

GENIZAH FRAGMENTS

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

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A most important prayer book

A manuscript from the Mosseri Collection of a prayer book of the Palestinian rite, made accessible for the first time in 70 years, reveals unique prayer traditions, solves some scholarly conundrums and evokes new questions.

The extinct prayer rite of Eretz Israel – the rite used in the ‘Synagogue of the Palestinians’, the Ben Ezra Synagogue, until the beginning of the 13th century – caught the vigilant attention of scholars from Solomon Schechter onwards, following its rediscovery in the Cairo Genizah. In 1949, Professor Simcha Assaf, a rabbi, a scholar and a supreme court judge, published a *siddur* according to the Palestinian rite from the Jacques (Jack) Mosseri Collection, featuring the weekday *Ma’ariv* (evening service). The Genizah fragments of the Mosseri Collection were originally excavated from the Ben Ezra Synagogue courtyard and the Al-Bassatine Cemetery, and many of them are therefore in a poor condition. Mosseri V.94.1 was no exception. It is composed of six badly torn, worn-out paper pages, of which Assaf managed to transcribe only three. After Mosseri’s death in 1934, Assaf found further access



Jacques Mosseri Collection at Cambridge University Library, one leaf from this important *siddur*, reconstructed from Mosseri V.94 and other fragments.

to the Collection impossible. By the time that Israel Adler made contact with the Mosseri family in 1970, and received permission to examine the Collection, the *siddur* fragment was so fragile that it could not be opened, and thus merely its two outer pages were microfilmed for the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in Jerusalem.

Thanks to the efforts of Dr Ben Outhwaite, Head of the Genizah Research Unit, Anna Johnson, the conservator who finally opened the manuscript in Cambridge, and Błażej Mikula, who photographed it, this fascinating prayer book is now revealing its secrets. The six pages comprise the concluding paragraphs of the *Shaharit* and full account

of the *Mincha* and *Ma’ariv* for weekdays in the Palestinian rite. The lower part of all the pages has disintegrated over time, and three small fragments are kept under the separate classmarks Mosseri V.94.2 and V.74.2. Many tiny pieces had to be photographed separately or are still firmly stuck to the larger pages.

continued overleaf

A most important prayer book *continued from page 1*

When fully examined for the first time in probably a millennium, the *siddur* revealed some outstanding liturgical traditions. First and foremost, this manuscript is the one piece of clear-cut evidence that Palestinian congregations had switched the order of the weekday *Ma'ariv* service, with the *Amidah* preceding the *Keriat Shema* in the daily evening prayers. When this feature had been previously noted elsewhere, the inverted *Ma'ariv* was attributed by scholars to the Saturday night service alone. The reason for this major inversion in the service is unknown. We

may assume that when evening services were conducted before dark, the urge to meet the obligatory time frame of *Keriat Shema* – after night has fallen – caused the *Amidah*, whose obligatory status was questionable, to be brought forward.

Another liturgical idiosyncrasy of the Mosseri *siddur* is the peculiar context of the rare Palestinian benediction 'Blessed... who has chosen his servant David, and desired his glorification and sacred hymns...' This previously

unknown benediction initially attracted scholarly attention due to its mention in 10th-century polemical Karaite writings. Even when it was eventually found in Palestinian prayer book fragments themselves, its exact liturgical function remained unclear. In most cases, the benediction precedes the special dedicated psalm at the beginning of *Ma'ariv* for holidays. However, its occasional occurrence in the *Shaharit* could not be properly explained due to the fragmentary condition of the previous manuscript evidence. The Mosseri *siddur*

has only heightened the mystery: the benediction 'Who has chosen his servant David' is found here in a completely new context, commencing the daily *Mincha* service, and having nothing to do with holidays.

Thousands of Mosseri fragments still await their conservation. When they are all finally made public, this collection is expected to reveal more amazing discoveries to explore.

Vered Raziel-Kretzmer
Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel

Maimonides and his circle

Despite the interest shown in one of medieval Judaism's greatest thinkers, Moses Maimonides (c. 1138–1204), there has not until now been a systematic attempt to comb the principal source for texts relevant to his life and work, the Cairo Genizah. The Genizah is particularly rich in fragments covering the Rambam's period of activity in Egypt, from the 1160s on.

