biology, Archaeology and Chemistry) Department use protein mass spectrometry to extract collagen peptide sequences from parchment samples. These peptides have unique masses which act like a fingerprint. Each species has its own characteristic pattern allowing the scientists to easily identify the type of animal.

Over the last year and a half samples have been taken from thirty-two fragments spanning all three Genizah collections housed at the UL. All that is needed to collect a sample from the fragment is a few eraser rubbings. An eraser is gently rubbed on the surface of the parchment, avoiding areas of text



and illuminations, until there is a small amount of eraser waste on the parchment surface. This waste is then carefully brushed into a vial and posted to the scientists at BioArCh. The collagen is removed from the eraser rubbings and sent through mass spectrometry. As the collagen is extracted by static energy, care must be taken to avoid cross contamination between different samples and even from the conservator. Gloves must be worn, hair tied back, no animal based tools such as bone folders or sable brushes used, and all equipment must be cleaned and changed for each new sample.

The results of parchment sampling provide valuable information for conservators. If species type is known before a manuscript undergoes conservation, treatments can be selected accordingly. For example, when doing repairs to a parchment that is known to be

calf, beef gelatine can be selected as the adhesive instead of a different animal-based adhesive.

With one exception, all of the thirty-two parchments tested from Genizah collections were discovered to be sheep. The one anomaly was a manuscript (L-G Misc.31) which was found to be goat skin. Though Middle Eastern parchment makers did use goat skins, goat was the predominant parchment source in Italy and Spain between the 12th and 15th centuries so there is a high probability that the manuscript is of Italian or Spanish origin. There is also strong evidence from the content of that particular text to believe that the manuscript is Spanish or Italian and therefore travelled from Western Europe to Cairo before ending up in the Genizah between the 12th and 13th centuries.

Emma Nichols
Lewis-Gibson Conservator



Mosseri VIII.478 before conservation

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

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

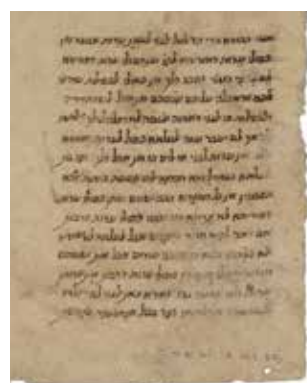
"Cambridge in America" is recognized by the IRS as a charitable organization, and contributions for the benefit of the Genizah Research Unit are legally deductible for USA income tax purposes. Contributions are similarly deductible in Canada even if made directly to the Development Office at the University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

