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*A Centennial Assessment of Genizah Studies*

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The object of this paper is to set the scene for the other, more detailed presentations in this volume by summarizing the contributions made by Genizah texts to various aspects of Jewish studies, and by citing a few examples of the kind of manuscripts that have been deciphered and analysed.<sup>1</sup> It should then become apparent what all this means for a century of past academic development, as well as for its equivalent over the next hundred years. What I hope to demonstrate is that there is undoubtedly an essential technical side to Genizah research and an aspect of it that deals with minute literary, linguistic and historical detail. At the same time, I am anxious to prove that the discoveries and their interpretation also reveal totally unexpected scenarios and permit the reconstruction, as with a giant jigsaw, of a broad picture, depicting much of Jewish life as it was lived about a thousand years ago. I have recently published a volume that sets out to explain how, where and why the Genizah archive was amassed; who transferred it to famous research libraries, particularly to Cambridge University Library; and the manner in which scholars have exploited its contents since the last decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> What has incidentally emerged is a remarkable tale of communal piety and superstition, scholarly co-operation and rivalry, and institutional care and neglect. That tale is a topic for consideration elsewhere. What is important in this present context is the fact that I have, in the course of preparing that volume, recently assessed the degree to which a number of areas of Jewish studies have been affected by Genizah discoveries. I am consequently able to offer fresh and pertinent comments under the five headings of Bible, Rabbinics, History, Daily Life and Literacy.

**Bible**

There are some variants to be found in the Genizah remnants of scrolls and codices which are significant for the history of scribal techniques and have yet to be adequately exploited for text-critical purposes. Nevertheless, the consonantal text

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the Toledo conference of the European Association for Jewish Studies in 1998 and appeared in *Jewish Studies at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, eds J. T. Borrás and A. Sáenz-Badillos, vol. 1 (Leiden, Boston and Köln, 1999), pp. 577–608. I am grateful to the publishers, Brill of Leiden, for their kind permission to reproduce much of that article here.

<sup>2</sup> S. C. Reif, *A Jewish Archive from Old Cairo: The History of Cambridge University's Genizah Collection* (Richmond, Surrey, 2000).

was substantially as it is today and it is rather in the area of vocalization that major discoveries have been made. There were three major systems, two emanating from the Holy Land and one from Babylon, that were in vogue a thousand years ago. The tenth-century Tiberian system of Ben Asher that later came to be regarded as standard took some two or three centuries to establish its dominance in the field. Whether inspired by the Syriac Christian example, by Muslim concern for the accuracy of the Qur'an, or by an internal feud with the Karaite Jews who preferred the biblical to the rabbinic tradition, such attention to the accurate recording of the vocalized text left its mark on exegesis. The schools of Masoretes (literally, 'transmitters' or, perhaps, 'counters'), who surrounded the text with vowel points, cantillation signs and explanatory notes, inevitably recorded *pari passu* their own understanding of its meaning, or the understanding that they had inherited from generations of readers.<sup>3</sup> Their methodical approach also encouraged the development of those Hebrew philological studies that provided the basis for the literal interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in later medieval and modern times.<sup>4</sup>

The interest in making sense of the Hebrew text was of course primarily inspired by its regular recitation before the congregation in the synagogue. The material from the Cairo Genizah confirms that there existed annual Babylonian and triennial Palestinian lectionaries for both pentateuchal and prophetic readings. They did, however, exist in such variety that it is impossible to identify any one order that may be traced back to the early Christian centuries. According to the latest research, the system was not a rigid one, allowed for local variations and took the form of a double cycle every seven years.<sup>5</sup> In addition to Hebrew lectionaries used by the Jews,

