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Uncovering the History of the Cairo Genizah Manuscript Collections:

The Story so Far ...



Image courtesy of the Stefan C. Reif Slide Collection

The discovery of the Cairo Geniza and the removal of its contents to the libraries of Europe and America was (and to a very small extent still is) a gradual process, many of the details of which remain unclear. Some of the evidence is even conflicting and a great deal of basic work needs still to be done before the full story can be written.

Simon Hopkins, *The Discovery of the Cairo Genizah*, Cape Town, 1981.

Some Talking Points:

1. The traditional Genizah story

2. New elements of the story:

- Before Schechter's discovery
- The key to the Genizah
- Scrabbling for fragments, 1896-1897
- Further discoveries, sales, schemes, 1898-1900

3. Challenges ahead: gaps in the evidence

4. Summary: why this project is important

The Traditional Story



Image courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library

New Elements of the Story: before Schechter's discovery

Assouat.
Mar. 26/95.

My dear Neubauer,

I am writing this week to
 convey this news to you. I have just
 heard from my Cairo friend that
 he has succeeded in discovering &
 entering the old subterranean place
 from which the Hebrews had long
 come. It is still filled with
 thousands of books, the larger & more accessible
 if it had been torn to pieces in
 order to sell the paper to have
 come to Europe. The Jews in charge

Letter from Archibald Henry Sayce to Adolf Neubauer, March 26, 1895, reporting that his Cairo friend [d'Hulst] has found the Genizah and that it is still filled with manuscripts. Image courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford (above)



D'Hulst? Y.Views.4 Image courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library

Correspondence. 27th

EGYPTE (Égypte)
 CARTES POSTALES

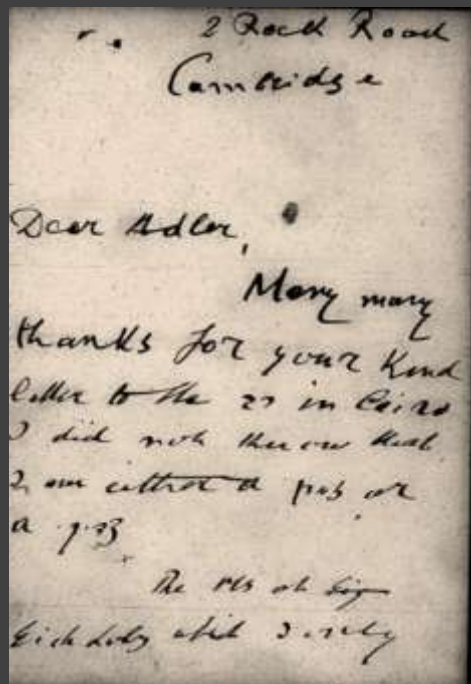
I thank you for your
 post card of Jan. 30 - (received
 Feb. 12 95) I am awaiting to
 hear from you.

As to the Kenisah MSS.: I
 discovered them, report in 1889
 carrying on excavations at Old
 Cairo. They seemed to me valuable
 but I was not sufficiently Hebrew
 scholar to decide, so I reported
 to the authorities of the B. & S.

England
 F. Madam Esq^{re}
 Bodley's Librarian
 Oxford

Postcard from Count Riamo d'Hulst explaining his long association with the Genizah manuscripts beginning in 1889. Image courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford (above)

New elements of the story: the “key to the Genizah”



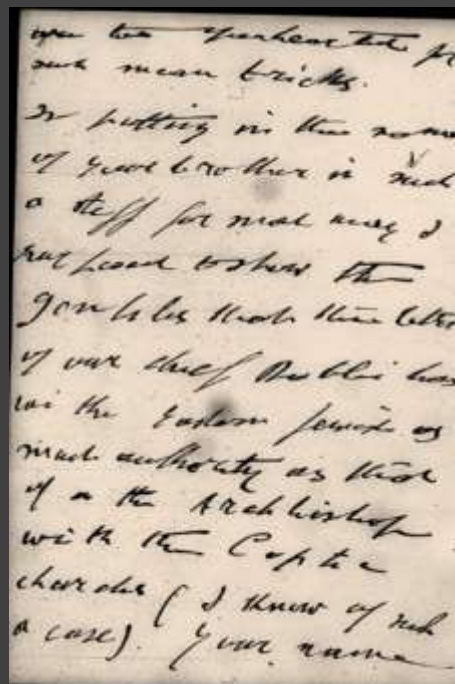
2 Rock Road
Cambridge

Dear Adler,

Many many
thanks for your kind
letter to the 27 in Cairo
I did not know that
2 was either a prob or
a 73.

