Research before sensation

Scholarship is no less prone to fashion and topicality than other areas of human endeavour. This applies even to what appears to be such an esoteric field as manuscript research.

In Solomon Schechter's day, a century ago, the discovery of the Cairo Genizah was the flavour of the period for many of those interested in studying ancient Hebrew documents.

Between the two World Wars, the literary remains of the Canaanite civilisation of biblical times, as preserved at Ugarit, attracted major attention.

No one can deny that 40 years ago a good deal of the excitement associated with the examination of primary Hebrew sources was generated by the analysis of the Qumran Scrolls that had come to light in the caves near the north-western shores of the Dead Sea.

Letters of Bar Kokhba, clay tablets from Ebla, freshly uncovered genizot in Europe, archives made available for the first time since the Bolshevik Revolution – as each new topic comes to the fore, so scholars undertake the necessary pilgrimages, both physical and intellectual, with the aim of making obeisance at the current Meccas of research.

Because this year is the 500th anniversary of 1492, special attention is being given to the outstanding Spanish-Jewish symbiosis that preceded the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and to the establishment of the American colonies that produced the modern nation with the most significant version of its modern cultural equivalent.

As the libraries of Russia open their doors to Western academics, so scores of scholars examine their treasures in the light of discoveries made elsewhere and pronounce on how they do or do not relate and compare.

All this is welcome and can only encourage the study of Hebrew and Jewish manuscripts, including the Genizah research to which this Unit is committed.

What must be borne in mind, however, is that fashion and topicality change, important collections may still await their full treatment.

When the initial excitement has worn off, much solid work remains to be done, and the world of scholarship must do everything in its power to ensure that such work is not neglected in favour of the latest academic sensation.

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

Spitn's 1492 legacy in Cairo Genizah

Professor S. D. Goitein once remarked that the richness of Judaeo-Spanish items in the Genizah reflects the dominance of Sephardi Jews in the Cairo community after 1492. What he did not reveal is the contents of these papers.

Like any other historian, the historian of Hispanic Jewry must be prepared for surprises. He must be able to specialise in, or at least deal competently with, an astonishing variety of subjects.

It is true that every reader of G. S. R. Kitson-Clark's Guide for Research Students Working on Historical Subjects knows that he must be ready to address a variety of topics. Yet the historian who is to reconstruct Hispanic-Jewish society and culture before and after the various expulsions by using the Cambridge Genizah Collections is likely to be taken aback by the evidence.

First, the language itself is an important cultural monument. Indeed, the raw material (that is, speakers and texts) for studying modern Judaeo-Spanish is not lacking in contemporary Israel and the USA.

But while such material for contemporary Judaeo-Spanish that has served most linguists in their analysis is hardly recondite, the evidence for the earlier vernacular is rare indeed and is frequently absent from scholarly bibliography. That is why the Genizah material is so precious.

The discoveries of sixteenth-century vernacular texts in Judaeo-Spanish (rather than the more easily available and printed calque) serve to fill the gaps in linguists' knowledge of the vernacular language of the exiles from Spain. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that so much attention should be paid to this material.

If, for areas such as legal and political history, the historian of Hispanic Jewry must look elsewhere, this is not the case with the history of more popular culture. The renewed impetus to this type of history, in the wake of the publications of such

Part of a Judaeo-Spanish letter (T-S Ar. 29. 105) from a blind man in Cairo to his wife in the Holy Land, one of several letters mentioned by Dr Eleazar Gutwirth in his accompanying article

Unit advises Washington on manuscripts

The Freer Gallery of Art at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, is currently planning to house its Genizah fragments.

Having read in various issues of Genizah Fragments descriptions of the conservation, housing and photography of the Cambridge Genizah fragments, the Gallery's paper conservator, Martha Smith, has been in touch with the director of the T-S Unit, enquiring about the Unit's degree of satisfaction with its methods.

The Gallery was advised that the system of conservation had generally proved successful, although the size of the binders for the New Series could perhaps have been a little smaller and thus less inconvenient for handling by readers.

