

The Genizah and its Research - An Exhibition

This exhibit presents the Cairo Genizah and its current research. It is the first venue showcasing the work of the new Haifa Centre for the Interdisciplinary Research of the Cairo Genizah and its Broader Application.

The Genizah was not an official archive, but rather a depository in which remains of almost every single text written in Hebrew letters were discarded. As such it provides a huge resource for the study of Medieval Jewish history and culture. The Genizah texts are unique in that they enable us to encounter the daily life and practice of people, as opposed to official historical accounts written by politicians or canonical literature accepted by known and established authorities.

This distinctive quality of the Genizah has brought together scholars from varied disciplines, that have come to realization that they share similar methods and approaches. In an accidental meeting in Cambridge a few years ago, the two of us began to understand that in spite of our different areas of interest - rabbinic literature and medical and scientific knowledge - we were following similar lines of research: the quest for the individual in his daily life. About the same time each one of us launched similar projects: a search for private lists and notebooks of medical practitioners, and a survey of private lists and notes of homilists and rabbis. We both noted that there is more to be learnt from Genizah besides the books found in it. It can bring to life the actual ways that human knowledge and cultural heritage function within society. We believe that just as the Genizah enabled us to become familiar with the wider society of the past, so too should it be shared with the wider society of the present. In our digitized era, as knowledge becomes readily available to all, it is the responsibility of academic scholarship to bring its findings into public discourse. We hope that this exhibit will help further these goals.

The exhibit consists of three sections. One section is aimed at presenting the Genizah and the Genizah collection as a whole. The two other sections present the results of ongoing Genizah research being done in the University of Haifa in the diverse fields of medical knowledge and Midrash and its reception.

We hope to expand the exhibit in the future to include many other Genizah studies from various academic groups around the world.

Efraim Lev and Moshe Lavee

We would like to thank the following people and institutions for their support and their permission to present the materials:

Dr. Ben Outhwait, The Taylor-Schechter Genizah Unit in the University of Cambridge; and the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

Prof. David Kraemer and the Special Collections Unit in the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York.

Dr. Cesar Mechan Hamman and the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Prof. Yaakov Schweka and Genazim website, the Friedberg project: ww.genizah.org.

Grandchamp Foundation.

The Exhibition Team:

Prof. Efraim Lev and Dr. Moshe Lavee.

Contributors: Moshe Gan-Zvi, Dr. Yachin Epstein, Vered Raziel-Krechmer, Dr. Oded Rosenblum, Tova Sacher, Dr. Shana Schick, Yehonatan Wormser.

Graphic designer: Marina Bugaev.