Re the ab big
Eichholz and I only

Letter from Solomon Schechter to Elkan Nathan Adler thanking him for his introduction to the “Rav” in Cairo (December 1896), Image courtesy of the Jewish Theological Seminary Solomon Schechter Collection



you too perhaps the pe
and mean bricks.

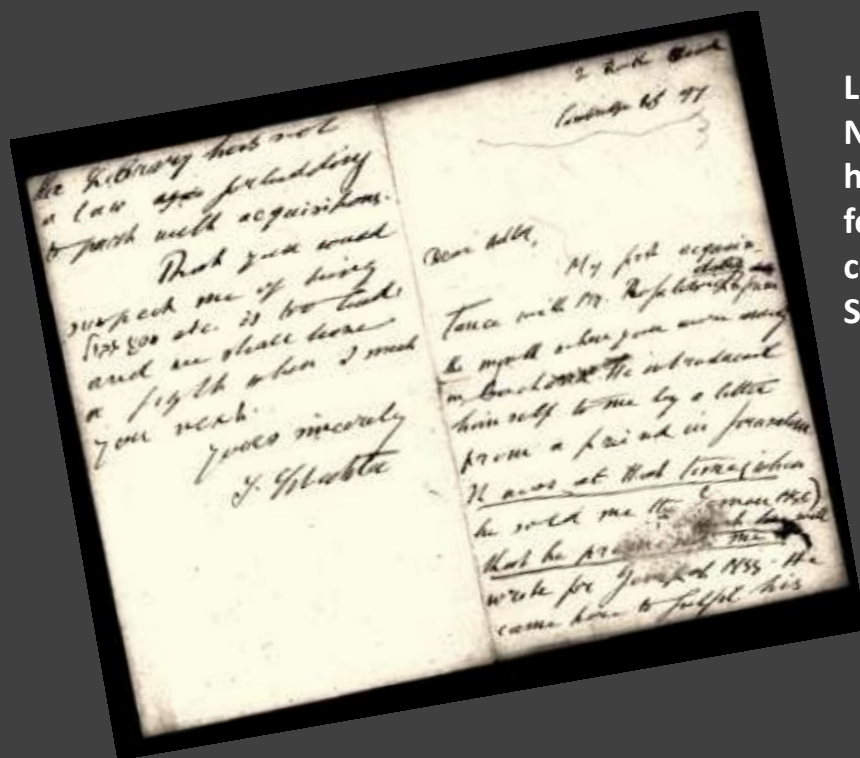
In putting in the name
of your brother in such
a stiff formal way I
had feared to show the
you to be that the letter
of our chief Rabbi has
in the Eastern sense of
much authority as that
of a the Archbishop
with the Coptic
character (I know of such
a case). Your name

Letter from Solomon Schechter to Elkan Nathan Adler, August 5, 1897, explaining why he failed to acknowledge his introduction to the Rabbi in Cairo. Image courtesy of the Jewish Theological Seminary Solomon Schechter Collection

