

GENIZAH FRAGMENTS

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

No. 72 October 2016

Announcing a new Genizah exhibition in 2017

Genizah manuscripts will be displayed in a special five-month exhibition at Cambridge University Library opening at the end of April 2017.

The exhibition, 'Discarded History', will tell the dramatic story of the discovery of the manuscripts 120 years ago, and peer into the medieval society that emerges from their pages. As readers of *Genizah Fragments*, you may have visited Cambridge and viewed the Genizah manuscripts before, and this exhibition will be an

opportunity to come again, learn something new, and bring your friends!

Throughout the exhibition, there will be a full programme of public lectures and activities. Full details of the exhibition programme will accompany the next issue of *Genizah Fragments*. Details will also be given on our website and on social media closer to the time.

Melanie Schmieder-Lee
Genizah Research Unit



T-S 13J13.16. This 11th-century letter was written on behalf of a poor woman with a disfiguring disease that has caused her nose to be eaten away. Having no-one else to turn to, she writes to the Jewish leader in Egypt, David ben Daniel, seeking a charitable allowance from the community funds. Come and see this fragment and others in the 2017 exhibition 'Discarded History' at Cambridge University Library.

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 appreciative of other smaller or anonymous donations, including those made following visits to see the manuscripts in Cambridge University Library.

The 2017 exhibition 'Discarded History'

An opportunity to share the **Cairo Genizah** with audiences who've never heard of it – there's something to interest everyone!

Do you know of a school or educational institution that would be interested in visiting Cambridge to learn about life in medieval Egypt?
Please spread the word!

Ben Sira's Hebrew text, 1896–2016

In the summer of 1896, Dr Solomon Schechter, then teaching talmudic and rabbinic literature at the University of Cambridge, told his wife that a discovery he had just made would ensure, as he put it, that 'as long as the Bible lives, my name shall not die'.

That discovery was the Hebrew text of the Book of Ben Sira, long since known only in Greek and Syriac. Now, 120 years later, a conference held at St John's College, brought together some twenty scholars from around the world, to discuss what has since then been achieved in understanding the importance

of this collection of proverbs composed by a Jerusalem sage early in the second century BCE.

How successfully did the early editors of the fragments of Ben Sira from the Cairo Genizah carry out their work? What are the keys to identifying the different manuscripts of this work and the scribes and poets who transmitted them? Do they reflect different approaches to the text? When will scholars have a published text of the whole Book of Ben Sira that provides them with the Hebrew, Greek, Syriac and Latin versions, and all the variant readings to be found on each verse, with

accompanying translations into European languages? Where do the language and content of Ben Sira stand in relation to earlier and later Jewish literature? In what ways are the poetry and imagery of the book impressive? What precisely were the roles of Charles Taylor and Solomon Schechter?

These and other questions were addressed during the conference. In addition, there were exhibitions at the University Library and at St John's College Library. The conference was sponsored by the Faculty of Divinity and St John's College in the University of Cambridge and the ISDCL at the University of Salzburg.

James Aitken, Renate Egger-Wenzel and Stefan Reif made the arrangements and will edit the volume of proceedings for the publishers Walter de Gruyter.

Stefan C. Reif
St John's College



Conference delegates pore over every fragment of Ben Sira so far discovered in Cambridge

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.

Ethics, Globalisation and Business in the Judaeo-Islamic milieu

Modern jurists and scholars of medieval Judaeo-Arabic judicial works may find themselves wrestling with similar ethical questions. In the second year of my research supported by the Parasol Foundation, I organised a summer workshop that brought together diverse speakers, including scholars of medieval Judaism and Islam and modern ethics as well as practicing Muslim and Jewish jurists.

The sessions sought to approach the manuscripts in a novel

tripartite fashion. First, a selected Genizah fragment was presented, and a conventional analysis of the fragment offered. A second presenter then analysed the same fragment from the perspective of religious thought. The third presenter then addressed – from a contemporary ethical or economic viewpoint – issues arising from it, including the arms trade, the trafficking of women, managing risk and responsibility, caring responsibly for the property of others, and truth and

deception when challenged by a hostile judiciary, concluding with an examination of how the study of medieval culture and modern business and ethics can mutually benefit each other.