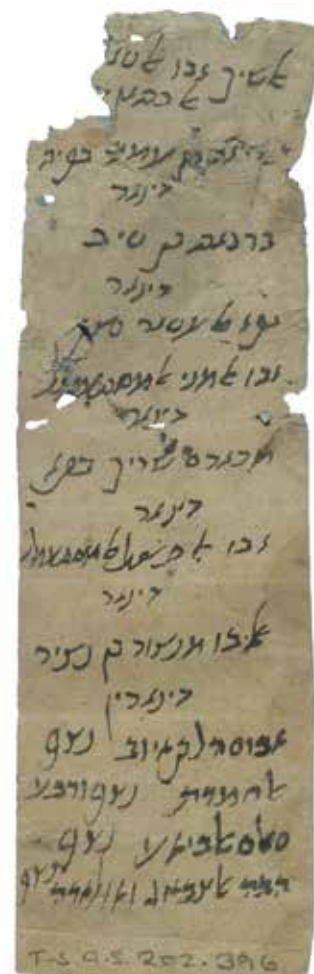
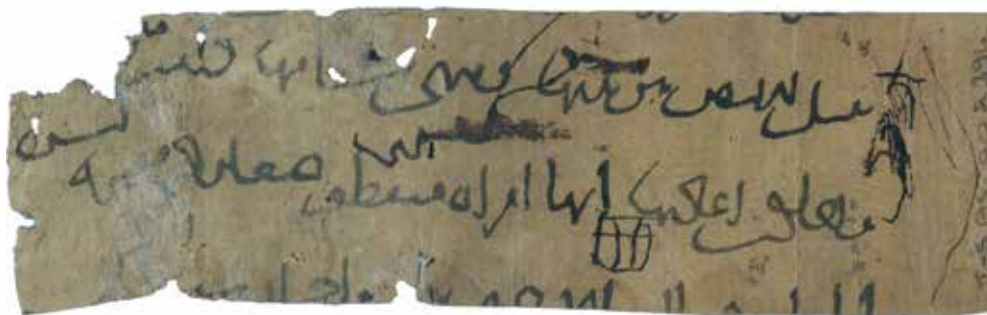
In the last six years I've been conducting a systematic search of the CUL Genizah Collections in order to trace documents

by Maimonides and his close circle. During the first phase, which began in 2013 and was made possible by an award from the BA/Leverhulme Small Research Grants scheme, I went through the very fragmentary manuscripts of the Additional Series of the T-S Collection and discovered several unknown autographs of Moses Maimonides, in addition to further related material such as fragments of his major works, letters addressed to him or correspondence in which he features. During this phase I was able to identify figures from his

'inner' circle, and this led me to the second phase of research, which was supported generously by the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung. In this phase, I went through the remaining series of the CUL Genizah Collections in search of all material related to him and his circle.

I currently have about 1800 such documents listed in my database and, if I am successful in obtaining further funding, I intend to widen this project to cover all the remaining Genizah collections.

Amir Ashur
University of Haifa, Israel



A photo of T-S AS 202.396 – a list of contributors to a fund for the release of Jewish prisoners, written by Maimonides – a new discovery. On the verso, a letter from a poor woman asking for assistance, probably also sent to Maimonides, in Arabic. This is the only currently known example of an Arabic (that is, in Arabic language *and* script) letter sent to Maimonides. All other correspondence to him is in Hebrew or Judaeo-Arabic.

A Unique Rotulus of *Tosefta*

The Tosefta is a compilation of Jewish law composed in Palestine in the third century CE, comprising sayings by sages from the second century BCE to the mid-third century CE. While the Tosefta never achieved the canonical status of the Mishna, to which it is closely related in terms of content and structure, rabbis of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages did use material from it in their discussions and clearly viewed it as important and somewhat authoritative. All the broad scope Tosefta manuscripts we have today were copied in Europe, the earliest during the eleventh century, – distant chronologically and geographically from the origin of the book.

A unique rotulus, including part of the thirteenth chapter of *Tosefta Menahot* found in the Cairo Geniza and now kept in Cambridge University Library, T-S F2(2).76, reveals new and important information concerning the use of the *Tosefta* and its transmission. A rotulus is a long and narrow scroll, in which the lines of the text are parallel to the joining of the individual sheets of the book. The rotulus format is easily carried around, and relatively cheap. Professor Judith Olszowy-Schlanger concluded that these books were in many cases user-produced by the intellectual elites, and usually

include texts that may have been wanted for regular personal use such as liturgical poetry (*Piyyutim*) and the Babylonian *Talmud*. She also identified the handwriting of this fragment as belonging to one of the scribes working in proximity to Ephraim ben Shemarya, the leader of the Palestinian congregation in Fustat during the first half of the eleventh century.

This eastern fragment, the only text of the *Tosefta* on a rotulus, is important firstly for demonstrating that a scholar in eleventh-century Fustat found the *Tosefta* was important enough to produce this carry-around copy for his regular use. Another interesting aspect is that it is the most prominent instance in which a Geniza fragment preserves a significant amount of text not found in the larger manuscripts of the *Tosefta*. A *baraita* which tells of cries heard in the Temple courtyard in reaction to the actions of several priests, not found in the other manuscripts, but found in two places in the *Bavli*, is brought and numbered in the fragment as *halakha* טי (19, see from the middle of the rotulus downwards), implying that it is part of the original *Tosefta* text and of tannaitic origin, and presumably omitted by some error from the other manuscripts.

