

Proposal for European Seminar on Advanced Jewish Studies

The material texts of the Genizah Collection at the Bodleian Library:

A new approach to Genizah research

The Genizah research project was conceived with the intention of bringing together a number of specialists in Hebrew codicology, paleography, Talmud and Jewish liturgy in order to examine the material text of a selected number of Genizah fragments in the Bodleian Library. The purpose of the project is to establish a new method of classifying Genizah material by means of the script, writing materials and peritextual features, thus aiming at the reconstruction of the geo-cultural provenance and at a more accurate dating of the fragments.

The participating experts will have unrestricted access to the Bodleian Genizah fragments collection and will have all the necessary equipment (such as infra-red and ultraviolet lights) at their disposal. The project will have the technical support of the Bodleian imaging services department, with its Beta photographic techniques, - techniques that are able to disclose watermarks, paper fibres and so on. The Oxford Imaging Papyri Project has used multi-spectral imaging experiments very successfully as a means of deciphering damaged texts. Such procedures will be invaluable to the proposed project.

In a weekly seminar, also to be held at the Bodleian Library, the experts will discuss the progress of the project and disseminate their findings to a wider scholarly audience. Members of the John Rylands Cairo Genizah Project and the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Unit will participate in the seminar, and scholars from the United Kingdom and Continental Europe will be encouraged to attend. A unique feature of the weekly meeting will be the opportunity for all participants to work with the actual fragments.

The end findings will be stored in a database which will be made available to all scholars for wider application of Genizah studies.

The Bodleian Genizah Collection

The Bodleian Genizah fragments were obtained at the turn of the 19th century partly through gifts, but mainly through successive acquisitions. A focused acquisition policy resulted in one of the most important Genizah collections worldwide. The 5,000 fragments comprise about 25,000 leaves, which amount to an average of 5 leaves per fragment. Often consisting of whole quires, the size of the fragments makes the Bodleian Library Collection one of the most important resources for the study of the Genizah treasures.

The digitization of the collections

Thanks to various digitization projects over the last few years, Genizah material has been made accessible in an unparalleled way. Exciting progress has been made in exchanging data from different collections such as those at the Jewish Theological Seminary (New York) and the Centre for Advanced Judaic Studies (Philadelphia) and the John Ryland's Library (Manchester). The digitization of the entire Taylor-Schechter Genizah Collection (Cambridge) has started. The Bodleian Library is in the process of digitizing its collection which will be accessible at the beginning of next academic year thus enhancing the accessibility of Genizah material significantly.

Digital availability of the data has not only contributed to scholarly discussion and cooperation; it has also already initiated the reconstruction of the mutilated Genizah treasure trove, often haphazardly broken up and dispersed in different locations. The retrieval of fragments of one and the same manuscript now located in two or more libraries is, however, still in its early stages. In order to further such a reconstruction on a firm basis and larger scale, essential elements of examination, well developed for the Hebrew codex, but thus far not sufficiently taken into account, should be applied. Being part and parcel of the Hebrew manuscript tradition, the codicological and paleographical aspects of the Genizah fragments need, therefore, to be analyzed.

The material text

The European Seminar will consist of a pilot study, in which the codicological and paleographical facets of a selected number of Bodleian Genizah fragments will be

examined. Focusing on the material text, attention will be paid to the script and the various hands (Yemenite, Persian, Sefardic and Ashkenazic), the para- and peritextual elements (line management, punctuation, auxiliary graphic marks, the *mise-en-page*), the morphology of the paper etc.

Matching fragments

The codicological and palaeographical findings resulting from an analysis of the material text will provide more refined tools with which to establish matches of fragments and to substantiate matches suggested on the basis of digital comparison. Given the fact that Hebrew manuscripts are often produced by more than one scribe, peritextual correspondence between fragments of the same content with a different hand of the same tradition (e.g. Sefardic) is a possible additional indication that the fragments belong together. An assumption such as this, however, should be substantiated by other material data, such as the morphology of the paper. Material data - and paper in particular - can, of course, also be used to discount matches of fragments suggested purely on the basis of digital comparison.

A new classification

To date, the Genizah fragments have only been classified according to subject, combined with rather general information about material elements of the text. Genizah studies conducted thus far have concentrated equally on textual discoveries such as variants in and vocalization of the biblical text, linguistic developments in rabbinic literature and thus far unknown liturgical material (see *The Cambridge Genizah Collections: their Contents and Significance*, ed. Stefan Reif, Cambridge University Press, 2002.) As is often claimed all these discoveries depict much of Jewish life as it was lived about a thousand years ago. The picture drawn from the Genizah material, however, can be much more focused and specific when taking into account the material text. Much may be discovered about local Jewish history and contribution to Jewish tradition by means of an accurate examination of all codicological and palaeographical aspects of the fragments. The combination of the results of such an analysis will create an additional method of classification, different from that of the printed catalogues and electronic search engines. Through identification of script and various hands, *mise-en-page* and paper analysis, we will be able to classify

material of different subjects according to their geo-cultural provenance. Such provenance, to which specific linguistic features and unknown traditions and practices can be attributed, will shed light on the characteristics of local Jewish communities.

Dating

Since the Genizah fragments usually are without colophon or any other indication of the year in which they were produced, their dating usually shows a rather broad-spectrum, often of two centuries. In particular the paper, which differs in composition from place to place, will not only help us to locate fragments, but by comparing its morphology with the writing material of dated Arabic manuscripts will enable us to establish the date of a fragment with more precision.

Additional help in this respect may be derived from the comparison of line management and *mise-en-page* in fragments and dated manuscripts.

Procedure of the project

For the pilot study a selection will be made from two important collections of the Bodleian Genizah Fragments: Talmud and Liturgy. Since many of these fragments consist of several pages and often of a complete quire, they are most suitable for our analysis. The selection from each subject will be made by the expert in the field and will cover various aspects of the subject (e.g. for the Talmud different tractates, and both Halakhic and Aggadic material; for Liturgy, Piyutim, Selichot, various rites etc.).

In order to identify specific characteristics both linguistically and in terms of content the experts in Talmud and Liturgy will examine the material through internal (Genizah fragments) and external (mss. and editions) comparison. Two experts in codicology and paleography will examine the material text of the selected passages. At each weekly seminar (for which Prof Philip Alexander, Director of the John Rylands Cairo Genizah Project, and Dr. Ben Outhwaite, Director of the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Unit will be invited) one Talmud fragment and one Liturgical fragment will be discussed and the conclusions recorded in a database (please see below).

SfarData

An essential part of the project will be the use of SfarData, a sophisticated quantitative database and retrieval system of a large number of measurable codicological attributes recorded in most of the extant explicitly dated, and in the undated but otherwise colophonned (or named) Hebrew medieval manuscripts. This database is the culmination of The Hebrew Palaeography Project, which has recorded most of the visible and quantifiable codicological features and variables of all the surviving dated Hebrew codices and the undated ones, with indications of scribes' names, in total some 5500 manuscripts in collections all over the world. The elaborate retrieving, sorting and linking system allows endless querying of the data, clustering and statistics.

The use of this database will not only enable us to store our results in such a way that they can be retrieved, linked and clustered, but also offers the possibility of linking the data of the project with that of The Hebrew Palaeography Project. The already established geo-cultural setting of many Hebrew manuscripts will be a valuable external tool for assessing the chronological limits and the geo-cultural provenance of the Geniza fragments. It is intended to make the database available as an electronic guidebook for further Genizah research.

Bringing together paleographers, codicologists and experts in the various relevant fields and languages in this way will afford an exceptionally exciting opportunity to further the study of Genizah material.

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