<sup>3</sup> A. Dotan, *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 16 (Jerusalem, 1971), cols 1401–82; I. Yeivin, *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah* (English translation of a Hebrew original, Missoula, 1980); E. J. Revell, *Hebrew Texts with Palestinian Vocalization* (Toronto, 1970); and M. C. Davis, *Hebrew Bible Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections*, (2 vols; Cambridge, 1978 and 1980; and another two being prepared for the printer). See also the papers published in early issues of *Textus* and read at recent meetings of the International Organization for Masoretic Studies. For further details of the relevance of the Genizah to biblical studies, see S. C. Reif, 'The Cairo Genizah and its Treasures, with Special Reference to Biblical Studies' in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, eds D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara (Sheffield, 1994), pp. 30–50.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, D. Becker, 'Traces of Judah Ibn Quraysh in Manuscript, particularly in Genizah Fragments' and I. Eldar 'Mukhtaṣar (an abridgement of) Hidāyat al-Qāri': A Grammatical Treatise discovered in the Genizah' in *Genizah Research after Ninety Years. The Case of Judaeo-Arabic*, eds J. Blau and S. C. Reif (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 14–21 and 67–73; and D. Téné, 'Hashva'at Ha-Leshonot Viydi'at Ha-Lashon' in *Hebrew Language Studies presented to Professor Zeev Ben-Hayyim*, eds M. Bar-Asher, A. Dotan, G. B. Sarfati and D. Téné (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1983), pp. 237–87. For the Karaite contribution, see the forthcoming volume by G. Khan, *Early Karaite Grammatical Texts*, scheduled for publication in 2001 in SBL's 'Masoretic Studies' series, and n. 9 below.

<sup>5</sup> J. J. Petuchowski (ed.), *Contributions to the Scientific Study of the Jewish Liturgy* (New York, 1970), pp. xvii–xxi; B. Z. Wacholder in the first prolegomenon to the reprint (New York, 1971) of J. Mann's *The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue* (Cincinnati,

Palestinian Syriac versions of the Christian scriptures have also been discovered. The range of biblical translations to be found in the Genizah testifies to the wide variety of languages in use when that archive was first built up. In the pre-Islamic centuries, the dominant language of the diaspora Jews was Greek so that it is hardly surprising to find fragments dating from the sixth to seventh centuries that were part of translations first prepared for them by Aquila some 500 years earlier.<sup>6</sup> Was it Jews or Christians who were using such versions in the sixth century and how did they come to be consigned to the Genizah? Is their use related to that of Origen's *Hexapla*, fragments of which have also come to us from the same source? Whether or not the Aquila just mentioned is, as has sometimes been suggested, to be identified with Onqelos, the reputed author of the main and literal synagogal targum, is not clarified by the Genizah texts. They do, nevertheless, add considerably to our knowledge of the development of that popular genre of Aramaic translation. Various compilations of targumic material, some hitherto unknown, have been identified among the Genizah texts. They include lengthy elaborations of the text, poetic versions of the narratives, and halakhic interpretations of verses that run counter to what is found in the talmudic sources.<sup>7</sup>

Because of the ancient nature of the custom to translate the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic, it was not abandoned when Arabic replaced Aramaic and Greek as the Jewish vernacular. Rather, it was incorporated into a trilingual version in which Arabic appeared side-by-side with Hebrew and Aramaic. The Arabic rendering, written in Hebrew characters and recording the popular dialect of that Semitic language used in the Jewish communities, originally existed in a variety of forms, many of them closely following the rabbinic and targumic traditions. Although they continued to exist well into the Middle Ages, they did gradually cede precedence to the version created by the tenth-century rabbinic authority in Babylon, Sa'adya ben

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1940 and 1966, with I. Sonne); E. Fleischer's Hebrew articles, 'Inquiries concerning the Triennial Reading of the Torah in Ancient Eretz-Israel', *Hebrew Union College Annual* 62 (1991), pp. 43–61 and 'Annual and Triennial Reading of the Bible in the Old Synagogue', *Tarbiz* 61 (1992), pp. 25–43; S. Naeh, 'The Torah Reading Cycle in Early Palestine: A Re-Examination', *Tarbiz* 67 (1998), pp. 167–87.

<sup>6</sup> A. S. Lewis and M. D. Gibson, *Palestinian Syriac Texts from Palimpsest Fragments in the Taylor-Schechter Collection* (London, 1900); M. Sokoloff and J. Yahalom, 'Christian Palimpsests from the Cairo Geniza', *Revue d'Histoire des Textes* 8 (1978), pp. 109–32; F. C. Burkitt, *Fragments of the Books of Kings according to the Translation of Aquila* (Cambridge, 1897), and C. Taylor, *Hebrew-Greek Genizah Palimpsests from the Taylor-Schechter Collection* (Cambridge, 1900); C. Müller-Kessler and M. Sokoloff, *The Christian Palestinian Aramaic Old Testament and Apocrypha Version from the Early Period* (Groningen, 1997); A. Salvesen (ed.), *Origen's Hexapla and Fragments: Papers Presented at the Rich Seminar on the Hexapla* (Tübingen, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> M. L. Klein, *Genizah Manuscripts of Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* (2 vols; Cincinnati, 1986) and *Targum Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections* (Cambridge, 1992); see also his article 'Targumic Studies and the Cairo Genizah', on pp. 47–58 below.