However, there are a few considerations that may lead us to another conclusion. Among them are the rough fitting of the *Baraita* in the literary structure of the chapter, and the empty spaces near faulty readings in the fragment, which are all found in this *Baraita*, indicating that the *Baraita* was copied from a manuscript with a low level of precision, whereas the other *halakhot* were copied from a different manuscript, one far more accurate. These lead to the conclusion that the *Baraita* was not included in the manuscript's proto-text, and was brought into the *Tosefta* at a later stage under the influence of the *Bavli*, thus shedding some light on the intellectual environment in which the *Tosefta* was studied in the East at the beginning of the second millennium.

This study was carried out as part of the preparation of a critical edition for the second part of *Tosefta Nezikin*, in collaboration with Prof. Adiel Schremer.

Binyamin Katzoff
Bar Ilan University, Israel



Right: (T-S F2(2).76) A vertical parchment scroll (rotulus) of *Tosefta Menahot*, probably from the eleventh century

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.

The Littman Genizah Educational Programme launches

The crowds that attended the Genizah exhibition 'Discarded History' in 2017 convinced us that there was an enthusiastic and knowledgeable public audience for Genizah manuscripts, and that we should find a way to continue to give access to those who wanted to come and learn

about its treasures. This is not straightforward in an academic facility like Cambridge University Library, which is geared towards students and scholars, and where neither staff nor space for visitors can be guaranteed. Through our research and cataloguing projects, we continue to make

fragments available online (more than 20,000 now on Cambridge Digital Library), but digital images are not always a substitute for those who want to get a sense of what the tattered manuscripts of the Genizah Collection really look like in all their thousand-year-old splendour. Over the past nearly two years, we have experimented with offering organised group tours of the Collection, and again we have been surprised by the extent of the uptake. Funding has been precarious, and visits relied on the spare time of researchers. Now, however, thanks to the generosity of the Littman Foundation, we have been able to retain staff time for public engagement and ensure that we continue to offer public access to visitors. By prior arrangement,

we can host visits of organised groups on most days of the week (bar Sundays, when the Library is closed), for a general overview of the Collection or to match a more specialised interest. Tours usually last two hours. For details and charges, please see our website or contact Sarah Sykes in the Genizah Research Unit. If the group is from a recognised educational institution then there is no charge. We are very grateful for the opportunity to launch the Littman Genizah Education Programme, and we hope to extend the programme and find new ways for the Genizah to reach its audience in the coming years.

Ben Outhwaite
Genizah Research Unit



New book, *The Tiberian Pronunciation Tradition of Biblical Hebrew (vols I & II)*

In this monumental new book, Prof. Geoffrey Khan produces the most up-to-date picture of the biblical recitation tradition of the Tiberian Masoretes. It is the first in a new open-access series, *Cambridge Semitic Languages and Cultures*, published by the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies and Open Book Publishers.

Utilising a bevy of medieval sources, Prof. Khan presents the history of the Tiberian Masoretes and their tradition of reciting the Hebrew Bible. He explains the fine details of Tiberian phonetics, and concludes volume I with IPA transcriptions of passages from Genesis

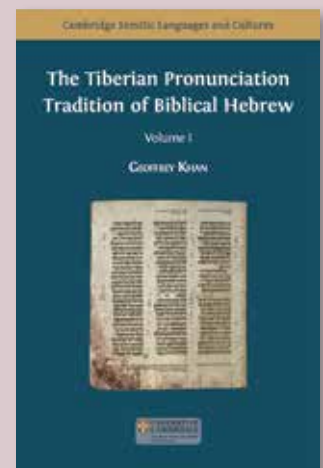
and Psalms. Accompanying these passages are links to oral performances, all recited according to their original Tiberian pronunciation.

In volume II, Prof. Khan provides an edition of *Hidāyat al-Qārī (The Guide for the Reader)*, the most comprehensive pre-modern book on the Tiberian pronunciation tradition. Written by the 11th-century Karaite Abū al-Faraj Hārūn, it was well-known in the medieval period, but until now only fragments of an abridged version had been published. Using manuscripts from the Firkovich Collection, Khan reconstructs both the full and abridged forms, and presents their

Judaeo-Arabic text alongside English translations.

The Tiberian Pronunciation Tradition of Biblical Hebrew is a remarkable resource that makes the pronunciation tradition of the 'great masters' of Tiberias widely accessible for the first time in over 900 years.

Nick Posegay
University of Cambridge



Both volumes can be downloaded for free:
www.openbookpublishers.com/product/951

The Genizah Research Unit is grateful for the support of the Littman Foundation, the British Academy, other smaller or anonymous donations and those made by Friends of the Genizah.