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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GENIZA FOR JEWISH HISTORY

ALEXANDER MARX

Fifty years ago, in December 1896, Doctor Schechter went to Egypt and transferred the greater part of the treasures accumulated for more than a thousand years in the Cairo Geniza, some one hundred thousand fragments according to his estimate, to Cambridge, England. To mark the semicentenary of this epoch-making event in the history of Jewish scholarship, the American Academy for Jewish Research in December 1946 had arranged a symposium on THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GENIZA FOR JEWISH LEARNING of which the present paper was a part.

Sometimes we speak of the "discovery" of the Geniza in 1896; this statement, however, is not meant literally since the Geniza was known long before that time. As early as 1753, Simon van Geldern at a visit in Cairo entered in his diary that he had searched in the Geniza.¹ It is doubtful whether some of the ancient fragments acquired by the Karaite Firkowitz in the first half of the last century and later sold to the Petersburg Library came from the Cairo treasure trove. Jacob Safir, in his book of travels,² tells us that he visited the Geniza in 1864, and he describes the difficulties he met with before being admitted. The search he made must have been very superficial, for he did not find anything of great value among the manuscripts he picked up. Greater discernment was shown by the dealers who, around 1890, began to abstract old fragments surreptitiously from their ancient resting place. From that year on the Bodleian Library³

¹ D. Kaufmann, *Aus Heinrich Heine's Ahnensaal*, Breslau, 1896, 123; חפשתי בנינוח.

² והיא (הגניזה) מלאה נובה שתי קומות וחצי: I, Lyck 1866, f. 21. He states:

³ A. Neubauer and A. E. Cowley, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library* II, Oxford 1906, p. III, XII ff.

began to purchase a number of fragments. On a visit to Egypt Dr. Cyrus Adler, in 1891, was able to acquire a small collection of such leaves, among which a considerable part of the *Sefer Hamitzvot* by Hefetz ben Yatzliah was later discovered.⁴ These were the first Geniza fragments that came to our country.

Shortly thereafter, Rabbi S. A. Wertheimer began with the publication of various Geniza texts.⁵ Elkan N. Adler was permitted by the authorities of the community during a visit in Cairo, in January 1896, to take with him a "sack full" of Geniza manuscripts,⁶ as much as he could put into an old Torah-mantle they gave him for the purpose. In May 1896, Mrss. Lewis and Gibson brought a collection of such fragments, acquired during a trip in the East, to Cambridge, and showed them to Dr. Schechter on May 13, 1896. He immediately identified one of these leaves to be part of the original Hebrew text of the Book of Ben Sira⁷ which had been lost since the time of Saadya.⁸ This led to the identification of further parts of the same manuscript in the Bodleian.⁹

The discovery caused a great stir, far beyond scholarly circles. Since it was known that these leaves came from the Cairo Ge-

⁴ B. Halper, *A Volume of the Book of Precepts by Hefetz B. Yatzliah*, Philadelphia 1915, 94; Id., *Descriptive Catalogue of Genizah Fragments in Philadelphia*, Philadelphia 1924, 9.

⁵ בחי מדרשות, Jerusalem 1893 ff.; גנוי ירושלים, ib. 1896 ff., etc. In 1892 he had already sold Geniza fragments to the Bodleian.

⁶ גנוי מצרים. *An Eleventh Century Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, Oxford 1897, 4 = *JQR* IX, 672 f.

⁷ The Jewish Theological Seminary has a photograph of the letter in which Dr. Schechter informed the ladies of the discovery. As they did not have a copy of the Apocrypha in their home he had asked for permission to take the leaf along for identification without telling of the expected discovery.

⁸ S. Schechter, "A Fragment of the Original Text of Ecclesiasticus", *The Expositor*, July 1896, 1-15.

⁹ A. E. Cowley and A. Neubauer, *The Original Hebrew of a Portion of Ecclesiasticus*, Oxford 1897. Dr. Schechter told me in 1898 that immediately upon the discovery of the fragment he wrote a postal card to Neubauer describing the leaf. A fortnight later he received a letter from Neubauer telling him that he had not been able to read his postal card and announcing that he had discovered nine leaves of Ben Sira. That ended the friendship between the two scholars.

niza it seemed probable that more might be found in the same place, an assumption which was shown to be well-founded.¹⁰ Thereupon Doctor Schechter was commissioned to search for further remnants of this important apocryphal book. He went to Cairo with a recommendation of Cambridge University and made such an impression on the communal authorities that he was permitted to transfer all the treasures he had salvaged to Cambridge.¹¹ Together with Charles Taylor who had financed his trip, he presented the fruit of his efforts to the Cambridge University Library, and here the systematic examination of the Taylor-Schechter Collection was started with amazing results.

Larger or smaller collections of Geniza fragments are dispersed now over various libraries. The most important ones besides those of Cambridge, Oxford and the British Museum are the E. N. Adler Geniza Collection in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, that of the Dropsie College,¹² the David Kaufmann Collection in the Budapest Academy, that of the Consistoire Israélite in Paris,¹³ the collections of the Archimandrite Antonin and of Harkavy in Leningrad, the Freer Collection in Ann Arbor, Michigan,¹⁴ and several others.

Besides the sensational discovery of the Hebrew original of Ben Sira there are among the outstanding texts unearthed in the Geniza fragments of Aquila's Greek translation of the Bible,¹⁵ of Origen's Hexapla,¹⁶ and of the Palestinian Syriac Bible,¹⁷ all palimpsests on top of which Hebrew texts had

¹⁰ S. Schechter and C. Taylor, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira, Portions of the Book Ecclesiasticus from Hebrew Manuscripts in the Cairo Genizah Collection presented to the University of Cambridge by the Editors*, Cambridge 1899.

¹¹ S. Schechter, *Studies in Judaism* II, Philadelphia 1908, 6.