Joseph, which, like the targum of Onqelos, became the standard one.<sup>8</sup> It was Sa'adya who championed the rabbinic traditions against the powerful challenge mounted by their Karaite opponents who were distinguishing themselves in biblical exegesis and philological studies. For their part, the Karaites also made a polemical point by means of a linguistic usage. At one point in their history, they demonstrated their independent religious identity by recording the text of the Hebrew Bible in Arabic and not Hebrew characters.<sup>9</sup>

Scholarly understanding of the development of midrashim, throughout the millennium following the destruction of the Second Temple, also owes much to Genizah research. Hitherto, the earliest manuscripts were from the initial period of Ashkenazi Jewry in the western Jewish communities. Now, there are hundreds of fragments written in their eastern counterparts at a much earlier date and representing older textual traditions. What is more, new midrashim, anthologies and commentaries have been discovered, both halakhic and aggadic in nature, and a new picture has been drawn of the colourful and heterogeneous Jewish exegesis of the Hebrew Bible in the early Middle Ages and of the manner in which various texts were transmitted.<sup>10</sup> Such a variegated approach gave way to the more linguistic and

<sup>8</sup> J. Blau, 'On a Fragment of the Oldest Judaeo-Arabic Bible Translation Extant' in *Ninety Years* (see n. 4 above), pp. 31–39; C. F. Baker and M. Polliack, *Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections* (Cambridge, 2001); *Heritage and Innovation in Medieval Judaeo-Arabic Culture*, eds J. Blau and D. Doron (Ramat Gan, 2000); M. Polliack, 'Types of Arabic Bible Translation in the Cairo Geniza based on the Catalogue of T-S Arabic', *Te'uda 15: A Century of Geniza Research* (Hebrew; Tel Aviv, 1999), pp. 109–25.

<sup>9</sup> G. Khan, 'The Early Karaite Grammatical Tradition' in *Jewish Studies at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (see n. 1 above), pp. 72–80 and *Karaite Bible Manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah* (Cambridge, 1990); M. Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation* (Leiden, New York and Köln, 1997); and see n. 4 above.

<sup>10</sup> Two helpful and reliable English guides to the whole midrashic field, as background to the relevance of the Genizah texts, are R. Kasher's article 'Scripture in Rabbinic Literature' in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, eds J. Mulder and H. Sysling (Assen/Maastricht and Philadelphia), pp. 547–94 and G. Stemmerger's *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Edinburgh, 1996), originally an updated version of Hermann Strack's classic, but now an important work in its own right, with the latest scholarly data. M. Gaster's midrashic pieces were reprinted in his three volumes *Studies and Texts in Folklore: Magic, Mediaeval Romance, Hebrew Apocrypha and Samaritan Archaeology* (London, 1925–28). For examples of the treatment of Genizah fragments of midrashim, see M. Sokoloff, *The Geniza Fragments of Bereshit Rabba* (Jerusalem, 1982), and S. C. Reif, 'A Midrashic Anthology from the Genizah' in *Interpreting the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honour of E. I. J. Rosenthal*, eds J. A. Emerton and S. C. Reif (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 179–225; L. Teugels, 'New Perspectives on the Origins of Aggadot Bereshit: The Witness of a Genizah Fragment' in *Jewish Studies at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (see n. 1 above), pp. 349–57. Hebrew volumes on the kind of unusual midrashim found in the Genizah include S. A. Wertheimer, *Batei Midrashot*, ed. A. J. Wertheimer (Jerusalem, 1954); J. Mann, *The Bible as Read and Preached* (see n. 5 above); L. Ginzberg, *Genizah Studies in Memory of Doctor Solomon Schechter. I. Midrash and*

philological commentaries of the tenth to the twelfth centuries, and the written evidence from the Genizah records is one of the factors that precipitated such a change.<sup>11</sup> It was effected by the centralized and centralizing powers of the Babylonian rabbinic authorities in an effort to thwart Karaite efforts to discredit rabbinic interpretation as lacking the serious and literal dimension.