A catalogue of the fragments in the Freer Gallery of Art was compiled by Richard Gottheil and William Worrell and published in New York, 1927.

Continued on page 4
Delegates to the fifth international conference of the Society for Judeo-Arabic Studies, held at Princeton University

Scholars confer

Some 40 scholars, members of the Society for Judeo-Arabic Studies, met last August for the Society's fifth international biennial conference. The third conference was held at London and Cambridge Universities in the summer of 1987. The recent one was co-hosted by the Jewish Theological Seminary and Princeton University, who sponsored it together with the Ben-Zvi Institute in Jerusalem. It opened at the Seminary on 25 August and continued at Princeton for the following three days.

The theme was "Aspects of Mediterranean Culture in the Middle Ages." Sessions were devoted to language, Jews and Muslims in Mediterranean society and culture, law, literature, Bible translations and exegesis, Karaites and Karaism, philosophy, copyists and readers in Judeo-Arabic culture, and history.

Professor Mark Cohen, of Princeton, gave an informal guided tour of the S. D. Goitein Laboratory for Genizah Research at Princeton, which duplicates the original archive housed at the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts at the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem.

Many of the papers touched upon the Genizah. Professor Haghai Ben-Shmami, of the Hebrew University, reported on Hebrew manuscripts written in Arabic script in the Pirkovich Genizah Collection in St. Petersburg, which he had examined during a recent trip to the Soviet Union.

An unpublished letter of friendship from Maimonides to the Genizah was the subject of the paper of Professor Joel Kraemer, of Tel Aviv University.

Meira Poliack, who is preparing her doctoral thesis at Cambridge, reported some of her findings in a presentation on medieval Karaitic translations of the Bible into Arabic.

Professor Moshe Sokolow, of Yeshiva University, summarized the contents of a volume of Genizah book-lists he has edited for the Ben-Zvi Institute.

Dr Shulamit Sela, of Tel Aviv University, presented a new hypothesis about the early origins of the office of "Head of the Jews," based on the chance discovery in the Genizah of a copy of a Fatimid decree.

Dr Yosef Rivlin, of Bar-Ilan University, described aspects of Jewish life in Lucena, Spain, revealed in a collection of Genizah documents.

Dr Menahem Ben-Sasson, of the Hebrew University, introduced the subject matter of the newly-published book he has edited, The Jews of Sicily 827-1068, the first volume of the Ben-Zvi Institute's Orients Judaicus series.

Professor Avrom Udovitch, chairman of the hosting Near Eastern Studies department at Princeton, shed "new light on mediæval Egyptian rural life from the Genizah" in his offering to the conference.

The T-S Genizah Unit's Professor Ephraim Wiesenberg also attended and delivered a paper on "Maimonides on the Relation between the Determination of the New Moon and the New Year, by Sight and by Calculation."

The Society plans to publish a volume of conference proceedings. Enquiries about membership should be addressed to Mark Cohen, c/o Department of Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey 08544, USA.

MARK R. COHEN
Professor of Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University

2 Genizah Fragments

Genesis discovery

Remnants of Hebrew books written between 135 CE, the date of the Bar-Kokba revolt, and the Middle Ages are few, and most of them are very small fragments. They were found with documents, letters and amulets written on papyrus and are today housed mostly in the Bodleian Library and the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich. As Professor L. Dukan and I have been fortunate enough to find important remnants of two scrolls in the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Collection at Cambridge University Library:

1. From the Byzantine period (300–700), two fragments of a Genesis scroll which we tend to assign to the fifth or sixth century.
2. From the first Arab period (700–930), 19 fragments (some quite large) of a Sefer Torah which we date in the eighth or ninth century.

The Genesis scroll is written on fine parchment, on the flesh-side, in a beautiful hand and is about 8.5 cm high. The margins are large (the upper one 6.5 cm) and the columns are 43.2–43.5 cm high.

We have the upper fragment of two columns (T-S NS 4.3: Genesis 41:38–47) and of five more (T-S NS 3.21: Genesis 13:10–17:27).