The proceedings of 2015's workshop, 'Language, Gender and Law in the Judaeo-Islamic milieu', are now being prepared for publication.

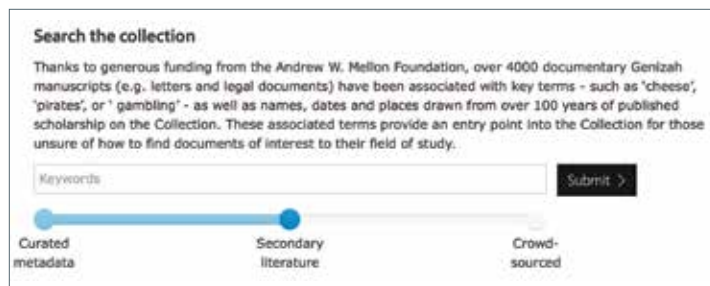
Zvi Stampfer
Genizah Research Unit

New search tools reveal Genizah documents

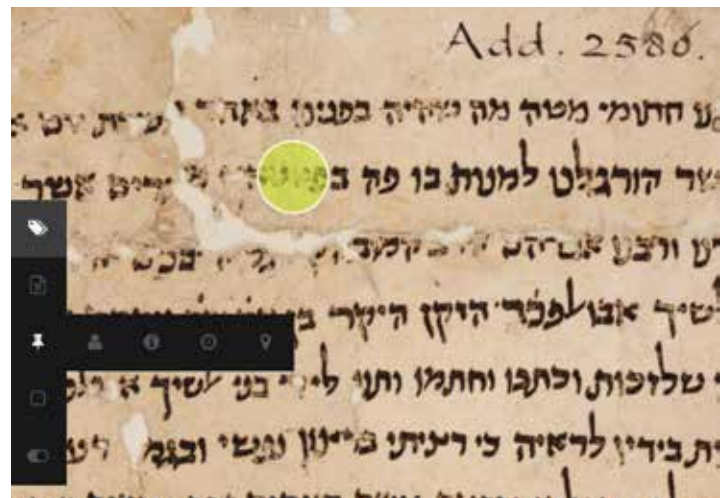
With the Mellon-funded 'Discovering history' project we've introduced a new way to search the Genizah manuscripts in Cambridge Digital Library (cudl.cam.ac.uk), as well as provided tools that let users add information to them.

When searching the historical documents of the Genizah – letters, legal deeds etc – you can now search at three levels: across the Genizah Unit's own descriptions ('curated metadata'), across data mined automatically from published sources ('secondary literature') and across information provided by users ('crowd-sourced'). This will enable you to find things that have not yet been catalogued, but which have been published at some point in the last hundred years or which a user has identified and tagged in some way.

To use the search, you'll need to sign in, and there are a number of sign-in options. Once you have a result, you can click on 'tagging' to see the keywords associated with the item. These have been generated from the literature by a text-mining program, and their size should indicate their relevance. While many will be useful and descriptive, some may well be irrelevant: clicking on an irrelevant tag will cross it out, and, behind the scenes, that tag will be demoted in future search results.



Search at three levels: across the Genizah Unit's own descriptions ('curated metadata'), across data mined automatically from published sources ('secondary literature') and across information provided by users ('crowd-sourced')



