

# GENIZAH FRAGMENTS

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

No. 73 April 2017

## DISCARDED HISTORY

### The Genizah of Medieval Cairo

After many months in preparation – and 120 years of research – a collection of manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah chronicling in remarkable detail the 11th–13th

centuries in Egypt, the Holy Land and even further afield are now on display at Cambridge University Library. Until 28 October 2017, visitors to *Discarded History: The Genizah*

#### Public exhibition:

27 April 2017 – 28 October 2017

Monday – Friday 09:00–18:00

Saturday 09:00–16:30

Sunday closed

Free admission – all welcome

#### Milstein Exhibition Centre

Cambridge University Library  
West Rd, Cambridge  
CB3 9DR

@theUL

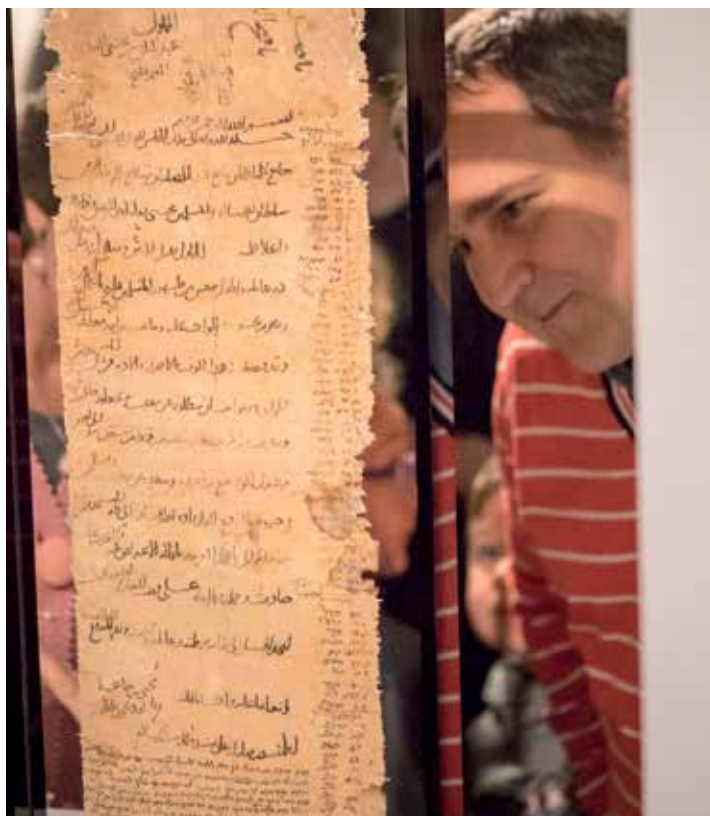
#ulDiscardedHistory  
[www.lib.cam.ac.uk](http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk)  
01223 333000

*of Medieval Cairo* can explore an intimate portrait of life for the Jewish communities of the medieval Middle East through their discarded writings.

Presenting an exhibition on the Genizah is a challenge: the fragments are rarely illustrated or decorated in any way, they consist mostly of text in black ink on pieces of parchment and paper in various shades of brown. Moreover, the very richness of the material presents problems: the greatest hits of the Genizah could fill an exhibition several times the size of the University Library's Milstein Exhibition Centre. Which

to choose? On the other hand, what makes the Genizah so exciting for historians is the insight it gives into the everyday history of the Middle Ages, what it tells us about the economy, social affairs and domestic life. Unlike royal or ecclesiastical archives, the Genizah has preserved the writings of women, children, the tales of the poor, the sick and the frightened refugees: people who perhaps otherwise might have been lost to history. It's a vast store of primary sources for the medieval Judaeo-Islamic world and one that should speak to anybody with an interest in how life was once lived.

*The Genizah Research Unit is grateful for the generous support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Friedberg Genizah Project, and the Wellcome Trust (Research Resources). We are also appreciative of other smaller or anonymous donations, including those made following visits to see the manuscripts in Cambridge University Library.*



## Discarded History: The Genizah of Medieval Cairo *continued from page 1*

Such a central figure to Jewish life in the Middle Ages, Moses Maimonides is of course well represented in *Discarded History*, with his letters, responsa and autograph medical writings all present, but

alongside him, the exhibition highlights the wider Jewish world in the lands of Islam, examining the intricacies of domestic life in the Middle Ages, the economic realities of a truly international society, and the challenges

faced by its citizens who discarded their history into the Genizah storeroom.

**Ben Outhwaite**  
*Genizah Research Unit*

### Plan your visit

Curator-led tours of the exhibition will be held each week.

### Reserve your place on a tour:

<https://exhibitions.lib.cam.ac.uk>



Find out about Genizah events:

[facebook.com/CambridgeGRU/](https://facebook.com/CambridgeGRU/)

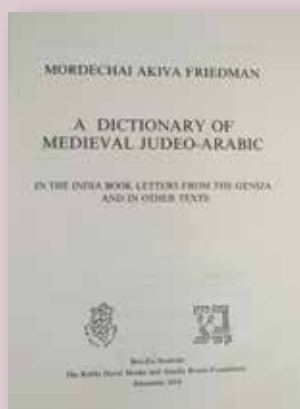


## New Genizah publications

*A Dictionary of Medieval Judeo-Arabic in the India Book Letters from the Geniza and in Other Texts*

By Mordechai Akiva Friedman  
Ben-Zvi Institute (Jerusalem, 2016)

An indispensable reference tool to set alongside Joshua Blau's dictionary of Judaeo-Arabic is Mordechai Akiva Friedman's newly published 'A Dictionary of Medieval Judeo-Arabic in the India Book Letters from the Genizah and in Other Texts'. Culled from many years of effort in translating



the texts in Goitein & Friedman's series of India Book volumes, the dictionary is a remarkable mine of information on the semantics of medieval Judaeo-Arabic.

