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 Israel 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 Moseran 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

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 Miss 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 Boruta 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 history of the Cairo Genizah, will be held early in 2016 in Cambridge University Library’s Milstein Conservation Centre.

The Lauffer Family Charitable Trust has generously supported with funding from the Friedberg Genizah Project, and the British Academy Small Research Grant Scheme (University 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 (£125); A. Shenkin (£125); M. Amin (£100); Emjaysea Charitable Trust (£6,000); Education Services (£1,000); S. C. Reif (£450); Hadley Wood Synagogue (£125); A. Shenkin (£125); M. Amin (£100); Emjaysea Charitable Trust (£6,000); Education Services (£1,000); S. C. Reif (£450); Hadley Wood Synagogue (£125); A. Shenkin (£125); M. Amin (£100); Emjaysea Charitable Trust (£6,000); Education Services (£1,000); S. C. Reif (£450); Hadley Wood Synagogue (£125); A. Shenkin (£125); M. Amin (£100); Emjaysea Charitable Trust (£6,000); Education Services (£1,000); S. C. Reif (£450); Hadley Wood Synagogue (£125); A. Shenkin (£125); M. Amin (£100); Emjaysea Charitable Trust (£6,000); Education Services (£1,000).
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, Melanie Schmierer-Lee, Daniel Davies and Gabriele Ferrario, the programme was produced by Miranda Hinkley and Michelle 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. Melodie 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 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-Fustat.

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 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 in 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

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 the Genizah, together with fragments that have been disassembled and translated 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, collections 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, disturbed through the British Academy’s Small Grant scheme, the Genizah Unit, together with Dr Amir Agha (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 Additioinal Series. The chance discoveries of recent years suggest that much more awaits discovery in a systematic search.

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) 333166 or by telephone (01223) 331000. 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 212-984-1960 or see their website: www.caminab.org.

‘Cambridge in America’ is recognized by the IRS as a charitable organization, and contributions to 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 scholars would very much like to have the opportunity to analyse the Genizah, particularly the Cairo Genizah, and we are very grateful to all who support this work. If you would like to contribute to the Genizah Research Unit, please contact them on 212-984-1960 or see their website: www.caminab.org.

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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 ‘Essay’. 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 feature of medieval Jewish culture. The intellectual output of the Cairo Genizah to a larger public and scholarly circles was at the heart of the final episode, tracing personal, professional 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 feature of medieval Jewish culture.

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In the USA the Collection is supported through ‘Cambridge in America’. For further information please contact them on 212-984-9860 or see their website: www.cambridgeinamerica.org.

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Gabriele Ferrario

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The magnificent collection includes more than 2000 documents, many of which were acquired by Mrs Lewis in the 1920s, along with other Genizah documents 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 Erez Israel in the sixteenth century, then his new volume of collected articles, Jewish Settlement in Erez ha-Zvi: texts and studies on late medieval Jewish history in the land of Israel (Rubi Knesset, Jerusalem, 2013), is an essential read. It contains 31 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.

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 Mosteri and Lewis-Gibson.

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Julia Krivoruchko
Genizah Research Unit