There are also some intriguing questions concerning the link between the biblical and quasi-biblical texts that occur both among the literature of the Dead Sea sect and in the Genizah corpora. It is sometimes forgotten that the first and fullest text of one of the sect's major religious tracts, the Damascus Document (or Zadokite Fragments), came to light among the Genizah finds fifty years before the contents of the Qumran caves made their sensational impact on Jewish and Christian history.<sup>12</sup> Nor indeed would it have been possible for the long-lost Hebrew text of the Wisdom of Ben Sira, written in the second pre-Christian century, to have been reconstructed without extensive input from the fragments found in the Ben Ezra synagogue.<sup>13</sup> But in which context did these two works continue to circulate in the intervening centuries and who copied them, and for what purpose, in Fatimid Cairo?<sup>14</sup> It is not perhaps so

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*Haggadah* (New York, 1928); Z. M. Rabinovitz, *Ginzé Midrash* (Tel Aviv, 1976); and M. Kahana, *Manuscripts of the Halakhic Midrashim: An Annotated Catalogue* (Jerusalem, 1995) and his article 'The Tannaitic Midrashim' on pp. 59–73 below.

<sup>11</sup> As far as rabbinic commentaries are concerned, M. Perez has, for example, published important fragments of the work of Judah ibn Bal'am and Moses ibn Gikatilla in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 57 (1991), pp. 1–16; *Sinai* 108 (1991), pp. 7–17; *Leshonenu* 55 (1992), pp. 315–22; *Hebrew Union College Annual* 63 (1993), pp. 1–17; and *Sinai* 113 (1994), pp. 262–76. M. Zucker did important work on Sa'adya's biblical scholarship in his Hebrew volumes *Rav Saadya Gaon's Translation of the Torah* (New York, 1959) and *Saadya's Commentary on Genesis* (New York, 1984) and Y. Ratzaby has published many additional fragments of Sa'adya's commentaries, as in *Sinai* 109 (1992), pp. 97–117, 193–211; and *Sinai* 111 (1993), pp. 1–26; see his edition of *Sa'adya's Translation and Commentary on Isaiah* (Kiryat Ono, 1993). Another important edition is that of A. Greenbaum, *The Biblical Commentary of Rav Samuel ben Hofni Gaon according to Geniza Manuscripts* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1979).

<sup>12</sup> Schechter published the Zadokite or Damascus Document (CD) in the first volume of his *Documents of Jewish Sectaries* under the sub-title *Fragments of a Zadokite Work* (Cambridge, 1910). The literature relating to CD is helpfully summarized in the excellent bibliography provided by F. García Martínez in Magen Broshi's *The Damascus Document Reconsidered* (Jerusalem, 1992). See also *The Damascus Document: A Centennial of Discovery*, eds J. M. Baumgarten, E. G. Chazon and A. Pinnick (Leiden, Boston and Köln, 2000), including S. C. Reif, 'The Damascus Document from the Cairo Genizah: Its Discovery, Early Study and Historical Significance', pp. 109–31.

<sup>13</sup> The whole story of the Cambridge Genizah fragments of Ben Sira is told in S. C. Reif, 'The Discovery of the Cambridge Genizah fragments of Ben Sira: Scholars and Texts' in one of a number of recent overviews of the field, *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research: Proceedings of the First International Ben Sira Conference, 28–31 July 1996, Soesterberg, Netherlands*, ed. P. C. Beentjes (Berlin and New York, 1997), pp. 1–22.

<sup>14</sup> The issue of the relationship between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Genizah texts is summarized in S. C. Reif's entry 'Cairo Genizah' in *Encyclopaedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, eds L. H. Schiffman and J. C. VanderKam (Oxford and New York, 2000), pp. 105–8. See

remarkable to find versions of *Toledot Yeschu*, recording early Jewish folklore about Jesus, among the fragments.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, no wholly satisfactory reason can be offered for the existence in the Cairo Jewish community of parts of a Nestorian Syriac hymn-book.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps these thirteenth- or fourteenth-century texts belonging to a feast of the Virgin Mary were sold as scrap when the Nestorian community faded out of existence in Cairo at that time or shortly afterwards.