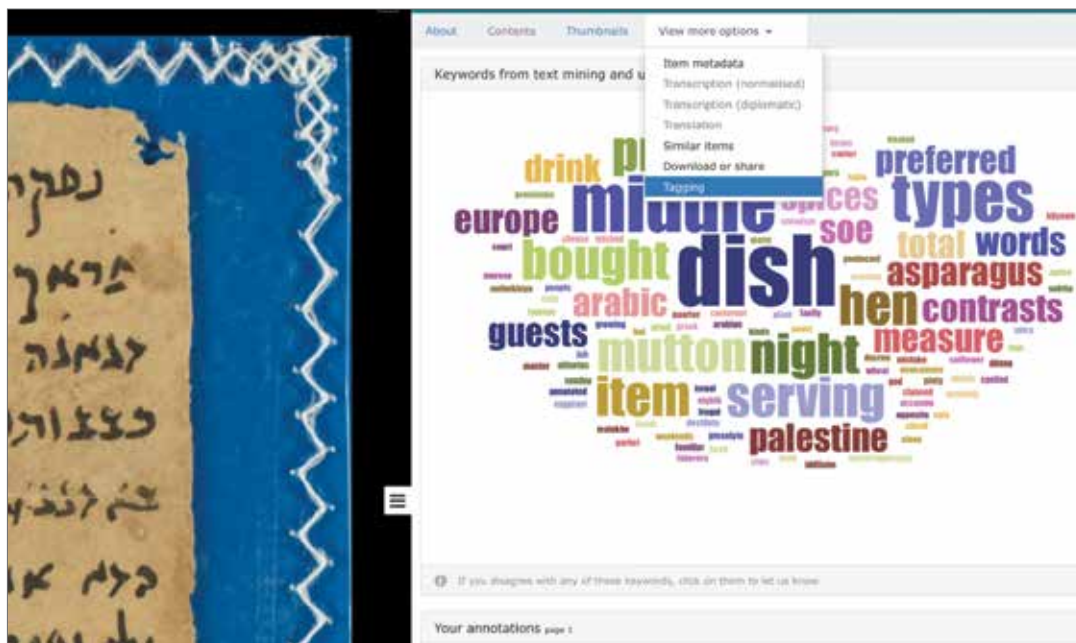
Add your own annotations by tagging names of people, subject matter, dates and place names in the fragment

Because we are now adding images with no descriptions other than the data derived from text-mining, we have given users the option to add their own data. Annotations can be added to tag the page as a whole, or a point or region of the page, with four different types of information: names of people, subject matter, dates and place names. So, if you're reading a document and spot a date or a name, then, providing you are logged in, you can add that information. Annotations added to a manuscript can be toggled

on or off. All user annotations (which are stored anonymously) are indexed nightly by the digital library and will thereafter be added to the data for that manuscript.

All this means that it is now easier than ever before to find a manuscript about a subject that you are interested in, and it is a resource that will improve the more people use it, so we urge people to get involved and start tagging.

Ben Outhwaite
Genizah Research Unit



Select 'tagging' to see keywords associated with the fragment. The keywords have been generated by text-mining secondary literature. The keywords here mostly relate to food, and in fact the fragment is a festive shopping list for a prominent Genizah individual, Solomon ben Elijah

A bookish alchemist

Research on alchemical texts in the Genizah Collections is still in its infancy. Only a handful of alchemical fragments are even referred to – let alone edited or translated – in the scholarly literature. During my years in the Unit, the projects I've worked on

