

GENIZAH FRAGMENTS

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

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The last journey of Lewis-Gibson

A further milestone was reached in July with the formal handover of half of the manuscripts from the Lewis-Gibson Collection to our colleagues in the Bodleian Libraries, who will be responsible for their care from now on. The Lewis-Gibson Collection of approximately 1760 manuscript fragments was bought jointly by Cambridge and Oxford following a successful fundraising campaign in 2013. The agreement was that, following conservation and digitisation, the collection would be physically split between the two libraries, CUL and the Bod, though with both retaining joint ownership of the full collection. Over the last few years CUL's Conservation Department has been conserving the medieval paper and parchment, and in 2015

Right: **The neat stack of sturdy Lewis-Gibson binders ready for boxing and transport.**

Below: **Conservator Emma Nichols explains some of the details of the binding to Dr César Merchán-Hamann of the Bodleian.**

the fragments were digitised and placed online. The last major task remaining has been to bind them into modern, purpose-built bindings, ensuring they can be stored safely and remain easily accessible to users.



Emma Nichols of Cambridge's Conservation Department designed the new housings, and over the first six months of this year she manufactured them and bound up the Bodleian's share of the collection. In an informal ceremony in July the completed bindings were handed over to Dr César Merchán-Hamann, the Hebraica and Judaica Curator at the Bod, and a van duly transported them off to Oxford. Emma will now continue to create housing for the remainder of the Lewis-Gibson Collection, Cambridge's share, as well as

deal with several dozen quite enormous fragments that need to be placed in separate bindings. The Lewis-Gibson contains a large number of beautiful bifolia from 'Great Bibles' of the tenth and eleventh centuries which are, for obvious reasons, about the size of a dead sheep, and thus too big to fit in a standard binding. To view the Lewis-Gibson fragments online, visit: <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/lewisgibson>

Ben Outhwaite
Genizah Research Unit



The Genizah Research Unit is grateful for the support of the Friedberg Genizah Project and the British Academy. We are also appreciative of other smaller or anonymous donations, including by the Friends of the Genizah, and those made following visits to see the manuscripts.

Calendar fragments as a tool for palaeography

The Genizah Unit is delighted to have received a British Academy Small research grant to explore the possibility of using calendar texts from the Cairo Genizah as a tool for palaeography. A tiny fraction of the tens of thousands of fragments in the Cairo Genizah are dated. A lack of dated or clearly datable texts hampers paleographic analysis of the manuscripts in the collection and the production of new tools to sort, classify and date items from the Genizah is always sought. One set of texts that can be dated to relatively narrow ranges of dates are calendar texts. Jewish calendar calculations are complicated and their results cannot be accurately

applied to years other than those for which they were performed. People are unlikely to have performed them for years that had already passed. Calculated calendars most likely reflect the time of the writing of the text and its immediate future. In this project I will assemble a corpus of datable manuscript fragments on the Jewish calendar from the Cairo Genizah Collection. The datable calendrical fragments will be presented on a timeline, with links to their high-resolution images, as an aid to palaeographers seeking examples of text from particular periods.

Nadia Vidro
Genizah Research Unit



T-S K2.91: **Calendar reckoning for year 10 of the 264th cycle, which is year 1558 according to the Seleucid Era, 1179 from the Destruction of the Temple, and 2559 from the Exodus (ie. 1247 CE).**

The extraordinary life of Johannes of Oppido (Obadiah the Proselyte)

The recovery of the life of Johannes of Oppido (Obadiah the Proselyte) will forever be connected to the luminaries of Cairo Genizah studies: Elkan Nathan Adler, Jacob Mann, S. D. Goitein, Alexander Scheiber, and Norman Golb (the latter yet alive at age 90). But as we have entered the digital age, a new presentation of the material is now available: <http://johannes-obadiah.org/>.

All that we know about this remarkable individual derives from the documents found in the Genizah. Johannes was a Catholic monk in southern Italy who converted to Judaism in 1102, and who then traveled throughout the East to places such as Constantinople, Aleppo, Baghdad, Dan, Tyre, and Cairo. His personal memoir is a vivid account of his peregrinations and of the current events of his

day. For example, Obadiah refers both to the Crusades in the Land of Israel and to Solomon Ruji, the messianic pretender in Kurdistan.

As so often occurred in the history of Cairo Genizah studies, the seven folios of the Obadiah Memoir wound up in three different collections: Kaufmann (Budapest), Taylor-Schechter (Cambridge), and Adler/J.T.S. (New York). The original composition is now digitally reunited at the aforementioned website, along with translations and transcriptions based on the earlier published work of Professor Golb (used with his kind permission).

Other relevant documents appear at the website as well, including the Siddur that Obadiah wrote for himself (housed at H.U.C.-Cincinnati) and the Epistle of R. Barukh of Aleppo (housed at the Bodleian in Oxford). The latter document includes instructions from R. Barukh that Obadiah should carry the letter with him at

all times, to show to anyone who might question the faithfulness of his conversion.

But most extraordinary of all are the three musical compositions that Obadiah composed, with Hebrew prayers set to Gregorian chant! Clearly, Johannes/Obadiah knew the musical traditions of his youth well and believed that they could be used to enhance Jewish liturgy as well.

The website was developed jointly by myself and my student Peter Shamah, with technical assistance provided by my former student Jacob Binstein. We invite you to peruse the manuscripts, admire the penmanship, read the translations and the transcriptions, click on other links, and simply marvel at the reclamation of yet another fascinating piece of Jewish history.