### Rabbinics

The distinction between biblical and rabbinic literature became pronounced only when authors and scribes took to prescribing and describing the contents of their codices in more definitive ways in the later Middle Ages. One should not therefore be surprised to find mixtures of contents in early Genizah folios, as in the case of the scrap of a prophetic lectionary that also contains an early version of a synagogal benediction.<sup>17</sup> That having been said, one may move on to more specific rabbinic literature and assess how the Genizah has contributed to our understanding of its development in the geonic period and soon afterwards. It is not rare to find among Genizah fragments talmudic sections, from both the *Bavli* and the *Yerushalmi*, that were later lost or removed, or to discover that post-Genizah texts have attracted all manner of adhesions. Sometimes the Genizah text is early enough to shed light on the origins of an expression that puzzled later generations. An unusual linguistic usage, a word of Greek or Persian origin, the exchange of one letter for another, a forgotten place name, or an unexpected abbreviation – such phenomena often led to corruptions in the text and it is not unusual for Genizah versions to uncover authentic readings.<sup>18</sup> Fragments of incunables and early editions of talmudic texts, some of them on vellum, and many of them from Spain (e.g. Guadalaxara) and Portugal (e.g. Faro), are another feature, albeit a limited one, of Genizah collections.<sup>19</sup> Genizah

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also the interesting exchange in Hebrew between Y. Erder and H. Ben-Shammai in a section entitled ‘Discussion: Karaism and Apocryphic Literature’, *Cathedra* 42 (1987), pp. 54–86.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed bibliography see R. Di Segni’s Italian monograph *Il Vangelo del Ghetto* (Rome, 1985).

<sup>16</sup> S. P. Brock has edited and published Syriac liturgies from the Genizah in his articles ‘East Syrian Liturgical Fragments from the Cairo Genizah’ and ‘Some Further East Syrian Liturgical Fragments from the Cairo Genizah’ in *Oriens Christianus* 68 (1984), pp. 58–79 and 74 (1990), pp. 44–61. My colleagues, Dr F. Niessen and Dr E. Hunter, are currently preparing for publication a fragment containing Syriac quotations from the Pauline Epistles.

<sup>17</sup> T-S A42.2; see Davis, *Hebrew Bible Manuscripts* (see n. 3 above), vol. 1, p. 221 and S. C. Reif, *Published Material from the Cambridge Genizah Collections: A Bibliography 1896–1980* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 42.

<sup>18</sup> For general guidance in English to scientific study of talmudic texts, see the revised English version of E. Schürer’s *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B. C. – A. D. 135)* by G. Vermes and F. Millar, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1973), pp. 68–118; the richly informative volume *The Literature of the Sages. First Part: Oral Torah, Halakha, Mishna, Tosefta, Talmud, External Tractates*, ed. S. Safrai (Assen/Maastricht and Philadelphia, 1987); and G. Stemmerger, *Introduction* (see n. 10 above).

<sup>19</sup> H. Z. Dimitrovsky, *S’ride Bavli: Fragments from Spanish and Portuguese Incunabula and Sixteenth Century Printings of the Babylonian Talmud and Alfasi* (2 vols; New York, 1979).

versions also contribute to a better understanding of linguistic developments. A clearer distinction between the Western Aramaic of Palestinian texts and the Eastern Aramaic of their Babylonian counterparts has become possible, with the result that the relevant dictionaries and grammars have been improved or, indeed, created from scratch.<sup>20</sup> Glosses on the text, some of them in Judaeo-Arabic or Judaeo-Greek, have helped to restore long-lost meanings, while the use in some manuscripts of vowel-points, following a variety of systems, has enabled experts in Hebrew linguistics to explain how different communities pronounced the Hebrew of their rabbinic texts.<sup>21</sup>

Two other developments, that are certainly reflected in the Genizah evidence, were the creation of supplements to the talmudic text, in the form of brief, additional tractates in the earlier geonic period, and the compilation of commentaries at a later date. Themes that are briefly treated in the standard tractates of the talmudic and immediate post-talmudic periods, or are dealt with there in scattered statements attached to various contexts, are expanded upon in the so-called 'Minor Tractates'.<sup>22</sup> If these tractates constitute the first stage of the process of commentary, the second stage is to be located in the statements made by various geonic authorities about the meaning of individual talmudic passages and preserved in their responsa.<sup>23</sup> The third stage is that of the compilation of running commentaries, such as that which appears to have been undertaken in the Babylonian centre of Pumbedita by Hai Gaon in the tenth and eleventh centuries but most of which has been lost, and that of his later contemporary, Ḥananel ben Ḥushiel, in Qayrawan, one of the most important Jewish communities in North Africa.<sup>24</sup> While investigative Genizah scholarship has played a

<sup>20</sup> On the matter of the Aramaic used in the rabbinic tradition, ample literature is cited by M. Sokoloff in the collection of essays that he edited entitled *Arameans, Aramaic and the Aramaic Literary Tradition* (Ramat Gan, 1983) and in his *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (Ramat Gan, 1990).

