

GENIZAH FRAGMENTS

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

No. 75 April 2018

The Last Watchman Of Old Cairo: A Novel

By Michael David Lukas

288 pages

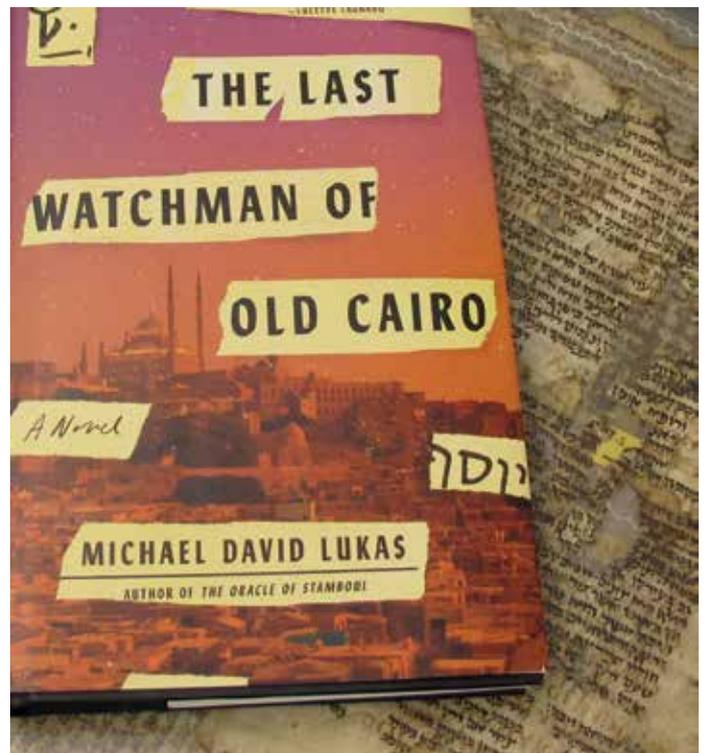
Random House USA
(10 April 2018)

Novelists who wind a tale around Solomon Schechter, the twin Smith sisters and the discovery of the Cairo Genizah are blessed with larger-than-life characters, a series of dramatic encounters, and a denouement of now legendary significance.

Michael David Lukas, whose previous book 'The Oracle of Stamboul' was set in nineteenth-century Istanbul, has taken up the challenge of retelling this familiar story, but setting it into a trifold narrative that weaves

across time and space. We encounter familiar scenes of Schechter and the Giblews as they hunt for their literary treasures, but Lukas adds to them the stories of Ali, the Muslim night-watchman of the Ben Ezra Synagogue, and his descendant Joseph, who returns from spiritual exile in Berkeley to explore his ancestral past. In the bustling streets of Cairo, we meet Mosseris, Chief Rabbi, and the enigmatic travelling companion Miss de Witt, but the beating heart of the tale, with its exotic sights, sounds and smells, is the city itself: 'Summer in Cairo is an angry and vengeful god'.

Ben Outhwaite
Genizah Research Unit



The Genizah Research Unit is grateful for the generous support of the Friedberg Genizah Project. 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.

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 scribe who wrote the Bible

During the first wave of Caliph al-Hakim's intolerance towards the People of the Book, a Fustat-based scribe – Samuel ben Jacob – completed his labours on a high quality Bible codex (circa 1008–1009). No doubt he was satisfied with his work: the codex contains all twenty-four biblical books, accurately and ornately written,

well-garnished with masoretic notes (early text-critical notes written around the biblical text itself). Little could Samuel have known that his book (now commonly referred to as the Leningrad Codex) would go on to be the earliest dated complete Bible codex in our possession – a manuscript of inestimable significance.