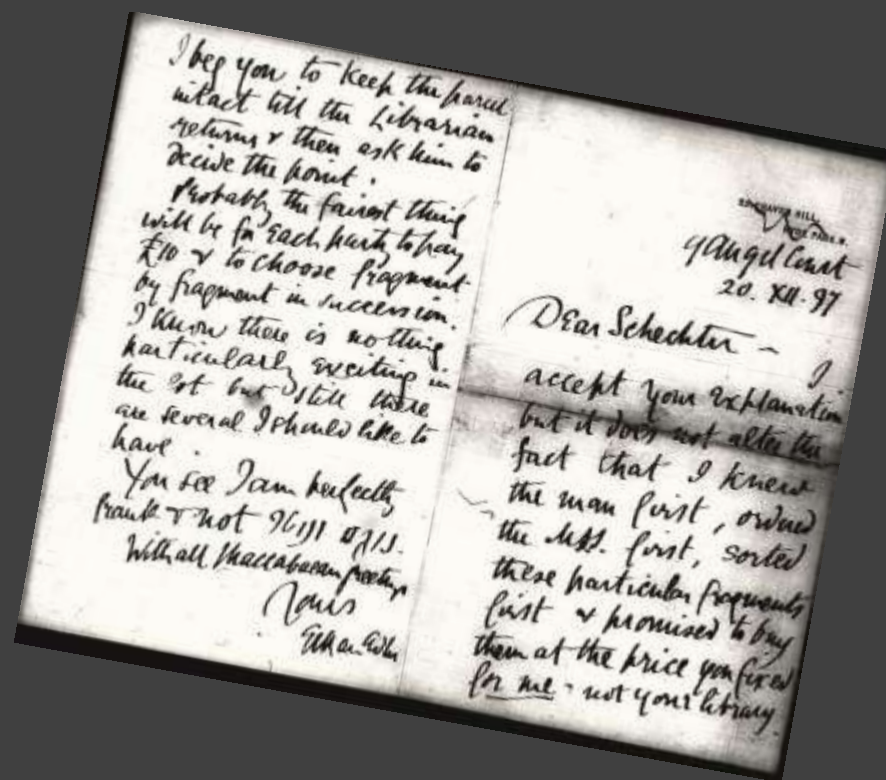


A tale of two Adlers: Rabbi Hermann Adler, the Chief Rabbi of England (above) and his brother, Elkan Nathan Adler (below)

New elements of the story: scrabbling for fragments



Letter from Solomon Schechter to Elkan Nathan Adler, December 15, 1897, defending his acquisition of Genizah manuscripts offered for sale by W. S. Raffalovich (top left). Image courtesy of the Jewish Theological Seminary Solomon Schechter Collection



Letter from Elkan Nathan Adler to Solomon Schechter, December 20, 1897, partly accepting Schechter's explanation and offering a solution to suit all parties (bottom right). Image courtesy of the Jewish Theological Seminary Solomon Schechter Collection

New elements of the story: further discoveries

Cairo February 17th 1898

My dear Mr. Neubauer

The permission for Old Cairo I have obtained, thanks to the kindness of Sir William Garstin, Mr Perry, chief of the Gendarmerie, Mr Pasha, chief of the Police.

I began the work last week & was stopped after half a day work because the native clerks had delayed their entries. After another visit at the Ministry matters were put right. I have forwarded by parcel post eight bags containing the result of my work. It appears that I only saw them throw out the last remains of their rubbish, that which I have turned now, some months before I began the work for the Egypt Exploration Fund they had thrown out another big heap of rubbish, which I have found. I have examined this heap; it contains papers of the same nature & in the same proportions. Of course I do not know whether under this heap may be buried refuse of another heap to come from the Synagogue; it would be better before it is turned. Immediately before it is an open water conduit & a road therefore part of it would have to be carried at a short distance, in order to obtain space for burning of the remainder. I am bound to say, to carry this work through it would have to be done without the least delay. Because the government has sold the plot upon which the rubbish lies (the sale having become complete the day before I began my work) & if



Old Cairo from the V&A Francis Frith Photograph Collection, London

Letter from Count Riamo d'Hulst to Adolf Neubauer, February 17, 1898, concerning the excavation of Genizah manuscripts in the rubbish heaps near the synagogue:

I have forwarded by Parcel Post eight bags containing the result of my work ... some months before I began the work for the Egypt Exploration Fund [in 1889] they had thrown out another big heap of rubbish, which I have found.