The first two columns are the sixth and seventh of the scroll; the others are the seventeenth to thirty-first. The columns are 7.9–9.2 cm wide, with 2–2.3 cm between them. Each line has 17–23 letters and there are 54–55 written lines. If Genesis alone was copied on this scroll, it had 68–70 columns and the whole length was 8–9 metres. If it was a Sefer Torah, it was 38–40 metres long.

This paper was almost completely identical to the Masoretic Text, except in 17:1, where the scroll has shanah for shamm at the end of the verse.

There are also two corruptions. The first is in 14:9, where the pttw missing from the beginning of the name Aykholl has been placed above the line by the scribe. This is a method of correction used, for example, in a fragment of a Gen¬esis scroll from the Dead Sea collection.

In the second correction, in 16:13, the scribe wrote the Hebrew for "and he called" instead of "and she called" and corrected this by writing a taw over the yod. Since yod is a narrow letter, the resulting taw differs from others in the scroll.

We have also found in this scroll what appears to be the first instance of the "crowns" (tagin) mentioned in the Babylonian Tal¬mud (Menahot, 2b20).

The ornament on top of the left down-stroke in the letters מִתִּי and מִתַּי is different from the ornament on other letters. It is made with a to¬and-fro stroke and creates an angle open to the right.

COLETTE SIRAT
Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes, Paris, and Institute for Advanced Studies, Jerusalem

[TO BE CONCLUDED]

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, University of Cambridge, Trinity Road, Cambridge CB2 1DR, England. The Library may also be reached by fax (0223) 333160.

Readers not already subscriber to the magazine are invited to take regular subscriptions by simply filling in the subscription form. Your subscription will ensure that you receive regular copies of the magazine. The subscription fee is $12 (USA) or $15 (Canada) and is payable by check or money order.

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, P.O. Box 7070, Arlington, Virginia 22207, USA.

How you can help the T-S Genizah Unit

Transfers of securities regularly made from the USA to Cambridge.

The AFCU is recognized by the IRS as a charitable organization and contributions and gifts are legally deductible for United States income tax purposes. They are similarly deductible in Canada even if made directly to Cambridge.
Welcome grant of £18,800

A grant of £18,819 has been made to the University of Cambridge by the Wellcome Trust to enable the T-S Unit to complete its catalogue of the medical texts in the Genizah Collection.

Dr Haskell Isaacs has been preparing descriptions of about 2,000 fragments on a part-time basis since 1985 and now has been joined in the project by Dr Colin Baker, whose doctoral research at Cambridge dealt with Arabic medical texts.

The intention is to complete the necessary research within a few months and to use computer technology for the preparation of camera-ready copy for submission to Cambridge University Press in 1993, for publication in the Library Series.

Other major awards recently received have included £1,500 from Mr Samuel Sebba, £1,400 from the Jewish Memorial Council, and £1,250 from the British Academy to sponsor the visiting professorship of Dr Victor Lebedev from St. Petersburg.

Mr Cyril Stein and Mr Michael Phillips have each contributed £1,000, and Mr I. Raine is welcomed as a new supporter of the Unit in the amount of £1,000.

Renewals of earlier support have kindly been made by Mrs Vivien Duffield (£500), Goldberg Charitable Trust (£500), Heron International plc (£500), Dr Ralph Kohn (£500), Mr Henry Kormind (£500), Mr Arnold Lee (£500), Mr A. S. Oppenheimer (£500), and Mr Leslie Porter (£500).

Lord Steiff of Brimpton has again associated himself with the Unit’s efforts by helpfully arranging for a £500 contribution from the Simon Marks Charitable Trust.

The Unit gratefully receives the death of its long-time supporter, Mr Stanley Burton, who contributed £400 last year, and welcomes an anonymous donation of £200 in his memory.

Among other friends to be thanked for maintaining their support are Mr Philip Maurice (£500), Mr Harry Landy (£300), Mrs Helena Sebba (£250), Mr William Margulies (£250), and Mr Fred Worms (£250).