<sup>21</sup> S. Morag, *Vocalised Talmudic Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections* (Cambridge, 1988); R. Brody, *A Hand-list of Rabbinic Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections* (Cambridge, 1998); N. Danzig, *A Catalogue of Fragments of Halakhah and Midrash from the Cairo Genizah in the Elkan Nathan Adler Collection of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America* (New York and Jerusalem, 1997). See also the essays included in *Mehqere Talmud: Talmudic Studies*, edited by J. Sussmann and D. Rosenthal (Jerusalem, 1990–93).

<sup>22</sup> M. B. Lerner, 'The External Tractates' in *The Literature of the Sages* (see n. 18 above), pp. 367–409.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, the monumental work of B. M. Lewin in his *Oṣar Ha-Geonim* published in 13 volumes between 1928 and 1962. Details of his publications are given in his *Festschrift, Sefer Ha-Yovel... B. M. Lewin*, ed. J. L. Fishman (Maimon) (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1940), pp. 1–32.

<sup>24</sup> Brody has summarized such development in his essay on 'The Cairo Genizah' included in B. Richler's *Hebrew Manuscripts: A Treasured Legacy* (Cleveland and Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 112–37. See also his important monograph *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture* (New Haven and London, 1998) and M. Ben-Sasson, *The Emergence of the Local Jewish Community in the Muslim World: Qayrawan, 800–1057* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1997).

role in the reconstruction of these earlier developments, it has made nothing short of a massive contribution to the recovery of the later work of Nissim ben Jacob ibn Shahin. For instance, in a work (*Kitāb Miftāḥ Magālīq al-Talmūd*) whose title might justifiably be translated 'A Key to the Talmudic Treasure-Chest', he assisted the student of the vast talmudic literature by providing sources and parallels for many statements, as well as explanations of many recurrent themes.<sup>25</sup>

Another topic documented by a century of Genizah study is the early expansion of halakhic guidance. The earlier distinctions between the Babylonian talmudic traditions and their equivalents in the Land of Israel also found later expression in the formulation of their respective laws and customs. As the Babylonian teachers and institutions between and around the Tigris and the Euphrates began to grow in stature and influence, so it became necessary for the Palestinian communities to put on record those instances (*ma'asim* in Hebrew) in which they differed. A body of literature thus came into being, perhaps early in the seventh century, the purpose of which was to clarify, recall and maintain these differences.<sup>26</sup> The Genizah has supplied additions and improvements to the questions and the homilies of the *She'iltot*,<sup>27</sup> as it has contributed better texts to later compilations of Jewish religious law from the geonic period, such as the *Halakhot Pesuqot* and the *Halakhot Gedolot*.<sup>28</sup> From many fragments preserved in the Genizah, it emerges that a certain Pirqoi ben Baboi, whose name is either of Persian origin or perhaps represents some sort of *nom de plume*, decided that the time had come to usher in a new halakhic era

<sup>25</sup> Among the Hebrew works of Shraga Abramson that are central to Genizah research are his *Essa Meshali* (Jerusalem, 1943); *Ba-Merkazim Uva-Tefuṣot* (Jerusalem, 1965); *R. Nissim Gaon Libelli Quinque* (Jerusalem, 1965); and *'Inyanot Be-Sifrut Ha-Ge'onim* (Jerusalem, 1974). See also the essays and bibliography in the memorial booklet produced by the Israel Academy, *Le-Zikhro shel Shraga Abramson* (Jerusalem, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> For the history of *halakhah* and of responsa literature, see L. Ginzberg, *Geonica* (2 vols; New York, 1909); S. B. Freehof, *Responsa Literature* (Philadelphia, 1955); J. Newman, *Halachic Sources from the Beginning to the Ninth Century* (Leiden, 1969); A. M. Schreiber, *Jewish Law and Decision-Making: A Study Through Time* (Philadelphia, 1979); E. E. Urbach, *The Halakhah: Its Sources and Development* (E. T., Jerusalem, 1986); M. Lewittes, *Principles and Development of Jewish Law* (New York, 1987); E. N. Dorff and A. Rosett, *A Living Tree: The Roots and Growth of Jewish Law* (Albany, 1988); and G. Libson, 'Halakhah and Law in the Period of the Geonim' in *An Introduction to the History and Sources of Jewish Law*, eds N. S. Hecht, B. S. Jackson, S. M. Passamaneck, D. Piattelli and A. M. Rabello (Oxford, 1996), pp. 197–250. On Samuel b. Ḥofni, see D. E. Sklare, *Samuel ben Ḥofni Gaon and his Cultural World: Texts and Studies* (Leiden, New York and Köln, 1996). See also M. Margalioṭ, *Hilkhot 'Ereṣ Yisra'el min Ha-Genizah*, ed. I. Ta-Shma (Jerusalem, 1973).