¹² See note 4.

¹³ M. Schwab, *REJ* 62-64.

¹⁴ R. Gottheil and W. H. Worrell, *Fragments from the Cairo Genizah in the Freer Collection*, New York 1927.

¹⁵ F. C. Burkitt, *Fragments of the Books of Kings according to the Translation from a MS. formerly in the Geniza of Cairo*, Cambridge 1897.

¹⁶ C. Taylor, *Hebrew-Greek Cairo Genizah Palimpsests from the Taylor-Schechter Collection including a Fragment of the Twenty-Second Psalm according to Origen's Hexapla*, Cambridge, 1900.

¹⁷ G. H. Gwilliam, *The Palestinian Version of the Holy Scriptures. Five*

been written.¹⁸ We learned of a hitherto unknown ancient Palestinian vocalization,¹⁹ and through the publications of Professor Paul Kahle,²⁰ we are now familiar with remnants of over a hundred manuscripts of the old Babylonian Bible texts, some of them accompanied by the Targum, equally with Babylonian vocalization. We also now have fragments of continuous texts of the Palestinian Targum on the Pentateuch.²¹ A most surprising discovery was the documents of the unknown Damascus sect which called forth an extensive literature.²² However, in this paper I only wish to point out the most important discoveries in the field of Jewish history.

The period from the tenth to the twelfth century, which was among those shrouded in darkness in Jewish history, has become known to us in considerable detail in the course of the researches of the last half-century in the Geniza documents. Cairo occupied a strategic position as mediator between East and West. The correspondence of the scholars of Babylonia and Palestine with the communities of Northern Africa and Spain went through the

more Fragments recently acquired by the Bodleian Library, Oxford 1893. — G. H. Gwilliam, F. C. Burkitt and J. F. Stenning, *Biblical and Patristic Relics of the Palestinian Syriac Literature from MSS. in the Bodleian Library* . . . Oxford, 1896. — Agnes Smith Lewis and Margaret Dunlop Gibson, *Palestinian Syriac Texts from Palimpsest Fragments in the Taylor-Schechter Collection*, London 1900. A Georgian palimpsest was published by Kokovzoff, Petersburg, 1898.

¹⁸ In the upper writing of the first two plates of Taylor's Geniza palimpsests and the six plates of Burkitt's Aquila Dr. I. Davidson recognized fragments of Yannai's liturgical compositions; see his *Mahzor Yannai, A Liturgical Work of the VIIth Century*, New York 1919, V, XXXVIII f.

¹⁹ First in Shorthand Bibles (Neubauer, *JQR* VII, 361–364; Kahle, *ZATW*, 21, 273–317; Id., *Masoreten des Westens* I, Stuttgart 1927, 26 f., II, *ib.* 1930, 88–95) and other Bible fragments (*ib.* I 27–29; II, 66–87), then in liturgical fragments, (*ib.* I, 77 ff. and Hebrew part).

²⁰ *Masoreten des Ostens*, Leipzig 1913; *Die Hebräischen Bibelhandschriften aus Babylonien*, Giessen 1928.

²¹ Kahle, *Masoreten des Westens* II, Stuttgart 1930, 1–65.

²² S. Schechter, *Documents of Jewish Sectaries*, Cambridge 1910. I Fragment of a Zadokite Work. Cf. L. Rost, *Die Damascusschrift*, Berlin 1933, where the literature is recorded pp. 4–6. II contains Fragments of the Book of the Commandments by Anan.

Jewish center of the Egyptian capital. Its scholars, it seems, made copies of many of the important letters and documents that passed through their hands and these as well as the letters directed to Egypt finally found their way into the Geniza and thus, at least partly, reached posterity.

Our information about the most important spiritual centers of Judaism in this period, Babylonia and Palestine, have been enormously enriched by these discoveries. Let us begin with Babylonia.

It had been generally assumed that with the publication of the calendar and its rules by the patriarch Hillel II in 359,²³ the dependence of Babylonia on Palestine in respect to the calendar had come to an end. Now a letter of a Babylonian exilarch to Palestine proves that as late as 835 it was still customary to consult the Palestinian scholars about the fixation of the holidays.²⁴ Eighty years later, however, conditions changed and Babylonia made itself entirely independent of Palestine in the regulation of the calendar. The oldest members of the academies did not remember any longer the former custom of depending on Palestine. We owe most of this information to the work of that greatest of the Babylonian Geonim, Saadya ben Joseph Al-Fayyumi, whose life and personality appear in much sharper outline through the documents recovered from the Geniza. A comparison of the early articles of Rapoport²⁵ and Steinschneider²⁶ with the exhaustive biography by H. Malter²⁷ gives an idea of the wealth of new information gained through the Geniza.

We knew that in the year 922–3 the Jews of Babylonia and

²³ Abraham bar Hiyya, ספר העבור, London 1851, 97. But see J. Mann, *HUC Jubilee Volume*, 238.

²⁴ J. Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fatimid Caliphs I–II*, Oxford 1920–22 (Henceforth Mann, *Egypt*), II 41–42; H. J. Bornstein החקופה XIV–XV, 1922, 346–47.

²⁵ בכורי העתים IX, 1828, 20 ff.

²⁶ *Cat. Bodl.*, Berlin 1860, 2155–2224. The article had already been published in 1857 in the *Specimen Catalogi*.

²⁷ H. Malter, *Saadia Gaon, his Life and Works*, Philadelphia 1921; cf. A. Marx, "Rab Saadia Gaon" in L. Finkelstein, *Rab Saadia Gaon, Studies in his Honor*, New York 1944, 53–95.

Palestine observed the holidays on different days. We now know what lay behind this strange fact. Aaron ben Meir, the head of the reestablished Palestinian academy, of which more will be said later on, wanted to introduce a change in the rules of fixing the calendar and to reaffirm the ancient privilege of the Palestinian scholars to determine the dates of the holidays for the whole of Jewry. He found allies in Egypt and some even in Babylonia. But the authorities in the latter country strongly resisted his effort. They restored unity within the ranks of their academies and protested against Ben Meir's procedure. Saadya, who had just at that time arrived in the capital Bagdad, then the seat of the two academies of Sura and Pumbedita, immediately became the outstanding representative of the Babylonians. It was due to his energetic leadership and marked ability that Babylonia came out as victor in the conflict and that Ben Meir had to drop his scheme. Saadya collected the documents of the controversy in his *Sefer Ha-Moadim* and from its fragments which have been published²⁸ our new information is derived. Incidentally it may be mentioned that the upper half of half a dozen leaves were found in Cambridge; years later the lower halves were discovered in Oxford.²⁹ Division of leaves of the same manuscript between various libraries is not uncommon. Very often two leaves are published from one collection and later the leaves missing between them turn up elsewhere.

In recognition of his activity in behalf of Babylonian Jewry, Saadya was given a high position, that of *Resh Kallah* or *Alluf*, in one of the academies. A few years later, after fruitful literary activity, he was appointed Gaon of Sura by the exilarch David ben Zakkai. We knew from our historical sources that after a short time Saadya was involved in a bitter struggle with the exilarch. Again our information has been very much enriched and several fragments of Saadya's *Sefer Hagaluy*,³⁰ directed against the exilarch and his partisans, especially Aaron ibn Sarjado, have now become available and give evidence of the bitterness of the

²⁸ Collected by Bornstein מאיר וזן וכן סעדיה נאון וכן סעדיה נאון וכן סעדיה נאון, Warsaw 1904; cf. id. in התקופה XVI, 1922, 237-270.

²⁹ *JQR*, NS V, 546-557.

³⁰ See Malter, *l. c.*, 391-394.

fight and the sharp language in which the opponents attacked each other.

We had a bare notice of Saadya's valiant fight against the early rationalist and Bible critic Hiwi of Balkh, but lacked all details. Davidson's discovery of a considerable fragment of *Saadya's Polemic against Hiwi*³¹ gave us an insight into some of the aspects of this most interesting controversy.

Another controversial treatise of his which was hardly known by title³² was, according to a recent study,³³ probably directed against the Masorete Ben Asher.

Parts of controversial treatises against various Karaites and fragments of many other works of Saadya in different fields have been found. Most interesting is a list of his works compiled twelve years after his death by his two sons, Shearit and Dosa,³⁴ from which we learn that the great Gaon was born ten years earlier than had been thought heretofore, viz. in 882. We get the exact date of his birth and death.³⁵ Unfortunately, the list of his works is not complete, but it includes some titles that were unknown.

Our information about the following generations of Babylonian scholars also has become much fuller. We have a few letters — one of them an autograph with seal³⁶ — by the Gaon Nehemiah³⁷ who established himself as a counter-Gaon of Pumbadita against Saadya's bitter enemy, Aaron ben Joseph ibn Sarjado (943–959). He refers to his opponent who did not give him and his group a share in the income of the academy as a "robber" and brings all kinds of charges against him without,

³¹ New York, 1915.

³² The fragments are collected by B. M. Lewin, *אשא מסלי לרבינו סעדיה נאון*, ספר הפלחמות הראשון כנגד הקראים רב סעדיה נאון collection, Jerusalem 1943, reprinted from J. L. Fischman's collection רב סעדיה נאון.

³³ B. Klar in *תרביץ* XIV, 156–173; XV, 36–49.

³⁴ Mann, *JQR*, NS, XI, 424–425.

³⁵ He was born in the week of June 27 to July 5, 882 — not 892 — and died on May 16, 942.

³⁶ B. M. Lewin, *אגרת רב שרירא נאון*, Haifa 1921, 133–34.

³⁷ Cowley, *JQR* XIX, 105–6; Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature* I, Cincinnati 1931, (henceforth Mann, *Texts*) 78–83; cf. *ib.* 75–78.

however, mentioning his name. The same designation is again applied to this Gaon in a remarkable letter dated 953 whose writer is still unknown, but which is directed, it seems, to the great Spanish statesman Ḥasdai ibn Shaprut.³⁸ This document gives us more valuable information about the conditions prevailing in the academies, about their loss of income through the civil wars and the troubles caused by the internal dissensions. These dissensions continued after the death of the Gaon Aaron, when Nehemiah claimed to have been generally recognized as Gaon. We know that Sherira who had been Ab-Bet-Din under Aaron did not join the academy of Nehemiah³⁹ but kept up one of his own. Through a curious fragment of a letter published by Asaf⁴⁰ we learn that some *modus vivendi* was finally established. Sherira once claimed that a case which had come to the Gaon should be turned over to his jurisdiction, probably as Ab-Bet-Din. Nehemiah refused the request but permitted a member of Sherira's school to inspect the documents pertaining to the litigation. Subsequently Sherira sent him a responsum of his grandfather to a similar question, which Nehemiah accepted as the basis for his decision. It seems that Nehemiah did not appoint a new Ab-Bet-Din after the death of his brother Ḥofni, in 961, and thus *de facto* acknowledged Sherira in this position in spite of his excommunication and the abuse he had heaped on him previously.

When Sherira (967–1004) succeeded Nehemiah as Gaon, the members of the latter's family probably kept up an academy of their own and did not recognize his leadership. Several letters by Sherira show that he had to contend with great difficulties in the beginning of his Gaonate, and only as time went on, gained

³⁸ Cowley, *JQR*, XVIII, 401–3; cf. Marx, *ib.* 768–69.