The Unit is also grateful to Mr S. W. Laufer (£180), Mr Clifford Barclay (£100), Mr David Isaacs (£100), Mr and Mrs Anthony Rau (£100), Mrs Judith Samuel (£100), and Mrs Flazel Alexander (£100, from a sale of her sculpture of Maimonides).

A number of contributions have been forwarded by the American Friends of Cambridge University and particularly thanks are due to them and to Ms Kathlyn L. Johnson (£500), Mrs Clara B. Laks (£275), Mr and Mrs Raphael Levy (£150), and Mrs Diane Clavert (£125).

All such assistance and many other smaller or anonymous donations are deeply appreciated and are ensuring the continuation of the Unit’s projects in the fields of description and research.

Egyptian help to the Holy Land

During the Mamluk period (1250–1516), the land of Israel was politically and economically attached to the Egyptian centre and was ruled from Cairo by emirs and governors with varying degrees of authority.

From the second half of the fifteenth century, Jewish sources paint an interesting picture of relations between the Jews of the two countries. Among much else, there were reports of immigrants and pilgrims from Europe to the land of Israel via Egypt, passages from responsa literature, and letters and documents found in the Cairo Genizah.

As part of the Orients Judaicæ project of the Ben-Zvi Institute in Jerusalem, I have recently researched twelve such manuscripts from the Genizah Collections at Cambridge University Library that form the history of Jerusalem, Hebron, and Safed in the early sixteenth century.

The evidence goes further than demonstrating the massive and apparently continuous support that the Jews of that city and town were giving to their brethren in the Holy Land. It also emerges that, although the links between the Jews of Safed and Damascus became reinforced with the rise of Ottoman rule in the land of Israel, from 1516, the connection between the Jews of that city and Egypt did not cease, but was reflected in commercial ties and in requests for financial aid.

Jerusalem: R. Samuel ha-Kohen, a member of one of the academies in Jerusalem, asked a number of communal leaders in Egypt for permission to use a synagogue sermon to explain his financial difficulties (T-S 131424.29).

Later in the sixteenth century, an anonymous philanthropist in Egypt received a letter from R. David Badussi, who used to teach children in Jerusalem. R. David details his economic plight and asks for help (T-S 13159.136).

During the same period, R. Jacob Zalmati and his brother R. Yeshu’ah in Egypt were contacted by their Jerusalem sister Gamlah, the widow of the Morrocan kabba-list, R. Judah Halevyah, who had lived in Safed and Jerusalem.

She asked them to intercede on her behalf with a philanthropist who is unnamed but is probably to be identified as R. Solomon Alshaka, a known supporter of charities in those parts. She had no responsibility for any of the places, but as such a personality in the first half of the sixteenth century, she probably expected some sympathy and assistance.

She explained that she is still waiting for him to fulfil a promise to send her money (Or. 1080 J161).

Hebron: Two fund-raising letters, signed by the heads of the Hebron community at some point in either the sixteenth or seventeenth century, were delivered by emissaries to dignitaries in Egypt (T-S 811.20 and T-S 181323.2).

Safed: The first six lines have been preserved of a letter sent from Egypt to the members of the holy academy by R. Samuel Bahalul.

Other Genizah evidence places such a personality in the first decade of the sixteenth century and we may therefore conclude that the Safed community at that time suffered the kind of economic difficulties that necessitated appeals to the Diaspora for financial assistance (T-S AS 218153).

At the end of the century, R. Abraham Sagis of Safed sent a letter to an anonymous person with good connections in Egypt who had studied in Safed with the prominent sage, R. Moses di Trani.

The writer complains bitterly about the addressee’s failure to pay a debt owed to him and his unwillingness to support the descendants of his late master. He also describes his own experiences in Safed at that time (T-S 101713.33).

I have published full details of these fragments, and of others from Oxford and New York, in the Cambridge 29 (1991), 59–78.