Gary A. Rendsburg
Rutgers University

T-S Misc.35.31. **In this portion of Obadiah's memoir, he recounts the suffering of the inhabitants of Aleppo, and his visit to Kalneh (Raqqa), in the days when 'the wickedness of the Franks (i.e. Crusaders) was great in the sight of the Lord'.**



How to read a Shorthand Bible

Of all twenty thousand Bible manuscripts in the Genizah, the so-called serugin manuscripts are among the most enigmatic. In this context, the word serugin (סרוגין) means 'shorthand'. These are abbreviated Bible manuscripts – the original condensed book.

The quintessential serugin Bible manuscript is laid out thus: the first word of each verse is written in full. Thereafter, the remaining text of the verse is presented in partial fashion. Sometimes

several letters of each remaining word are given. Frequently, a single letter is used to represent each remaining word (often the letter carrying the main accent). At its most condensed, one letter is used to represent several words.

Such a technique enables a lot of text to be squeezed into a relatively small space. Frequently an entire verse can fit into a single line (indeed, some serugin manuscripts adhere to this as a rule). The neat little manuscript below,

for example, is quite pocket-sized: 16 x 14cm. Nonetheless, this one page contains nearly two chapters of Jeremiah: 26:19-28:10 (38 verses in total). Jeremiah 27 begins one third of the way down the right hand column. Verse 1 is represented as follows:

בראשית לקיזא

How does the condensed text relate to the full text of Jer 27:1? The vocalisation and accentuation signs in the serugin text (which are from the

so-called Palestinian, rather than Tiberian, tradition) indicate that the abbreviated text matches up with the accented letters given in red below:

בראשית ממלכת יהויקים
בן יאשיהו מלך יהודה
היה הדבר הזה אל
ירמיה מאת יהוה לאמר

What principles govern the selection of letters in such a condensed text? Who were the creators of these texts, and who their intended users? For what purpose were they produced? Further light is being shed on these, and related, questions as these mysterious manuscripts have been recently subjected to fresh scrutiny by Genizah researchers, as part of a wider study of the Genizah Bible manuscripts from the Palestinian tradition.

Kim Phillips
Genizah Research Unit



A leaf from T-S A43.1, one of the Genizah's best preserved serugin manuscripts. Multiple folios from the same manuscript have been preserved across six different classmarks, containing dozens of chapters of text from Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. As well as being an invaluable source for our understanding of the serugin method, it is a key witness for the decipherment and interpretation of the Palestinian vocalisation and cantillation systems.

Two new publications on poets and poetry

Two new books on poetry have appeared in Brill's Cambridge Genizah Studies series. The first, by Laura Lieber of Duke University, takes a look at the history and context of the Aramaic poems discovered in the Genizah. These poems, archaic survivals in the Jewish Palestinian Aramaic dialect, reflect a tradition of popular religious celebration, since, unlike the Hebrew piyyut, they do not simply embellish the statutory prayers but instead mark major life-cycle rituals – marriages and funerals – as well as festivals and high holy days. While the Genizah manuscripts show their later incorporation into siddurim and liturgical collections, their origins probably lie outside the synagogue service in the realm of popular celebration. Lieber mines the poetry for the glimpses it gives

into Jewish life in late antique Palestine, through sixty-nine annotated translations, and the book is an essential companion to Yahalom and Sokoloff's 1999 critical edition of the original Aramaic texts.

A thousand years later Jewish poetry had undergone enormous changes thanks in no small part to its exposure to the Arabic literary world. The next work in the series, by Michael Rand of Cambridge University, looks at the master of the Hebrew maqama, Judah al-Ḥarizi, exploring the development of his great *Taḥkemoni*, as it took shape during the last ten years of the author's life. Al-Ḥarizi, like Judah ha-Levi, was born in Spain but ended his days in the east, following a lengthy personal pilgrimage that took

him from Alexandria, through Jerusalem and on to Aleppo, where, in 1225, he died. Erudite, sociable and with an acerbic tongue, he is an attractive subject for research, and Rand digs into the formal structure of the maqama to draw out the rich autobiographical and geographical material within.

Laura Lieber, *Jewish Aramaic Poetry from Late Antiquity: Translations and Commentaries* (Cambridge Genizah Studies Series, Volume 8; Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2018)

Michael Rand, *The Evolution of Al-Ḥarizi's Taḥkemoni* (Cambridge Genizah Studies Series, Volume 9; Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2018)

Ben Outhwaite
Genizah Research Unit

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.

Visiting the Cairo Genizah collections at Cambridge

Although our public Genizah exhibition 'Discarded History' has closed, people of all ages continue to flock to Cambridge to view the manuscripts and learn about life in medieval Egypt. In the past six months we have hosted almost 600 people, from secondary

school children to synagogue groups, from historical societies to young people considering studying history at university, from families to tour groups. If you would like to bring a group to see the manuscripts, or if you would like to reserve a place

on one of our monthly small group visits, contact the Genizah Research Unit on 01223 333129, or at genizah@lib.cam.ac.uk.

Melanie Schmierer-Lee
Genizah Research Unit



A visitor writes: "I am writing to say thank you once again for such a fascinating and inspirational talk and introduction to the Geniza collection. It was, all in all, a remarkable and memorable afternoon. Having heard of the Cairo Geniza from time to time and its treasures it was amazing to be introduced to it – and the reality turns out to be even more impressive, and to actually be so up close to our living history was deeply moving."