Eli ben Amram and his Companions

Elinoar Bareket’s new book, Eli ben Amram and his Companions (Sussex Academic Press, 2017) takes a close look at Jewish leadership in medieval Fustat by focussing on Eli b. Amram, politician and poet of the middle of the eleventh century. Eli succeeded Efraim b. Shemarya, who died in 1055, as head of the Fustat community, and, like his predecessor, endured a number of controversies, including a serious falling-out with the Jerusalem Gaon Solomon b. Judah, who referred to Eli in one of his letters as "ה牽יכן ידכתי, the distinguished traitor". Eli has fortunately left quite a large written legacy in the Genizah, which enables us to see beyond Solomon’s cruel characterisation. The legacy includes letters, legal deeds and quite a number of poems. Poetry, for Eli, was a means to a political end, as most of his extant compositions are poems of praise for leading Egyptian Jews, including the Karaite Tustani brothers, courtiers to the Fatimid Caliph. Through such flattering poems, Eli sought to advance his status and secure his leading position among Fustat’s Jews. Bareket’s thought-provoking study examines in detail how the language of letters and poems functioned as a mechanism to negotiate the complex network of social relationships that existed in the medieval Mediterranean.

Ben Outhwaite
Genizah Research Unit

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 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.

Eli's political art in the eleventh century: Eli b. Amram's paean of praise for the Karaite courtier Abraham b. Sahl (T-S 13110.12)

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Left: The political art in the eleventh century: Eli b. Amram’s paean of praise for the Karaite courtier Abraham b. Sahl (T-S 13110.12)

To read about the latest discoveries of Genizah researchers, from Karaite halakha, to tax receipts, to stolen cows, browse our 'Fragment of the Month' articles online: http://tinyurl.com/y8rcd766

Or dip into over 20,000 catalogued Genizah fragments on Cambridge Digital Library: https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/genizah

35,000 visitors and counting
Genizah exhibition reaches new audiences

So far, over 35,000 people have found their way to the University Library’s Milstein Exhibition Centre, and stepped back a thousand years in time to view the manuscripts of ‘Discarded History: the Genizah of Medieval Cairo’. Since opening at the end of April, the exhibition has kept the Genizah Research Unit constantly busy running curator tours, public lectures and study days to add to the experience. The response has been quite overwhelming, and the remarkable number of visitors justifies the faith that the University Library has in the tattered Fustat fragments to command a wide audience.

We’ve received many kind communications congratulating us on the exhibit, and only a few criticisms. One change we did make in the early weeks of the exhibition was as a response to public pressure: many visitors pointed out that the commentary on Isaiah by Saadya Gaon was exhibited upside down.

Above: The trousseau list of the wealthiest woman in the Genizah, accompanied by Fatimid period ceramics loaned by the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

continued overleaf

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

Genizah Fragments 74
Editor Melanie Schmerer-Lee
Design H2 Associates, Cambridge

Genizah Research Unit
Cambridge University Library
West Road, Cambridge, CB3 9DR, England

University of Cambridge

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ON OTHER PAGES: The Bible in the Land of Israel | Eli ben Amram and his Companions
The project is expected to critique previous reconstructions of the historical development of the Palestinian tradition found in biblical manuscripts, to propose a new typology of text types, and to provide a body of research data for future studies on this enigmatic reading tradition of the Bible. The result will be a descriptive map of the Palestinian Bible materials preserved in the Genizah, placing the fragments in their linguistic and historical context.

Melanie Schriemer-Lee
Genizah Research Unit

The award of a new grant will enable researcher Dr. Kim Phillips to examine all known Genizah manuscripts of the Bible vocalised with the so-called Palestinian vocalisation, the Niqqud Erets-Israeli – approximately 120 manuscripts. This form of vocalisation, which marks vowels above the consonants, is a system both less complete and more ‘popular’ in character than the dominant Tiberian system. It is only found in manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah, where it is mainly used to vocalise liturgical poetry, rabbinic texts, targum fragments and the Hebrew Bible. Despite pioneering work by Kahle, and more recent work by Dietrich, Chiesa, Revell and Yahalom, there remain many unanswered questions both about the system itself and the manuscripts that employ it.

Dr. Phillips’ project, which will run over four years, will pay particular attention to the different layers of Palestinian vowel and accent signs, attempting to produce a rigorous typology, and will examine the underlying consonantal text, to see how this compares with the consonantal text types of the Tiberian and Babylonian-vocalised manuscripts of the Bible. Furthermore, the project will examine the masoretic notes found on many of the manuscripts, an area previously neglected, as well as analyse in detail the unique seruger fragments, which present an abbreviated biblical text, probably to be used by scribes.

The Bible of the Land of Israel: re-examining the Palestinian vocalisation tradition

The Genizah Research Unit

After spending a few days with talking heads from all corners of the Genizah world – from former director of the GRU Stefan Reif, through to recent writers such as Mark Glickman (author of 'Sacred Perplexed') –, it’s an impressive array of Genizah erudition that we hope that we’ll have the opportunity to show new audiences further treasures of the Fustat Genizah soon.