ABRAHAM DAVID
Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem

Professor Goshen-Gottstein at the Genizah Research Unit

In the summer of 1990, Professor Moshe Goshen-Gottstein, the distinguished semitist and biblical philologist, wrote to the Unit offering a charming reminiscence and a note of appreciation:

“You have put Genizah studies back on the map, and the days when I directed my hands excavating the crates with Miss Skillett’s permission seem light-years away.

‘Had I myself not moved so far away from the area, I would almost feel like coming back one day and leafing through the newly-ordered material. Of course, there is little chance of repeating my discoveries, most of which were never published.’

‘In any case, let me offer you hearty congratulations on what you have accomplished.’

During a visit to England with his wife Esther nine months ago, Professor Goshen-Gottstein was able to visit Cambridge University Library again and to entertain those in the Unit with stories of work on the Genizah Collection in the 1950s.

Sadly, the learned professor died in Jerusalem in September, 1991, but researchers in the Unit feel privileged to have welcomed him here during what turned out to be his last visit abroad.

Indian trade

Readers will recall that in a recent issue of Genizah Fragments (No. 21, pages 3–4), Professor Mordechai Friedman described the Genizah documents relating to the Indian trade.

Those particularly interested in the twelfth-century letter from David Maimonides to his brother, the famous Moses Maimonides, should note that the classmark is Or. 1081 J1, and not Or. 1080 J1, as inadvertently printed.
Spain’s 1492 legacy in Cairo Genizah

The next conference of the British Association for Jewish Studies will take place at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, 27–29 July, 1992. The main theme will be “The Medieval Jewish Experience” and the following list of lecturers and titles has been tentatively arranged:

A. Broadie, “The Nature of Medieval Jewish Philosophy.”
A. David, “Late Genizah Material as a Source for the History of Eretz Yisrael.”
W. Horbury, “Judaah Briel and Seventeenth-Century Jewish Anti-Christian Polemic.”
E. Horowitz, “The Meaning of the Jewish Beard in the Middle Ages.”
I. Jacobs, “Is Peshat a Medieval Concept?”
A. Jacobs, “Havayot de-Abbaye ve-Rava: The History of a Talmudic Text.”
G. Khan, “The Pronunciation of Hebrew in the Middle Ages.”
M. Rubin, “The Birth of the Host Desecration Accusation against Jews in Late Medieval Europe.”
N. Solomon, “Nathan ibn Al-Fayyumi and Jewish-Christian Relations.”

S. Stern, “Medieval Rabbinic Attitudes to Christian Dogmas.”
H. Trautner-Kromann, “Jewish Criticism of Christianity in Medieval Spain and France.”
M. Winterman, “Hasdai Crescas and his Refutation of Christian Theology.”

There will also be short research reports on Genizah projects at Cambridge, an exhibition, a reception and the annual general meeting of the Association.

New volumes

Cambridge University Press has just announced the publication of Genizah Research after Ninety Years. The Case of Judeo-Arabic, edited by J. Blau and S. C. Reif, and appearing as No. 47 in the University’s Oriental Publications series. The volume contains 21 essays.

Publication of M. L. Klein’s Targumic Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections in the University Library’s Genizah Series, published by CUP, is on schedule for publication in June.

Praise for T-S Unit

The University Library’s annual report, published in the Cambridge University Reporter of 31 January, 1992, includes the following remarks about the Oriental Division:

“One of the purposes of the creation of the Division was to co-ordinate the diverse and isolated achievements of the various departments into a coherent whole . . . and to extend and exploit the management structures which had been so successful in the Genizah Research Unit.

“This has undoubtedly been achieved and the Library can with confidence point to a Division which has few equals outside.

“At the same time, the achievements of the Genizah Research Unit have in no sense been diminished. On the contrary . . .”

Mrs Elena Romero (left), of the Arias Montana Institute in Madrid, and Mrs Beatriz Martin Arias, of the Spanish Ministry of Culture, arranging manuscripts from the Taylor-Schechter Collection at Cambridge for their exhibition in Toledo marking the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain.