Uncovering the History of the Cairo Genizah Manuscript Collections:

The Story so Far …
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.

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
New Elements of the Story: before Schechter’s discovery

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

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”

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

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)

Letters being edited for work in progress: Jefferson, R. J. W. *Collected papers of the scholars and antiquarians who discovered the Cairo Genizah* (Brill Cambridge Genizah Series) eds. S. Bhayro, G. Khan & B. Outhwaite.
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

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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.
New elements of the story: sales

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)

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

Letter from Reginald Q. Henries 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.
Challenges ahead: gaps in the evidence

David Heinrich Müller (1846-1912); Orientalist; born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Muller 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.

“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 ...”

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