³⁹ In his Epistle (note 36) p. 121 he states that he and his group did not join Nehemiah but that he refused to become counter-Gaon. Nehemiah in his letters, written after Aaron's death, attacks him and an otherwise unknown Naḥshon in a most disgraceful way and tells his correspondents that he had excommunicated both.

⁴⁰ עיניים שונים לחקר חקופה, Jerusalem 1933, 99–100; cf. Mann, *הגאונים*, Jerusalem 1935, 28–29 note 91. Nehemiah does not mention Sherira's name, but refers to him as the son of the late head of the academy.

the commanding position owing to his scholarship and his personality.

All the letters we just discussed were directed to former supporters of the academies in foreign lands. These men were evidently disgusted with the bickerings among the leaders of the academy and their disgraceful recriminations, and did not lend their ears to the pitiful pleas of the contending parties. Therefore we meet with repeated complaints by the writers that despite the many letters they had directed to their correspondents these had not responded and their efforts had borne no fruits. It was a painful surprise to us to find these pathetic pleas of the Babylonian "Excellencies" to the rich leaders of distant communities.

When Sherira, in 985, appointed his son Hai as Ab-Bet-Din and thus as his presumptive successor, the members of the other Geonic families who had counted on succeeding him saw their hope vanish. Thereupon they decided to reopen the Sura academy which had been closed about half a century earlier, shortly after Saadya's death. Heretofore our histories stated that it was Samuel ben Ḥofni, nephew of the Gaon Nehemiah, who reopened the academy and presided over it until 1034. Through a list of the dates of death of the leading persons in both academies (the right half of which, with the dates, is missing)⁴¹ we learn that six Geonim succeeded each other in the leadership of the Sura academy during its last four decades. It was opened by an otherwise unknown Tzemaḥ Tzedek, who was succeeded by Samuel ben Ḥofni. This Gaon died in 1013, over thirty years earlier than had been previously accepted. His successors were Saadya's aged son Dosa (1013–1017), Samuel ben Ḥofni's son Israel (1017–1034) and two others. From one of Samuel ben Ḥofni letters⁴² it appears that the new academy had created a large number of titled positions — among them "sons of Geonim" — evidently to attract many prominent members of the Pumbedita academy to join it.

There was originally a continuous struggle between Sherira and the heads of the new academy. Finally, as we are told in a let-

⁴¹ Mann, *JQR*, NS, XI, 411–412.

⁴² Cowley *JQR* XVIII 404; cf. his son Israel's letter, Mann, *Texts*, 168–169.

ter of Samuel ben Ḥofni,⁴³ peace was established and an arrangement was made that all donations sent to the academies without special designation of the recipient, should be equally divided between both schools. The agreement, reached two years before Sherira's death,⁴⁴ was strengthened by a political marriage between Sherira's son Hai and Samuel ben Ḥofni's daughter. In spite of this relationship the rivalry between the heads of the two academies seems to have continued.⁴⁵

Hai Gaon (1004–1038), the last head of the school of Pumbedita and one of the greatest and most productive of the Geonim, from whose pen we have more responsa than from any other Gaon, evidently also carried on a very extensive non-halakic correspondence. His responsa contain many facts of interest to the historian, but the little that we have of his private letters gives us a deeper insight into his colorful personality and his time. Unfortunately, just as is the case with his predecessors and contemporaries, only few of his letters have reached us.⁴⁶ Even so, they provide very valuable information. He complains in a letter to Jacob bar Nissim of Kairuan⁴⁷ that a former corre-

⁴³ Lewin, *Geni* II, Haifa, 1923, 20–21.

⁴⁴ Mann, *Texts*, 148 note 3, considers my correction טרם אסיפתו בשנים into טרם יאסף ב' untenable, because in another letter, *ib.* 158, Samuel writes: טרם יאסף ב' שנים מר רב שרירא גאון בומן מרובה. I do not think this general expression precludes the possibility that the arrangement had been made two years before Sherira's death. That might be considered a long time.

⁴⁵ In the aforementioned letter Samuel ben Ḥofni urges his correspondent to send the monies to the academies in general and not to any prominent individual (evidently he has his son-in-law, Hai, in mind). He emphatically states that he is the greatest and oldest member of the academies and none is his superior in age and learning. He has heard that the recently deceased head (of the Kairuan school, R. Jacob bar Nissim) had sent the sum of 150 דרכמונים for somebody else (בשם וולחנו, again probably Hai). Such a large amount was evidently meant for the scholars of the academies not for an individual, he assumes. He therefore asks for an investigation.

Hai's reference to his father-in-law in חשובה הגאונים, Lyck 1864, no. 99 shows scant respect for the latter.

⁴⁶ All the Geonic letters we know have been discussed by Mann, *Texts* 63–195 where many new ones are published. Two more Geonic letters have been published since by Asaf, חרביץ XI, 146–159.

⁴⁷ Mann, *Texts*, 119–122.

spondent of his, Bahlul bar Joseph, had ceased writing to him, i. e. supporting him and his school, and had transferred his allegiance to the Palestinian academy. Of more interest is Hai's request that his correspondent should induce the great scholar R. Hushiel, of whose presence in Kairuan he had heard, to enter into correspondence with him. He also asks him to bring pressure to bear⁴⁸ on R. Ḥanok (ben Moshe at Cordova) to answer the letters directed to him by his father, Sherira, who accordingly was still alive in Ellul 1006, the date of our letter. (He died a month later). Here we see the effort to uphold the authority of the Babylonian center over the new schools arising in the West, an effort which does not seem to have been successful, partly probably because of political conditions.

In another letter,⁴⁹ six months later, in Adar 1007, Hai states that he had learned of the death of his old friend, R. Jacob bar Nissim ben Shahin, whose loss he considers a great calamity. He had pronounced eulogies on the deceased in the academy as well as in the synagogue. We thus get the approximate date of the death of this prominent scholar whose questions had caused Sherira to write his invaluable epistle on the composition of Mishna and Talmud and the chronology of the Amoraim and Geonim.