<sup>27</sup> R. Brody, *The Textual History of the She'iltot* (Hebrew; New York and Jerusalem, 1991); M. B. Lerner, 'The Geniza Fragments of *She'iltot De-Rav Aḥai* in the Munich Library' in *A Century of Geniza Research* (see n. 8 above), pp. 161–88.

<sup>28</sup> E. Hildesheimer (ed.), *Sefer Halakhot Gedolot* (Hebrew; 3 vols; Jerusalem, 1971, 1980 and 1988); N. Danzig, *Introduction to Halakhot Pesuqot* (Hebrew; New York, 1993).



and to put an end to any influence that the talmudists of the Holy Land might still have.<sup>29</sup>

The later Genizah material includes hundreds of fragments of the halakhic digest of the Babylonian Talmud that Isaac Alfasi prepared in the eleventh century. The first fully comprehensive code of Jewish law, the *Mishneh Torah* of Maimonides, completed in Cairo in 1180 is also, not surprisingly, well represented among the medieval fragments from the Ben Ezra synagogue.<sup>30</sup> Equally unsurprising is the fact that many of these fragments cover such themes as ritual slaughter, laws of inheritance and marital matters, all of which were of major concern to the daily lives of the community. Genizah wills reveal that some fathers tried to cut their families out of any inheritance, that women could bequeath property of their own and that there was considerable doubt about intentions expressed on what was wrongly thought to be a death-bed.<sup>31</sup> In the case of marriage documents, there are important remnants of Palestinian religious practice which demonstrate that in matters of personal status the emigrés from the Holy Land succeeded in maintaining their halakhic individuality for some time. Work on Karaite *ketubbot* has indicated how they differ palaeographically, linguistically and legally from their rabbinic counterparts and how they compare to Babylonian and Palestinian *halakhah*.<sup>32</sup> Via the Genizah, hundreds or maybe even thousands of authentic and original halakhic responses have now been recovered. Groups of decisions sent by the authority himself by way of guidance to a number of questioners have surfaced. They have retained the original formulation, with the prefaces and conclusions of the author, and they often provide us with his name. Many texts can now therefore be traced to their composers and many decisions that had been lost or forgotten have come to light. It should not be forgotten that there are also Genizah responsa that date from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, many of them emanating from Moses Maimonides himself or his son Abraham, occasionally in their own hands.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> See the useful summary and bibliographical details in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 13, cols 560–61.

<sup>30</sup> The project of the Israel Academy of Sciences to describe all the fragments from the Genizah in the talmudic and midrashic fields (directed by Professor Jacob Sussmann of the Hebrew University) has produced a wealth of information in this connection; see also the volumes by Brody and Danzig cited in n. 21 above.

<sup>31</sup> See J. Rivlin, *Inheritance and Wills in Jewish Law* (Hebrew; Ramat Gan, 1999).

<sup>32</sup> Two comprehensive studies of marriage documents, customs and lawsuits are M. A. Friedman's *Jewish Marriage in Palestine: A Cairo Geniza Study* (2 vols; Tel Aviv and New York, 1980), and his *Jewish Polygyny in the Middle Ages: New Documents from the Cairo Geniza* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1986). See also the discussion between Friedman and J. Olszowy-Schlanger in *A Century of Geniza Research* (see n. 8 above), pp. 127–57.