Samuel was part and parcel of the world of 10th–11th century Fustat – a world vibrantly illuminated by the Genizah documents. Indeed, various documents mention Samuel by name, revealing aspects of his life and work from 1000 years ago. Recently, not just his name, but also his oeuvre have started to be discovered in

the Genizah. Medieval Jewish scribes developed a range of idiosyncratic traits regarding the way they wrote the biblical text itself, the manner in which they arranged it on the page, and the way they organised and wrote the masoretic notes. One of Samuel's most distinctive traits is his tendency to finish each masoretic note with a particular symbol : o : as seen below. By establishing a list of Samuel's scribal habits, Genizah researchers have been able to identify other fragments of his work in the Cambridge Genizah collection, as well as a nearly complete Former Prophets codex by him, now in the Firkowich collection. Enlarging our corpus of material written by this important scribe is helping us understand hitherto unexplained aspects of his work.



Detail of a page from a Great Bible codex written by Samuel b. Jacob, showing his distinctive : o : siglum at the end of masoretic notes (T-S A3.35).

Kim Phillips
Genizah Research Unit

E.J. Revell (1935–2017): A pioneer of masorah and vocalisation in the Genizah

On 15 December 2017, Ernest J. Revell, Professor Emeritus of the Department of Near Eastern Studies, University of Toronto, passed away. Revell completed his PhD, 'A structural analysis of the grammar of the "Manual of discipline" (1QS)', at the University of Toronto in 1962, and enjoyed a long and fruitful career in the field of Biblical Hebrew grammar and vocalisation. As a young scholar, Revell arrived in Cambridge to study Genizah fragments with Palestinian vocalisation, which were classified and published in his 1970 work *Hebrew Texts with Palestinian Vocalization*. He returned to Cambridge for his 1977 book *Biblical Texts with*

Palestinian Pointing and their Accents, and advocated for the study of manuscripts in person, writing in his Preface 'This author has had the shame of discovering that a dot recorded from a photograph as original pointing was in fact a spot of ink on the glass in which the fragment was kept...'. In 1980 he did students of Masoretic studies a great service by translating Israel Yeivin's *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah* into English. The thorny problem of stress retraction was dealt with in his 1987 book *Nesiga (Retraction of Word Stress) in Tiberian Hebrew*. In addition to his academic work, Revell was a talented botanical watercolour



artist and an avid gardener, and created the exquisite watercolour illustrations of Canadian plants for the delightful and well-received volume *And Some Brought Flowers: Plants in a New World*.

Melanie Schmierer-Lee
Genizah Research Unit

Above: An example of nesiga (retraction of stress) taken from E. J. Revell's definitive 1987 study of the subject. Nesiga is not a stable feature in Tiberian Hebrew, and can differ from manuscript to manuscript. Here, it occurs on קרא, in Genesis 1:5 (T-S A1.3), QA-ra LAY-la, avoiding juxtaposition of two main stressed syllables (qa-RA LAY-la).

From rags to scholarly riches

In May 2017, researchers Shouji Sakamoto and Léon-Bavi Vilmont came to Cambridge University Library to investigate early paper fragments in the Genizah collections.

Paper was invented in China around the 2nd century BCE. Papermaking spread to the south (Vietnam), to the east (Korea and Japan) and arrived in Europe via Spain in the 12th century CE through Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa.

It is known that early European papers were made from linen or hemp rags, but how did this knowledge pass from Asia to Europe? Old papers originating from the Middle East and North Africa may fill gaps in our knowledge of papermaking between Central Asia and Europe, and the collection of Genizah paper fragments that are held at Cambridge University Library offers a unique opportunity to unveil the missing link.

In our project 'Research on papermaking propagation to the East and the West', we use nondestructive analysis techniques to investigate various papers using a digital microscope. This technique is non-invasive and perfectly

suitable for collection items – even the most fragile. We have studied documents found along the Silk Road in Dunhuang, Loulan and Turfan, dating from the 4th–10th century CE. Our analysis has shown that these papers were made of rags that still contain many threads.