One of Hai's letters⁵⁰ was written to a prominent person in Fostat a few months before his death, in 1038. He expresses deep concern over the quarrels which divided that community. The letter shows that at the age of 99 years the great scholar was still in full possession of his powers.

It is not only this personal correspondence which has greatly added to our knowledge of Babylonian Jewry. Occasionally even the legal responsa found in the Geniza contain direct historical data. It was known e. g. that at the time of the Muhammedan conquest of Persia the Caliph Omar presented a Persian princess to the famous political head of Babylonian Jewry, the exilarch Bostanai, and that the legitimacy of the offspring of this union

⁴⁸ חבענו מן האלוף שישים את כוונתו לנצח את מר רב חנוך הרב נט רחם על תשובות האגרות
 לעד אשר נכתבו אליו מלפני נורנו נאון הגדול אבינו יחי לעד.

⁴⁹ Mann, *Texts*, 123-126.

⁵⁰ B. Chapiro, *REJ* 82, 1926, 327-328.

was contested and became the subject of litigation before a high Jewish court. Two new responsa⁵¹ contain the correct Persian names of the princess and her sons as well as of their stepbrothers who contested their legitimacy. It was a case that came up again and again, not only as a precedent in cases of a union with a female slave who had not received formal manumission, but also in respect to the status of the descendants of Bostanai. Some of these played a leading and influential part in the Karaite community of Jerusalem. A member of the Palestinian academy, Nathan ben Abraham,⁵² at that time counter-Gaon in opposition to Solomon ben Judah, wrote an account⁵³ of the well-known Bostanai story which was composed — or copied — in 1041:⁵⁴ He claimed that Bostanai had no children from another wife and therefore all his descendants were affected with the blemish of being descended from a slave. He mentioned especially Anan, the founder of Karaism, the sons of Boaz, Karaite princes in Palestine, and the sons of Zakkai, Babylonian exilarchs in the time of Saadya.

Thus the Geniza has enabled us to supplement the bare chronological frame of the last two centuries of the Gaonate contained in Sherira's epistle, and has acquainted us with the personalities of several of these leaders who had heretofore figured as mere names in our history.

The last text we discussed, a work of a Palestinian Gaon, leads us to the mother-country, for which the discoveries of the last fifty years are even more startling. We hardly knew of the

⁵¹ Schechter, *Saadyana*, Cambridge 1903, 76–77, 77–78, Tykocinski in דביר, I, 146 f.; B. M. Lewin, תשובות הרמב"ם VII, יבמות, Jerusalem 1936, 39–41, § 93–94; Asaf, תשובות הרמב"ם, Jerusalem 1942, 61, no. 57. — For historical information in another responsum see note 40.

⁵² According to Mann, *Texts*, 333. About Nathan ben Abraham, we have to speak later.

⁵³ G. Margoliouth, *JQR*, XIV, 303; E. J. Wormann, *JQR*, XX, 212–215; Tykocinski, *l. c.*, 152–153; A. Marx, *Livre d' Hommage . . . Poznanski*, Warsaw, 1927, 79–80.

⁵⁴ See Mann, *l. c.*, 333, note 17. Tykocinski who did not know the dated colophon placed the account in the thirteenth century. His defense of his position, *MGWJ* 78, 369, by denying that the colophon belongs to the Bostana i

existence of Palestinian academies during the Geonic period. Now we have at least for several centuries a record of the names of the Palestinian Geonim⁵⁵ who mostly belonged either to the Davidic family or to two families of Kohanim. The earliest of the Davidids known, — he claimed descent from the Palestinian patriarchs — Saadya's contemporary Aaron ben Meir, has already been discussed.

We still know little beyond the mere names of the predecessors of Solomon ben Judah of Fez⁵⁶ (1025–1051) who did not belong to any of the Geonic families. Of this Palestinian Gaon more than fifty letters have come down to us besides a fragment of a single responsum.⁵⁷ The Gaon, we learn from his letters, was hard pressed for funds which were mostly raised from pilgrims visiting the Holy City. If only few came in some year the financial conditions became critical.⁵⁸ Solomon, in spite of his peaceful disposition, became involved in the bitter quarrels between Rabbanites and Karaites who, it appears, had more outstanding scholars in their midst than the former. Through the influence of the Bagdad authorities, the Rabbanites in the time of Ben Meir reached ascendancy and it became customary to pronounce a *Ḥerem* against the sectarians on Hoshana Rabba on Mount Olivet for eating meat with milk.⁵⁹

Sometimes divisions also occurred among the Rabbanites themselves. When an Edict of Tolerance by the Caliph, in 1024, forbade excommunication and granted the Karaites freedom from interference by their opponents, the Gaon Solomon ben Juda was ready to comply but wanted to omit the customary procession on Hoshana Rabba altogether in order not to create

account fails to take into consideration that the double leaf of the British Museum fills exactly the gap in the double leaf of the Adler collection which has the date.

⁵⁵ See e. g. the list in Mann, *Egypt* I, 71 (to which a name is added, II 342) and 197. Next to the Gaon the Palestinian academies had an *Ab* and eight dignitaries designated as Third, Fourth etc.

⁵⁶ See about him Mann, *Egypt* I, 75–152; II, 75 ff.; *HUCA* III, 271–273; *Texts*, 310–322. All previous publications are discussed by Mann.

⁵⁷ Asaf, מספרות הגאונים, 97.

⁵⁸ Cowley, *JQR*, XIX, 108 = Wertheimer, גוי ירושלים II f. 17.