*A Jewish Mediterranean Society in the Late Middle Ages as Reflected from Cairo Genizah Documents*

By Abraham David.  
The Jewish Theological Seminary of America  
(New York-Jerusalem, 2016).

Abraham David, for whom retirement has seemingly only increased his academic output, has published another collection of writings on the neglected later history of the Genizah world. David's collected articles speak volumes on the 'cultural, economic and spiritual



flowering' of Jewish culture in the Ottoman Levant.

**Ben Outhwaite**  
*Genizah Research Unit*



# Reuniting minute fragments

Dismissed as a 'dust heap' in 1944 by librarian A.F. Schofield, thousands of small vellum and paper fragments from the 'residue' of the Taylor-Schechter Genizah in Cambridge have since been manually rejoined with others from the same manuscript. However, minute Genizah fragments, the smallest scraps of all, sometimes with only individual letters visible, are much more challenging and have received very little attention until recently.

In 2007 in collaboration with Professor Yaacov Choueka and supported by the Friedberg Genizah Project (now the Friedberg Jewish Manuscript Society) the Cambridge Genizah digitisation project commenced. Every single fragment in the collection was photographed in high definition, including minute fragments housed in pockets at the back of the New Series and Additional Series folders. These were photographed in groups in large 'multi fragment images'. From 2012, in their search for variant readings of the Babylonian Talmud, the researchers of the Friedberg Bavli Variants 'Hachi Garsinan' Project closely examined these images. As part of the working process, the 'Genuzoth' team of transcribers and researchers, headed by Rabbi Yisrael Priesand, proposed fragments that should be pieced together, which were later reviewed by the Friedberg 'Genazim' team.

Approximately 2,500 images of multiple minute fragments were examined. When a small fragment was found to originate from the Babylonian Talmud, it was compared to other previously identified fragments. In many cases the minute pieces contributed to the understanding of the larger fragments to which they joined.



**Small fragment with an individual shelfmark**

(T-S AS 96.193)

**Very small fragments (only individual letters may be read, not words) – part of a multi-fragment shelfmark**

(T-S AS 85 Minutes)



Around 200 minute fragments contained significant textual variants and over 300 other minute fragments were joined virtually. Some of these were joined to known fragments and others were found to be

part of fragments not previously identified. 60% of these joins are in fragments from the Babylonian Talmud, 36% Mishna and 4% Rabbi Isaac Alfasi's digest of the Talmud. This has been the first such research

project to use the minute fragments from the Cairo Genizah in a systematic way.

**Menachem Katz**  
*The Friedberg Jewish Manuscript Society*

**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](mailto: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](http://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.

# A Wellcome addition to our website: the medical corpus of the Cairo Genizah

February 2017 marked the successful completion of the two-year project *Medicine in medieval Egypt: creating online access to the medical corpus of the Cairo Genizah*, funded by a Wellcome Trust 'Research Resources in Medical Humanities' Grant. The outcome of the project, mainly aimed at producing new catalogue descriptions for the almost 2,000 fragments of medical content found in the Cambridge Genizah Collections, is now available in a dedicated page of the Genizah Unit's website, where users will be able to browse high quality images of all our medical manuscripts and search through their enhanced digital catalogue. From Graeco-Roman medical classics in Arabic, Judaeo-Arabic and Hebrew to the original works of major physicians of the Arabo-Islamic and Jewish world, Maimonides' own medical contributions and unique medieval medical prescriptions and medical recipes, the Genizah medical corpus preserves key documents for drawing a unique and amazingly detailed picture of medieval medicine. It was high time that such a rich and multifaceted source became freely available to researchers and historians of medicine!

This project also supported the creation of two short documentaries filmed and edited by the video-maker Michele Banal: *Beneficial, if God wills! Medicine and the Cairo Genizah*, offers a survey of the

medical material in Cambridge's Genizah Collections, and *A Brush with History. Conserving the Genizah Collections*, explores the painstaking process of conserving

Genizah fragments from their arrival in the Conservation Studio of Cambridge University Library to their final digitisation. These films are now available on

the 'audio and video' page on our website.

**Gabriele Ferrario**  
Genizah Research Unit



**Conservators  
clean a Genizah  
fragment in the  
short film 'A Brush  
with History'**



## Friends of the Genizah

Looking for a way to make a contribution? The Genizah Research Unit is supported by generous donors around the world. Coming this April with the launch of *Discarded History: The Genizah of Medieval Cairo*, we will unveil the Friends of the Genizah – levels of annual

giving in pounds sterling and American dollars from just £50 or \$50. Support research and scholarship around the Genizah collection and receive exciting benefits, such as products featuring items from the collection, invitations to events, behind-the-scenes tours, and more!

---

**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.**

---