

I. Schechter discovers and obtains access to the Genizah

1. May 15th, 1896, Schechter to Hon. Mayer Sulzberger:

I met yesterday with a piece of good fortune of which many a Biblical scholar will be jealous. I have namely discovered among the Fragments which Mrs. Lewis (the discoverer of the Syriac Gospel) brought from her last journey in the Orient a leaf from the Hebrew Sirach (Eccliasticus). As you know was the original of the Apokryph in the Hebrew and the Geonim even cite passages from it. But it is now for the first time that we have a Fragment coming from the body of the book. I am now transcribing the MS. and shall have ה"י א [God willing] write a monograph on the subject which I hope you will receive soon.

(Meir Ben-Horin, "Solomon Schechter to Judge Mayer Sulzberger: Part I. Letters from the Pre-Seminary Period [1895-1901]," *Jewish Social Studies* 25.4 (1963) 257.)

2. In 1896, Schechter indicates that the fragment came from Palestine, and not from Egypt:

For this Fragment we are indebted to [Agnes Smith Lewis' Margaret Dunlop Gibson's] last journey in Palestine and Egypt, in which countries they have acquired various Hebrew MSS., mostly in fragments. Our Fragment was found in the Palestine bundle, among other leaves of Hebrew MSS., extending over various branches of Jewish literature, as Bible, Mishnah, Talmud, Liturgy, Grammar, etc.

(Solomon Schechter, "A Fragment of the Original Text of Ecclesiasticus," *The Expositor* 5.4 [1896] 4.)

3. According to Mathilde:

Mr. Schechter left England on the 16 December for the East, Egypt, and Palestine where he was sent to by our University for purposes of research (Hebrew Mss). As it is a secret mission, the fact will be announced in the University Reporter only after the commencement of next Term about the end of January, when he will already have secured permission to work in the old Genizah, as otherwise his plans might have been defeated, caused by his discovery of the Ecclesiasticus fragment.

(Ben-Horin, "Solomon Schechter to Judge Mayer Sulzberger: Part I," 259.)

4. Schechter explains what is at stake:

If it could be proved that Sirach, some believe, in the Rabbinic idiom, with which we are acquainted from the Talmudic literature, "then between Ecclesiasticus and the books of the Old Testament there must lie centuries, nay, there must lie, in most cases, the deep waters of the Captivity, the grave of the Old-Hebrew and the old Israel, and the womb of the New-Hebrew and the new Israel." The assumption of Maccabæan Psalms, and many other hypothesis of Bible-Criticism would fall to the ground.

(Schechter, "A Fragment of the Original Text of Ecclesiasticus," 1)

5. In his 1908 article entitled "A Hoard of Hebrew Manuscripts:"

After showing me over the place and the neighboring buildings, or rather ruins, the Rabbi [Grand Rabbi of Cairo Aaron Bensimon] introduced me to the beadles of the synagogue, who are at the same time the keepers of the Genizah, and authorized me to take from it what, and as much as, I liked. Now, as a matter of fact, I liked all. Still, some discretion was necessary. I have already indicated the mixed nature of the Genizah. But one can hardly realise the confusion in a genuine, old Genizah until one has seen it. It is a battlefield of books, and the literary production of many centuries had their share in the battle, and their *disjecta membra* are now strewn over its area. Some of the belligerents have perished outright, and are literally ground to dust in the terrible struggle for space, whilst others, as if overtaken by a general crush, are squeezed into big, unshapely lumps, which even with the aid of chemical appliances can no longer be separated without serious damage to their constituents. In their present condition these lumps sometimes afford curiously suggestive combinations; as, for instance, when you find a piece of some rationalistic work, in which the very existence of either angels or devils is denied, clinging for its very life to an amulet in which these same beings (mostly the latter) are bound over to be on their good behavior and not interfere with Miss Jair's love for somebody. The development of the romance is obscured by the fact that the last lines of the amulet are mounted on some I. O. U., or lease, and this in turn is squeezed between the sheets of an old moralist, who treats all attention to money affairs with scorn and indignation. Again, all these contradictory matters cleave tightly to some sheets from a very old Bible.

(Solomon Schechter, *Studies in Judaism, Volume 2* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1908) 6-7.)

Among the numerous fragments from the Cairo Genizah which I brought away with me in January, 1896, and which I have since acquired, I have discovered a portion of the famous Hebrew Text of Ecclesiasticus, and hasten to publish the text and translation with fascimiles...the case containing the fragment was only opened on March 7 last, and the precious fragment itself identified two days later.

(Elkan Nathan Adler, "Some Missing Chapters of Ben Sira," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 12.3 (1900) 466.)