Thanks to Judith Schlanger, senior researcher and professor at the French EPHE, we were introduced to Dr. Benjamin Outhwaite, head of the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit, who gave us permission in May 2017 to access several 10th and 11th century paper fragments of the Cairo Genizah. The manuscripts we examined were all the more valuable because they were dated or sometimes included information about the place they were produced. During our two-week stay at CUL, we studied 24 manuscripts. We identified fibers, noted their orientation(s) in the sheet, and studied incorporated particles. For example, our analysis of fragment T-S 13J9.5, a legal document from the 11th century, revealed that this somewhat rough paper was made with unresolved Z twisted linen/hemp threads.



T-S 13J9.5. A legal document, the lower part written by Ephraim ben Shemarya, head of the Palestinian Rabbanite congregation in Fustat between 1016 and 1055.



Detail of T-S 13J9.5 at x100 magnification. Note the textile thread visible in the paper.

This is clear evidence that this paper was made from textiles similar to those found in papers from along the Silk Road, mentioned above.

conditions for working, and for their invaluable help. We hope that the results of our study will improve knowledge of the propagation of papermaking to the West.

We would like to thank Maciej Pawlikowski, head of the Digital Content Unit, and Jim Bloxam, Head of Conservation & Collection Care, for their warm welcome. We are particularly grateful to all the staff of Conservation & Collection Care for providing us the best

Shouji SAKAMOTO (Ryukoku University, Kyoto and Sorbonne Universités, Centre de Recherche sur la Conservation, Paris) and Léon-Bavi VILMONT (Sorbonne Universités, Centre de Recherche sur la Conservation, Paris)



Our work bench: Keyence digital microscope



Studies in Semitic Linguistics and Manuscripts

In honour of his sixtieth birthday, twenty-one of Geoffrey Khan's former students have contributed to a *Liber Discipulorum*. Geoffrey Khan, Regius Professor of Hebrew at the University of Cambridge, has had a tremendous impact on a vast array of domains of study, including Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic, Semitic grammar and linguistics, Bible vocalisation traditions, Cairo Genizah studies, palaeography, codicology and Arabic papyrology. His fresh insights into Semitic syntax and into the pronunciation

traditions of the Hebrew Bible, supported by the study of Arabic transcriptions, his pioneering work on Hebrew grammatisation and the history of Hebrew linguistic ideas, his daring fieldwork trips to document endangered Neo-Aramaic dialects as well as his work on medieval manuscripts and other documents have all transformed our perceptions of these fields. The articles in this volume reflect the effect Geoffrey has had not only on these fields of study but in training up students that can

carry them forward. After completing his PhD at SOAS, London, with a dissertation entitled *Extraposition and Pronominal Agreement in Semitic languages*, Geoffrey worked as a research associate in the Genizah Research Unit from 1983–1993, before becoming Lecturer, Reader, and then Professor in the University's Oriental Studies department (now Asian and Middle Eastern Studies).



Geoffrey Khan as a young researcher in the University Library

Melanie Schmierer-Lee
Genizah Research Unit

Below: Stained glass created by David Martin after a visit to see the 'Discarded History' Genizah exhibition. David writes, "I was just struck by the 'common' themes of the Genizah. All of the people who lived, worked, married. People in need or hoping for payments. It seemed like it could be any person I would meet today or anyone I might see in my therapy office. The current of humanity seemed to run through the writing, even though it was so old, it was so familiar. The middle image is from artefact **T-S AS 183.272** – a good luck charm. I fell in love a bit with this simple and magical 'souvenir' that someone might buy in the market. Thanks again for hosting such an inspiring exhibit."



Studies in Semitic Linguistics and Manuscripts: A Liber Discipulorum in Honour of Professor Geoffrey Khan, ed. Nadia Vidro, Ronny Vollandt, Esther-Miriam Wagner, and Judith Olszowy-Schlanger (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2018)



Above: Visitors examine Genizah fragment **T-S 8J22.25**, part of a pop up exhibition 'Queering the UL' in Cambridge University Library, featuring LGBT+ related materials from its historic and modern collections to mark LGBT History Month.