⁵⁹ Mann, *Texts* II, Philadelphia 1935, 62.

a precedent. Fanatical Rabbanites, however, objected and insisted that the procession take place and the usual excommunications be pronounced, an act which had serious consequences for the members of the academy who volunteered to carry out the will of the fanatics.⁶⁰

Subsequently there also developed an internal fight in the academy. The Ab-Bet-Din Abraham bar Nathan, staying in Ramle, made himself counter-Gaon in 1039, and he and Solomon ben Judah pronounced excommunications against each other. The government, however, interfered and restored the previous status.⁶¹

In Solomon's letters we hear about the relationship of the Palestinian school to Babylonia and the rivalry between the two centers. For some time these relations were very friendly and Solomon sent his own son Yaḥya to Bagdad to study under Hai Gaon. But when a prominent adherent of the Palestinian school in Egypt changed the allegiance of his community to that of Babylonia,⁶² Solomon was deeply mortified.⁶³ He complained that the Babylonian Geonim tried to increase their influence everywhere and aimed to extend their power over the whole Jewish world, and all that, he adds, to increase their income.⁶⁴ The Palestinian school, as far as we can judge, received most of its support from Egypt and some from Kairuan. How much Italy contributed we cannot tell, since no documents concerning this country and its gifts to the academy were found in the Geniza. The Aḥimaatz Chronicle gives evidence of regular pilgrimages to Jerusalem and gifts to the Palestinian scholars.

Upon the death of the Gaon Solomon ben Judah, the son of his predecessor, Joseph Ha-Cohen, expected to succeed him, but a member of the Davidic family who had immigrated from Babylonia, Daniel ben Azarya, took over the leadership of the academy

⁶⁰ Mann, *Texts* I, 310–11; II, 62–63.

⁶¹ Mann, *Texts*, 323–37, gives a full account of the struggle and the letters and documents concerning it which have gradually come to light.

⁶² Solomon calls it ישיבה חוץ in opposition to his own צבי; Mann, *Egypt*, II, 126. He refers to Hai as נאון הנולה, *ib.* 128 no. 41.

⁶³ Mann, *Egypt*, 115–117.

⁶⁴ Mann, *Egypt* II, 126.

by force (1051–1062).⁶⁵ A much superior scholar,⁶⁶ he was supported by the Karaites, and his authority was recognized by the Jews of Egypt. He persecuted Joseph Ha-Cohen who died after a few years, in December 1053. The latter's brother, his Ab-Bet-Din Elijah Ha-Cohen, however, finally made his peace with Daniel, retaining his position and succeeding as Gaon after Daniel's death (1062–1083).

It is noteworthy that a responsum of Elijah and his son Ebyatar to the Mayence community which is often quoted by German codifiers, has been preserved in the Geniza⁶⁷ though in general Palestinian letters going to Europe did not come to Cairo and therefore are not represented in the Geniza.

After the Seljuk conquest of Jerusalem Elijah transferred the Academy to Tyre. There his son and successor, Ebyatar, had to suffer from the aggression and persecution of David, the son of the aforementioned Gaon Daniel Ben Azaryah.⁶⁸ David is pictured in our sources in a most unfavorable light, but our main source, an account of the events by the Gaon Ebyatar, naturally is one-sided and prejudiced. Incidentally, Dr. Schechter's discovery and publication of this Megillat Ebyatar gave us the first definite information on the existence of a Palestinian Gaonate.^{68a} David Ben Daniel, who made himself *Resh Galuta*

⁶⁵ *Megillat Ebyatar* p. 2, *Saadyana* 88. Mann, *Egypt*, 178–84 discusses the controversy of Daniel with Joseph ha-Cohen and his activity with the help of new material published, *Egypt* II, 215 ff.

⁶⁶ He was the only Palestinian Gaon of whom we know that he solicited legal questions from his correspondents: ויטריחו עלינו בשאלות; see Mann, *Egypt* II, 216 note 23. Cf. Asaf, חשוכות הגאונים, 1942, 125–127; מספרות הגאונים, 90 note 5.

⁶⁷ Marmorstein, *REJ* 73, 1921, 88–92; Mann, *Egypt* II 223 f. — In the twelfth century R. Baruk ben Isaac sent a letter to his relative, R. Baruk ben Samuel, from Aleppo to Italy via Egypt; see J. N. Epstein, *Tarbiz* XII, 52.

⁶⁸ Mann, *Egypt* 187–192. What he says of David's scholarship, 190 f., however, refers to the Babylonian exilarch Daniel b. Hisdai, 1161; see Mann, *Texts* I, 230 f.

^{68a} *Saadyana*, 86–104. The first appraisal of the important new data of this document was made in W. Bacher's paper with the significant title: "Ein neuerschlossenes Capitel der jüdischen Geschichte. Das Gaonat in Palästina und das Exilarchat in Aegypten," *JQR* XV, 79–96.

in Egypt, married a Karaite lady of prominent family in 1082 after he had divorced his first wife. *The Ketuba*,⁶⁹ which has been preserved, stipulated that the husband must not interfere with his wife's observance of Karaite customs. Among the witnesses there appears a dignitary of the Palestinian academy.⁷⁰

When Tyre came under Egyptian sway after the conquest of the Palestinian coast, in 1089, David tried to assume authority over the academy,⁷¹ and a bitter struggle ensued which was terminated when David was deposed in 1094. The conquest of Palestine and the Phœnician coast by the crusaders probably brought about the destruction of the school in the early years of the following century. Some members of the Palestinian school during the struggle with David founded an academy in Ḥadrak which was later transferred to Fostat, and considered these a continuation of the Jerusalem academy.⁷² It is not possible in the scope of this brief paper to go into further details. I may only mention in passing a poem by a member of the Geonic family, Solomon ben Joseph Ha-Cohen, in honor of the Egyptian Nagid Juda, in which he tells us of the Turkoman defeat before Cairo in 1077.⁷³

A very unusual story revealed by the Geniza is that of the convert Obadiah.⁷⁴ In the colophon at the end of a Prayer Book written by his hand, he states: "Obadiah the proselyte, the Norman, who joined the Covenant of the God of Israel in the

⁶⁹ Schechter, *JQR* XIII, 220-221. This was David's second marriage. According to *Megillat Ebyatar* he had divorced his first wife, the daughter of his benefactor.