Image courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford from collection Bodl.d.1080

New elements of the story: sales

Financial summary—The accompanying statement of accounts will show that, despite a considerably increased expenditure on the purchase of MSS. and printed books and on the binding of MSS. the credit-balance has not been materially reduced.

This is due partly to the continued liberality of Trinity College in making a second grant of £150; partly to another generous donation of £100 from a member of All Souls; and partly to the fact that the latter College (which since 1886 had found it impossible to furnish any part of the £1000 a year specified by the last University Commission) was able to resume its contributions to the extent of £120.

On the receipts side of the balance-sheet and of the account relating to the Trinity College grants one item requires explanation. In 1888 the cost of certain excavations in Egypt, and of the carriage of the proceeds to Oxford, was paid for from the Trinity grant. It was found that a very large proportion of the manuscript scraps dug up were quite without value to a library so extremely rich in Hebrew MSS. as the Bodleian—consisting merely of verses of the Bible &c. in writing of no considerable antiquity. Accordingly on the recommendation of the Senior Librarian and the Assistant Sub-Librarian, and with the approval of the Regius Professor of Hebrew and the Librarian, the Curators agreed to accept the offer made for them by a private collector of well-known position, and to repay that amount to the Trinity grant. An exactly similar disposition of Hebrew fragments, and to the same gentleman, is recorded in the accounts for 1897.

On the payments side two items may be explained. The photographs purchased were photographs of the library buildings specially executed for the Education and Paris Exhibitions: the negatives will be used for the production of farther copies which will be on sale at the Clarendon Press depot for the benefit of the Library. The medical expenses were caused by an injury suffered by an under-assistant in the performance of his duties.

Bodleian Library Curators' Annual Report (clipping; 1899) detailing the sale of unwanted Genizah manuscripts to "a private collector of well-known position" that year in 1899 and previously in 1897 (above)

Sale of Waste

January 25, 1897

Sale of useless Hebrew MSS fragments

to Mr. E. N. Adler

£5.0.0

March 25, 1899

Sale of useless Hebrew MSS fragments

to Mr. E. N. Adler

£20.7.0

March 28, 1907

Sale of useless Hebrew MSS fragments

to Mr. E. N. Adler

£7.10.0

Mock-up of Bodleian Library C.37: Receipts Ledger, 1890-1916

New elements of the story: schemes

digging up at least 25 to
25 bags of manuscripts.
I shall try to find out who
he was & let you know.
Now there is another man
on the scene Dr Muller whose
card I enclose you. This
man has offered the beadle
& people in charge £2 per bag
but up to present as I heard
of this I stepped in & collared
what was already dug up
which is 5 sacks full.
I have got them here in my store
under the condition that on
receipt of your reply I must



Image of the Manchester Docks from 1900 courtesy of www.oldukphotos.com

Letter from Reginald Q. Henriques to Solomon Schechter, December 8, 1898:

The matter of the Ghenisa is by no means finished ... While I was at home in England ... some German or Austrian ... succeeded in digging up at least 20 to 25 bags of manuscripts. Now there is another man on the scene Dr. Muller whose card I enclose you. This man has offered the beadle & people in charge £2 per bag but up to present as I heard of this I stepped in and collared what was already dug up which is 5 sacks full.

MS CUL ULIB 6/6/1/2. Image courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library

Challenges ahead: gaps in the evidence



David Heinrich Müller (1846-1912); Orientalist; born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Müller gave “Even Saphir” wider notice (in 1879). He went on an expedition to South Arabia in December 1898.



David Kaufmann (1852-1899): Austrian scholar; professor at the Budapest Rabbinical Seminary. He was close friends with Müller.

Summary: why this project is important



Roni Choueka, left, and his father, Yaacov Choueka, displaying a computerized fragment

“TEL AVIV — One scholar likened it to finding the orphaned socks for generations of a family. Another compared it to law-enforcement’s use of DNA databases and face-recognition software. The idea is to harness technology to help reassemble ... 320,000 pages and parts of pages ... scattered in 67 libraries and private collections around the world, only a fraction of them collated and cataloged ...”

Quote and Image from *The New York Times*, May 26, 2013

For further information (or to supply information!)
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