The project is supported by generous donors around the world. Support research and scholarship on the Genizah collection and receive exciting benefits, such as products featuring items from the collection, invitations to events, behind-the-scenes tours, and more, by becoming a ‘Friend of the Genizah’.

Friends of the Genizah

For more information on becoming a Friend of the Genizah visit http://tinyurl.com/y6wvzees

Visiting Scholars at the Genizah Research Unit

We were delighted to host two visiting scholars in the Genizah Research Unit this summer. José (Pepe) Martínez Delgado of the University of Granada joined us from March–June, and spent his time working on the Cordoban grammarian Hayyuj. Professor Yoram Erder of Tel Aviv University joined us from July–August to work on early Karate commentaries on the Bible and Saladiya Gaon’s polemic against the Karaites.
down. We eventually decided to take action, and there is now a caption beside it explaining why it is upside down: because the Crusader who wrote in Latin that ‘this is a commentary on Isaiah’ didn’t understand how Hebrew was written, or that Hebrew was read from right to left, and we are in discussions as to where to take it.

In addition to study days, public talks and hands-on sessions, the Unit collaborated on a number of special one-off events around the exhibit. We were delighted to host Michelle Paymar as she showed a rough cut of her new major documentary on the Genizah, ‘From Cairo to the Cloud’. Years of research, filming in Egypt and the UK, and in conversation with some of the world’s leading scholars on the Genizah, including Yoram Erder of Tel Aviv University, José (Pepe) Martínez Delgado of the University of Granada, and Mark Glickman (author of ‘Sacred Perplexed’), it’s an impressive array of Genizah erudition that will be a descriptive map of the Palestinian tradition and its contribution. The Genizah Research Unit is supported by generous donors and contributors, including those made following the successful fundraising appeal to support the Friedberg Genizah Project, and the Wellcome Trust’s ‘From Cairo to the Cloud’.

The award of a new grant will enable researcher Dr Kim Phillips to examine all known Genizah manuscripts of the Bible vocalised with the so-called Palestinian vocalisation, the Niqqud Erets-Israeli– a system less consonantal than the dominant Tiberian system. It is only found in manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah, where it is mainly used to vocalise liturgical poetry, rabbinic texts, targum fragments and the Hebrew Bible. Despite pioneering work by Kahle, and more recent work by Dietrich, Chiesa, Revel and Yahalom, there remain many unanswered questions both about the system itself and the manuscripts that employ it.

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The project is expected to critique previous reconstructions of the historical development of the Palestinian tradition found in biblical manuscripts, to propose a new typology of text types, and to provide a body of research data for future studies on this enigmatic reading tradition of the Bible. The result will be a descriptive map of the Palestinian Bible materials preserved in the Genizah, placing the fragments in their linguistic and historical context.

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Genizah Research Unit

**The Bible of the Land of Israel: re-examining the Palestinian vocalisation tradition**

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**Friends of the Genizah**

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£50/$50 – Friend
£250/$250 – Supporter
£500/$500 – Manuscript
£1,000/$1,000 – Scroll
£15,000/$15,000 – Codex

For more information on becoming a ‘Friend of the Genizah’ visit http://tinyurl.com/y6vwzes

**The Genizah Research Unit**

is grateful for the generous support of the Friedberg Genizah Project, and the Welbecke Trust (Research Resources). We are also appreciative of other smaller or anonymous donations, including those made following visits to see the manuscripts and Discarded History exhibition in Cambridge University Library.
Eli ben Amram and his Companions

Eli, Amram’s son, was a Gaon of the time of Solomon ben Judah, as is clear from a responsa written by Judah himself. Though not himself a Gaon, Eli certainly kept up the tradition. Indeed, some say he was the first Gaon to hold office for only one year, though this is not certain. Nevertheless, he was a great literary figure and wrote poems in praise of Solomon. His best-known work is the “Praise of Solomon,” which has been preserved in a number of manuscripts. It is an example of the kind of writing that was typical of the era, with its emphasis on piety and scholarship.

The political situation in the eleventh century was complex, with a number of different political entities vying for power in Egypt. Among these were the Fatimids, the Seljuqs, and the Ayyubids. Eli was drawn into this political intrigue, and his correspondence is a rich source of information about the political landscape of the time.

The exhibition at the University Library has in the last month been quite overwhelming, and the response has been overwhelming. The collection has been very well received by the public, and the number of visitors has been quite astounding. The library has been busy running curator tours, public lectures, and study days to add to the experience. The response has been quite overwhelming, and the remarkable number of visitors justifies the faith that the University Library has in the tattered Fustat fragments to command a wide audience.

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The trousseau list above is the trousseau list of the wealthiest woman in the Genizah, accompanied by Fatimid period ceramics loaned by the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.