⁷⁰ Mann, *Egypt*, 182 note 2.

⁷¹ Mann, *Egypt*, 189 f. The representative of David who tried to enforce his rule is called "Abiram ben Datan;" his real name was probably Abraham ben Natan.

⁷² Mann, *Egypt*, 193, 196 and 220 f. The heads of these schools assumed the title ראש ישיבה נאון יעקב, born by the Palestinian Geonim.

⁷³ J. H. Greenstone, "The Turkoman Defeat" *AJS* XXII, 144-75; cf. Mann, *Egypt*, 208. He is the same man who signed the Ketuba of David b. Daniel; see note 70.

⁷⁴ Mann, *REJ* 89, 245-59.

month of Ellul, in the year 1102.”⁷⁵ He had evidently been one of the crusaders from Normandy who had left his home to free the holy places of Christendom from Moslem rule. We do not know and cannot even guess what influences caused him to change the whole course of his life. In any event, three years after the conquest of Jerusalem by the crusaders (1099), he embraced Judaism in Aleppo and became a prominent member of the Jewish community of that city. In a letter of recommendation for Obadiah when he left that city, its Rabbi, Baruk ben Isaac,⁷⁶ mentions that he came from a rich and prominent family in Normandy. Three, unfortunately not consecutive, leaves of a Megillah on Messianic movements from his pen have been preserved. They tell us of a false Messiah, curiously a Karaite, Solomon ha-Kohen, who had arisen in Northern Palestine in 1021, with whom Obadiah had a discussion denying his Messianic pretensions. The other leaves speak of the movement of David Alroi, or Menahem ben Solomon ben Duji,^{76a} as he calls him, at the time of the second crusade, and of a subsequent movement about which we have no other sources.

Egyptian Jewry, particularly the rich and influential community of the capital, Fostat (Cairo), played an important part in our period as supporters of the great academies of Babylonia and Palestine. It was through their representatives in Fostat that the dignitaries of the schools were in communication with the Jewries further west. The Cairo Geniza naturally contains a wealth of material on the Jews of Egypt and their leaders. As we knew from Benjamin of Tudela's account of his travels, there existed Babylonian and Palestinian congregations in Fostat, which followed the rites and customs of the respective countries. The Palestinian synagogue, e. g. followed the trien-

⁷⁵ עובדיה הגר הנרמנדס אשר בא בברית אלהי ישראל בירח אלול שנת אחי"ג לשטרות הוא כ"ד ב"ד, Mann, *l. c.*, 246.

⁷⁶ Wertheimer, גני ירושלם II, 1901, 16-17; Mann, *l. c.* 247-249 prints the second half of the letter, omitted by Wertheimer.

^{76a} Samuel ibn Abbas calls him Menahem ben Sulaiman ibn al-Ruhi; see M. Wiener, *Emek habacha von R. Joseph ha Cohen*, Leipzig, 1858, Appendix IV p. כ"ב; cf. Schreiner, *MGWJ* 42, 1898, 410.

nial cycle in the reading of the Torah. The Geniza brought us inventories of the books and other possessions of these synagogues from the eleventh and twelfth centuries.⁷⁷ Worman has collected a considerable number of facts about the Jewish quarters of Fostat⁷⁸ to which much could be added.

Two Egyptian Megillot tell us of significant events in the history of the times. One of them is dated 1012⁷⁹ and deals with the imprisonment of twenty-three Egyptian Jews after the funeral of the great scholar and leader, R. Shemaryah. Grave danger threatened the community, but fortunately it passed without evil consequences and the Megillah commemorates the happy turns of events. The *Megillah Zutta*⁸⁰ reports the evil deeds of an unworthy Nagid who usurped power and oppressed the people. He was finally deposed owing to the efforts of Maimonides and other leaders of the community.

Ephraim ben Shemaryah, appointed Ḥaber by the Palestinian academy, the head of the Palestinian community of Fostat, was one of the mainstays of the Palestinian Gaon, Solomon ben Judah. Several letters of the Gaon to Ephraim have been published⁸¹ and considerable information on him and other leaders of the Egyptian communities has become available. These communities also, we learn, were torn by internal dissensions. Most of their members were not persons of the same caliber as the heads of the mother countries; it would lead us too far to follow their activities. We also receive much new information about the lay-heads of Egyptian Jewry, the Negidim,⁸² one of whom,

⁷⁷ For the Palestinian synagogue (כניסה אלשאטיין) from 1186 in Gottheil, "Tit-Bits from the Genizah" in *Israel Abrahams Memorial Volume*, no. 4 p. 160 f.; for the Babylonian synagogue (כניסה אלעראקין) from 1080 in Worman, *JQR* XX 458 f.; from 1181 in Gottheil, *l. c.* no. 5 p. 164 f.

⁷⁸ "Notes on the Jews in Fostat," *JQR*, XVIII, 1-39.

⁷⁹ Mann, *Egypt*, II, 31-37; cf. I, 30-33.

⁸⁰ Various fragments were published in *JQR* and in Wertheimer's נגוני ירושלים, I, 37-43. The complete text ed. D. Kahana in *השלח* XV, 78-84; cf. Mann, *Egypt*, 234-236.

⁸¹ Poznanski, *REJ* 48, 145-75; Cowley, *JQR* XIX, 107 f., 250-56; cf. Mann, *Egypt*, passim; see index.

⁸² Mann, *Egypt*, 251-62. On the individual Negidim *ib. passim*.

Samuel ben Ḥananya, became famous through his friendship with Judah Halevi.

