
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 Hiddayot al-Qari (The Guide for the Reader), the most comprehensive pre-modern book on the Tiberian pronunciation tradition. Written by the 11th-century Karaite Abi 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 Judeo-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

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-Bastantine Cemetery, and many of them are therefore in a poor condition. Mosseri V.94.I 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 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 Research Unit’s Assistant Archivist, and Błażej Mikuła, who photographed the manuscript in Cambridge, the page fragments have been reunified and published, with an English translation by Prof. Geoffrey Khan and other fragments.

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

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.
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 Masor service, with the Amidah preceding the Kenat Shema in the daily evening prayers. When this feature had been previously noted elsewhere, the inverted Malakh 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 Kenet 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…” which 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 Karate writings. Even when it was eventually found in Palestinian prayer book fragments themselves, its exact liturgical function remained unclear. In most cases, the benediction preceded the special dedicated psalm at the beginning of Masor for holidays. However, its occasional occurrence in the Shohat 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 texts relevant to his life and work, the Cairo Geniza. 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/Leventhal 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

The Tosafot 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 Tosafot new material and the canonical status of the Mishna, to which it is closely related in terms of content and structure, rabbinic of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages did use material from it in their discussions and clearly viewed it as an important and somewhat authoritative. All the broad scope Tosafot 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 Tosafot 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 Tosafot 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 requirements of use such as liturgical poetry (Piyutim) 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 Tosafot on a rotulus, is important firstly for demonstrating that a scholar in eleventh-century Fustat found the Tosafot 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 Tosafot. A baraita which tells of tisha b’avora heard in the Temple courtyard in reaction to the actions of some priests, not found in the other manuscripts, but found in two places in the (Ravl), is brought and numbered in the fragment as halakho (19, see from the middle of the rotulus downward), implying that it is part of the original Tosafot text and of tannaitic origin, and presumably omitted by some error from the other manuscripts.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

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A photo of T-S AS 202.296 – 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

Right: (T-S F2(2),76) A vertical parchment scroll (rotulus) of Tosafot Menahot, probably from the eleventh century.
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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 Ramabam’s period of activity in Egypt, from the 1160s on.

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A most important prayer book, continued from page 1

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However, there are a few considerations that may lead us to another conclusion. Among them are the rough fitting of the Baratza in the literary structure of the chapter, and the empty space left by splitting a sentence in the word order of the lines in the fragment, which are all found in this Baratza, indicating that the Baratza 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 Baratza was not included in the manuscript’s proto-text, and was brought into the Tosefta at a later stage under the influence of the (Bw), 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 Menahot, in collaboration with Prof. Adel Scherner.

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

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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 well-informed 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

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Ben Outhwaite
Genizah Research Unit

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