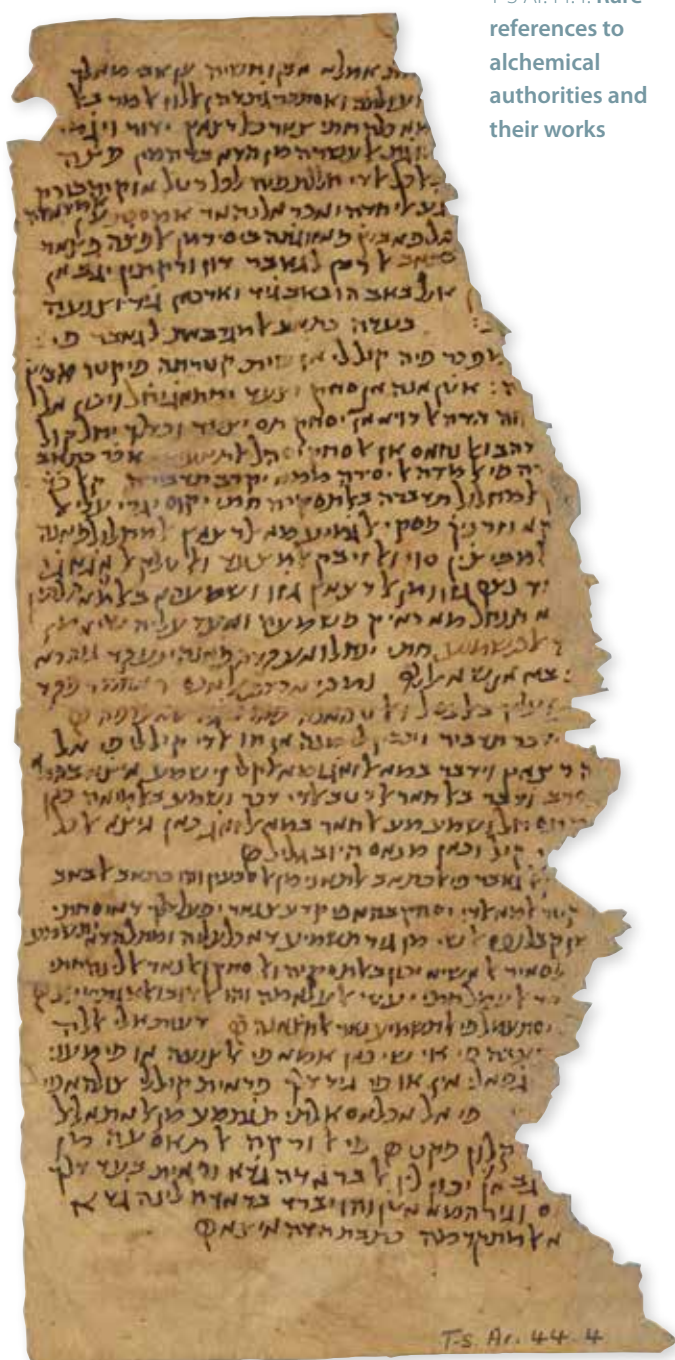
have allowed me to leaf through thousands of fragments in a wide range of genres. To my great joy, I have been able to identify more than 100 fragments that describe laboratory operations for the production of silver and gold from other less precious

metals – the first and foremost goal of any alchemist. These fragments read almost like cooking recipes: a list of ingredients followed by the description of the operations that would lead to their so-called transmutation. However, theoretical works and reference to any alchemical authorities of the past, their books and their teachings are nowhere to be found.

It therefore came as a great surprise to discover that a composite fragment (T-S Ar.44.4 and T-S NS 31.6), first mentioned by Paul Fenton in 1997, breaks with this scheme. Interspersed

among the operative directions of this fragment are references to alchemical books and authorities. In the very first line of the first leaf of the fragment, the name of the 9th/10th century polymath and devotee of the occult, Ibn Wahšiyah Al-Nabaṭī, appears, and various alchemical books by Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, arguably the most legendary and prolific Arabic alchemist, are given as the source of many of the alchemical operations described.

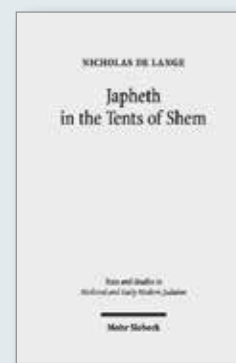
Gabriele Ferrario
Genizah Research Unit



T-S Ar.44.4: **Rare references to alchemical authorities and their works**

Greek Bible Translations in Byzantine Judaism

The years that have passed since the first publication of the Genizah manuscripts have transformed our understanding of biblical translations, Byzantine Judaism, and scriptural hermeneutics. In his recent volume, presenting the results of the AHRC-funded project 'The Greek Bible in Byzantine Judaism' at Cambridge's Faculty of Divinity from 2006–2009, N. de Lange summarises the results of this fruitful scholarship and outlines the latest trends. His book, *Japheth in the Tents of Shem*, presents a comprehensive overview of the Genizah manuscripts in their wider cultural background, and contains many useful insights into their relationship to major trends of ancient and Rabbinic thought.



It will appeal to readers interested in Greek biblical translations, the transmission of Jewish exegesis and wider translational studies.

Japheth in the Tents of Shem: Greek Bible Translations in Byzantine Judaism
Nicholas De Lange (Mohr Siebeck, 2015)

Julia Krivoruchko
Genizah Research Unit

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.