<sup>33</sup> See S. Assaf's Hebrew volumes *Gaonic Responsa* (Jerusalem, 1928); *Gaonica* (Jerusalem, 1933); *Responsa Geonica* (Jerusalem, 1942); *Texts and Studies* (Jerusalem, 1946); and *Teqfat Ha-Geo'nim Ve-Sifrutah* (Jerusalem, 1955). J. Blau's edition of *R. Moses b. Maimon: Responsa*, (4 vols; Jerusalem, 1957–61 and 1986) contains substantial Genizah material and other examples may be found in a number of articles by M. A. Friedman, as

It is now clear that monographs on halakhic themes were composed from at least as early as the tenth century. Sa'adya may have been one of the innovators in this field; he is certainly among those whose works on Jewish legal themes appear among the fragments. What has been recovered of his study of the laws of inheritance does not include any references to sources and may therefore be a remnant of an abbreviated format. As far as his practical guide to Jewish rules on testimonies and deeds (*Sefer Ha-Sheṭarot*) is concerned, fifty Genizah fragments (forty of them in Cambridge) have produced some 200 folios, amounting to over ninety per cent of the original work. Since the first scientific edition of Sa'adya's prayer-book was published, almost sixty years ago, many more fragments of the work have been located. Some of Sa'adya's successors in the Babylonian academies followed his example and produced their own halakhic monographs, Hai ben Sherira Gaon and Samuel ben Ḥofni of Sura demonstrating considerable creativity and exercising a major influence on subsequent halakhic developments.<sup>34</sup> Samuel ben Ḥofni, together with Sa'adya himself and the later scholar Tanḥum ben Joseph Yerushalmi, also wrote commentaries on the Hebrew Bible that demonstrated how one could remain faithful to the source, and at the same time provide rational and philosophical responses to the problems raised by the texts.<sup>35</sup>

In the field of rabbinic liturgy, what researchers have found particularly exciting has been the sheer novelty of so much of the material.<sup>36</sup> Firstly, there are novel or

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listed in the various volumes of the *Index of Articles on Jewish Studies* published annually in Jerusalem, beginning in 1969.

<sup>34</sup> See Brody's work cited in n. 24 above, and details of the work of M. Ben-Sasson and R. Brody on Sa'adya's *Sefer Ha-Sheṭarot* as discussed in *Genizah Fragments* 19/2 (April, 1990), p. 2. See also G. Libson, 'The Structure, Scope and Development of the Halakhic monographs of Rav Shmeu'el ben Ḥofni Gaon' in *A Century of Genizah Research* (see n. 8 above) pp. 189–239. On Sa'adya's prayer-book, see N. Wieder, *The Formation of Jewish Liturgy in the East and the West* (2 vols; Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1998), vol. 2, pp. 559–658; and R. Brody, 'Note on the Conclusion of Sa'adya Gaon's Prayerbook', *Tarbiz* 68 (1999), pp. 279–81.

<sup>35</sup> Some of the history of Jewish biblical exegesis is covered in S. C. Reif, 'Aspects of the Jewish Contribution to Biblical Interpretation' in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. J. Barton (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 143–59, and there are important essays in this field in *Genizah Research*, eds Blau and Reif (see n. 8 above).

<sup>36</sup> For recent work on the contribution of the Genizah to the scientific study of Jewish liturgy, see Wieder, *Formation* (see n. 34 above); S. C. Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer* (Cambridge, 1993), especially pp. 122–52, and 'The Genizah and Jewish Liturgy: Past Achievements and a Current Project', *Medieval Encounters* 5 (1999), pp. 29–45, as well as a more detailed Hebrew version of part of the latter paper in *From Qumran to Cairo: Studies in the History of Prayer*, ed. J. Tabory (Jerusalem, 1999), pp. 121–30. The edition of Sa'adya's prayer-book currently available is that of I. Davidson, S. Assaf and B. I. Joel, *Siddur R. Saadja Gaon* (Jerusalem, 1941; Jerusalem<sup>2</sup>, 1963) and the fullest study of the Palestinian rite to date is that of E. Fleischer, *Eretz-Israel Prayer and Prayer Rituals as Portrayed in the Geniza Documents* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1988). For a thorough guide to the bibliography on Jewish liturgical matters, see J. Tabory, *Jewish Prayer and the Yearly Cycle: A List of Articles*, supplement to *Kiryat Sefer* 64 (Jerusalem, 1992–93), and a substantial collection of *addenda* to that publication that appeared together with his facsimile edition of the Hanau