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

Not a Third Rate Poet

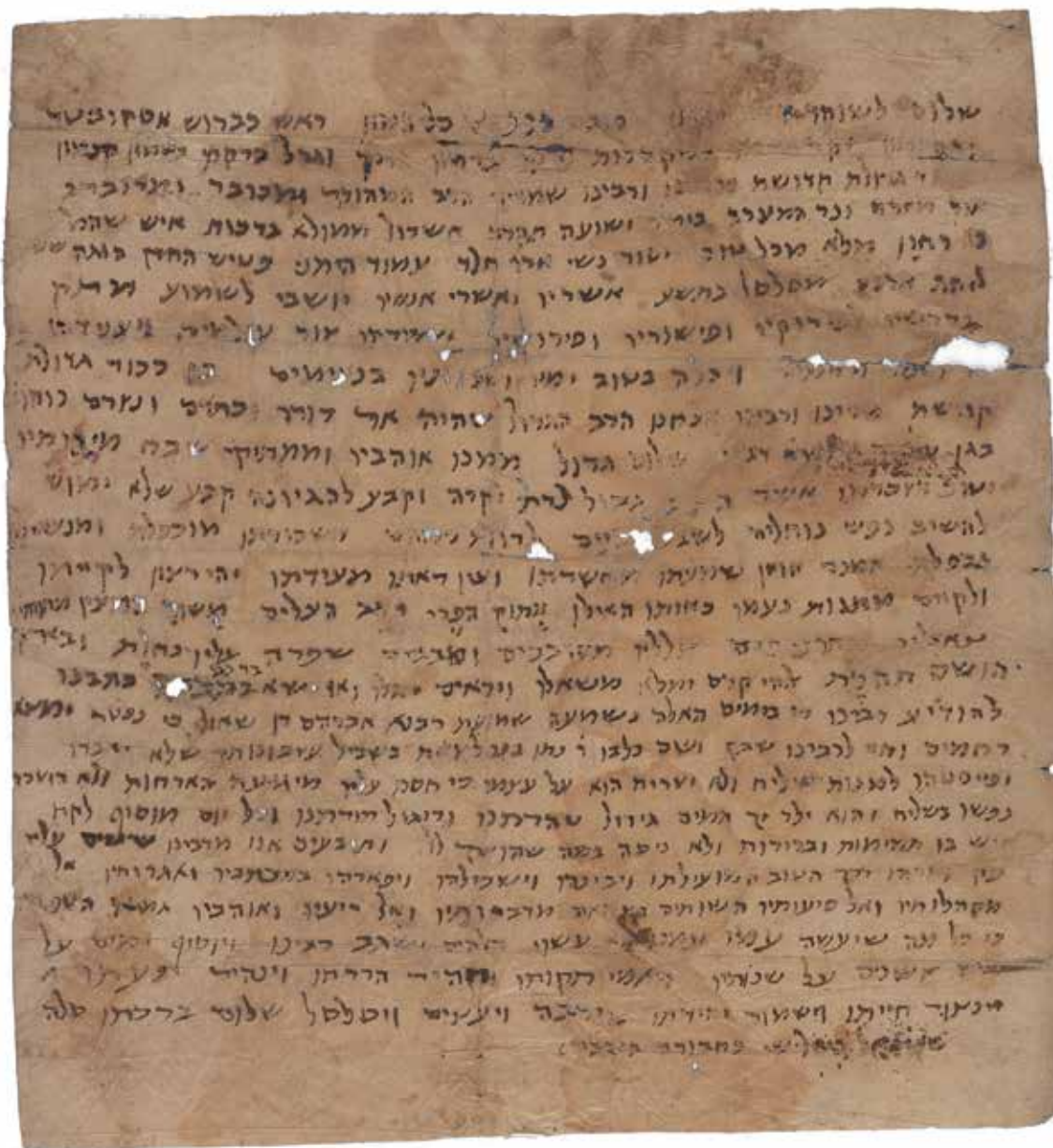
Naoya Katsumata, whose published PhD is on the medieval Hebrew poet Samuel the Third b. Hoshā'na (*Hebrew style in the liturgical poetry of Shmuel Hashlishi*), has collaborated with Yosef Yahalom on an impressive-looking new work *The Yotserot of R. Samuel the Third: a leading figure in Jerusalem of the 10th century* (Yad Ishak Ben-Zvi, Jerusalem, 2014). The rather uninspiring subtitle doesn't do justice to Samuel, one of the

principal poets of his day and a high official in the Jerusalem Academy – third in rank after the supreme head, the Gaon, and his deputy, the Av Bet Din. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* entry on Samuel points out that despite being a major payṭan (liturgical poet) 'only some of his extant piyyuṭim have been published', and Yahalom and Katsumata have gone a long way in rectifying that deficiency with these two volumes drawing

on the five hundred yoṣerot preserved in Genizah collections worldwide. As is usual in the publication of piyyut, the poetry is given fully vocalised, which improves intelligibility, but necessitates frequent consulting of the original manuscripts for those interested in the linguistic aspects of tenth-century poetry. That this vocalisation extends even to the handful of documentary texts presented in the volume is an

odd decision, and not one with precedent in the work of historians like Mann or Gil. That aside, however, the two volumes are splendid and present the reader with an abundance of evidence for the vitality of the Hebrew language under the Palestinian gaonate in the late tenth to early eleventh century.

Ben Outhwaite
Genizah Research Unit



T-S 16.68, sent c. 1010. The magnificent letter of introduction sent by one leading figure to another, as Samuel the Third ben Hoshā'na introduced the young Nathan ben Abraham to the leader of Babylonian Jewry in Fustat, Shemarya ben Elhanan, one of Ibn Daud's famous 'four captives'. Nathan ben Abraham himself went on to cause a major rift in the Jewish community of Egypt by attempting to usurp the position of Head of the Academy from the incumbent Solomon ben Judah.

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.