II. Some texts from the Cairo Genizah:

1. Letters Written by Maimonides, including 12 responsa

a. T-S 12.191:

May the Lord prolong the life of my honourable pillar and support, the trustworthy and pious elder and keep his vigour forever. His admirer and servant Moses sends him his regards and stresses how much he is missing him because of the long distance which separates them. He seeks his kindness in helping the bearer of this letter, Yitzhaq Al-Dar'I, because he is well-known to us. Could he also speak with the head of the community, may his Rock protect him, to entrust the community with the task of paying the poll-tax on his behalf, since he and his son owe two payments of the poll-tax... He is going to Dhumyat in an important mission, and when he comes back, please help him as much as possible. May your health increase and the health of the head of the community and his son and the health of your son, may the Rock protect him.

Moses the son of Maimon, of blessed memory.

(trans. Avihai Shivtiel)

2. Contracts: Marriage contracts, business contracts, others

Witness to grounds for divorce:

He who will affix his signature at the bottom of these lines declares: We were present during

quarrels which took place between Abu Ali (ou) m(aster) Japheth b. (our) m(aster) Manasset (r(est in) E(den) and his wife Milah b. Xayrun (r(est in) E)den). He said to her, “Word has reached me that Barakat b. Abu Said the perfumer has enticed you away (from me). And you want to divorce me to marry him.” Then she said, “I would marry that one?!” She swore by great oaths that she would never marry him. Then we came with this Abu Ali as he met with this Barakat b. Abu Said. Abu Ali said to him, “You rascal! You scoundrel! You entice my wife away (from me) and tell her ‘Divorce him so that I can marry you.’” And there were m[any?] words between them and argument, blaming and attacks, some in earnest and some in jest. Then said this Barakat b. [Abu Said], [t]he perfumer... [...]of the undersigned, of our fellows, “Serve as my witnesses in wh[at I shall say] to you. I bind myself with powerful oaths that were I to m[arry...] I undertake, as of now, to pay to the poor of Egypt fifty dinars [...] to her, and I have [no]t asked her to marry nor anything else [...]” this Japheth Abu Ali [...] to this. They reconciled and par[t]ed... “Sign for me your signatures to what Baraka[t] has said [...]” with his free will and his vol[ition]. And because it was permissible for us to accept [this testimony... We wrote] for him these lines and signed our testimony below [... We wrote] and signed and gave to this m[aster] Japheth b. m(aster) [Manasseh...] for a deed of right and evidence. Our signing was delayed until [...] year 1406 of the era which is situated on the river Nile, Strong and firm [...] Benjamin b. Abraham [...]

Mordechai A. Friedman, “The Ransom-Divorce: Divorce Proceedings Initiated by the Wife in Mediaeval Jewish Practice,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 6 (1976) 292.

3. Piyyutim: Ex. Yannai

Section “Chet” of *Qedushta* for Exodus 3:1:

Fire/ which transforms into many appearances/was upon the bush in flames/ and upon Sinai in lightning/above sparks will blaze/ and below demon fire will lick/ and from it,
 The outline of angels/ who, therefore, cannot be burned by it/ from the sweat which they perspire / and the river
 Of fire flows with flame/ and its banks are rimmed with ice /
 The fire does not melt the ice/ and by the ice
 The fire is not quenched / for the fire comes forth and creates the ice / He makes peace between fire and ice/
 He judges by fire and decides by ice
 And who can hide from His heat? And who can withstand His cold? /
 (None) except Israel His people / and who have come
 Through fire and water/ and they are compared to fire and water / therefore they are neither overwhelmed by water nor
 [burned by fire/ but rather] they are like those compounded of water and fire / they open their mouths in holiness to stand in awe
 Of the Holy One/ As it is written “And the one calls...”

Trans. Laura Lieber in Lieber, “Yannai on Exodus 3:1 and Deuteronomy 6:4,” *Prooftexts* 30.2 (2010) 189.

For more English translations of Yannai’s poems, see Ophir Münz-Manor in Manor, “All About Sarah: Questions of Gender in Yannai’s Poems on Sarah’s (and Abraham’s) Barrenness,” *Prooftexts* 26 (2006) 344–374.

4. Karaite Texts

5. Medical Prescriptions

6. Biblical Texts

7. Damascus Document:

8. Personal Letters, including many written by women:

From a man to his wife:

I have sworn an oath not to wash the clothes I wear until I return to you, nor cut my hair, drink wine or enter a bath until I come home. People know how I am constantly weeping, crying out and sobbing. By the Torah of Moses, peace upon him, I have not forgotten you, nor have I ever replaced you with someone else, or forgotten your piety and love; may God not let me die out of desire for you. I entreat you not to forget me in your prayers...I wish to treat you with kindness, may God fulfill my hopes in this regard. I ask that I should be able to bedeck you with jewels beyond every woman in Sicily. (MS Mosseri 7.162.3 (L 230); trans. Joel L. Kraemer).

<http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/genizah>