The greatest personage in the history of Egyptian Jewry, Moses Maimonides, is represented by numerous autographs,⁸³ more than we have of any other medieval Jewish scholar. We have leaves of the first drafts of his great works, the commentary to the Mishna, the Code⁸⁴, and the Guide of the Perplexed, as well as of numerous responsa, the latter mostly jotted down at the bottom of the letters containing the original questions directed to him. His secretary would copy them adding the complimentary addresses to the correspondents customary at the time. We also have some responsa of his son Abraham and a few leaves of the latter's commentary to his father's code⁸⁵ in autograph which are still unpublished. Later descendants of the Cairo sage are also represented in the Geniza.

Another leading community about which our information has become much richer is that of Kairuan, near Tunis, which for a few centuries played a great part in Jewish history. Poznanski has collected no less than forty-five names of prominent persons from that city⁸⁶ only half of whom were known before. Most interesting and important is an autograph letter written in that city by

⁸³ M. Lutzki, *התקופה וכתב משה*, 30–31, New York 1946, 682–86 enumerates all the autographs discovered up to the present.

⁸⁴ Lutzki in Vol. 5 of Schulsinger's forthcoming edition of the Mishne Torah publishes the twelve leaves of the code which he discovered in the Bodleian and the Seminary Library with full notes. They throw interesting light on Maimonides' method in composing his great work.

⁸⁵ Ms. Adler 2379 (8 leaves) and 2709 (2 ll.). The leaves published by B. Chapira, *REJ* 99, 13–16 evidently belong to the same Ms. In one place the author writes in the text *ר' יוסף המערבי*, then, feeling that his father's famous pupil deserved a more complimentary reference, he wrote *רבנו* over the *ר'*, crossed out *המערבי* and wrote on the margin *אוסף החכמות ואוצר התבונות איש השכל* *גר המערבי זצ"ל*. Such a correction could only be made by the author himself and proves that we have here his autograph. Abraham speaks of this commentary of his in a letter in 1231 as unfinished, Letterbode III, 53; Rosenblatt, *The High Ways of Perfection of Abraham Maimonides*, New York 1927, 125. I hope to publish this fragment.

⁸⁶ Poznanski, *אנשי קירואן* in *Harkavy Festschrift*; cf. Marx, *ZfHB* XIII, 73 f.; *JQR*, NS I 437–40.

the famous Rabbenu Ḥushiel,⁸⁷ one of the so-called “Four Captives.” Our source for the story of these “captives” is Abraham ibn Daud,⁸⁸ the Spanish historian many of whose statements which had formerly been accepted without question have been shown to be incorrect by the discoveries of the Geniza. He records that four great scholars had been sent out towards the end of the Geonic period by the Babylonian academies to collect funds for their support. They were captured by pirates and sold at Cairo, Kairuan and Cordova where they were redeemed by the Jews of the three cities. These scholars then established schools, spread learning and created new centers of Judaism in the West. Among these captives, ibn Daud enumerates our Ḥushiel, and Shemaryah who, we now know, had been a native Egyptian who had succeeded his father Elḥanan in a high position, had founded a school and was renowned as a preacher.^{88a} In his letter Ḥushiel writes to Shemaryah that he had left a Christian country, undoubtedly Italy, in order to visit him in Egypt. He had remained for a while in Kairuan, waiting for the arrival of his son Elḥanan. When he was ready to proceed on his trip, the Kairuan community would not let him depart but insisted on retaining him in their midst as their spiritual leader. This letter destroys the beautiful legend as far as Ḥushiel and Shemaryah are concerned; neither of them could have been an emissary of the Babylonian academies. On the contrary, we have seen before that Hai Gaon made an unsuccessful attempt to get into correspondence with Rabbenu Ḥushiel who probably brought from Italy to Kairuan independent traditions for the interpretation of the Talmud, which ultimately went back to Palestine and perhaps introduced the study of the Yerushalmi. On the other hand, the much more circumstantial account of the Spanish historian may be true in reference to the coming of R. Moshe and his son Ḥanok to Cordova, Spain,⁸⁹ where the former

⁸⁷ Schechter, *JQR* XI, 647–50.

⁸⁸ Ibn Daud, הַקְּבִלָּה 'ס in A. Neubauer, *Medieval Jewish Chronicles* I, 67 f.

^{88a} Mann, *Egypt*, 26 ff.

⁸⁹ Meiri speaks only of these as Babylonian scholars captured and carried away. The capture took place in 955; cf. Marx, *ZfHB* XIII, 74. — It is curious that R. Ḥanok did not want to answer Sherira's letters; see note 48.

founded a great school which made Spain independent of Babylonia.

Spain is more directly represented in the Geniza by some letters to the great statesman at the court of Cordova, Ḥasdai ibn Shaprut. I have mentioned the letter written to him from the Babylonian academies in 953;⁹⁰ in all likelihood he also was the recipient of the new Khazar Letter discovered by Doctor Schechter.⁹¹ Letters from Bari, Southern Italy,⁹² and from France⁹³ give evidence of his interest in the Jewries of these countries. A letter to one of the powerful ladies at the court of Byzantium⁹⁴ pleads for tolerance for the Jews under Byzantine rule and asks that they should be treated as well as the Christians were treated under his influence in his own country.

As has been mentioned repeatedly, large numbers of documents have come down to us in the Geniza which are of the greatest interests from various aspects. We learn from them of the existence of Jewish communities in different places of Palestine,⁹⁵ Egypt and elsewhere, of the members of various courts who signed court decisions and notarized documents, as well as of many other valuable facts.

The formularies of Saadya⁹⁶ and Hai Gaon⁹⁷ are important for the development of the official form of documents, as are the actual documents which show their practical application. The oldest document found so far is dated as early as 750.⁹⁸ A few from the beginning of the following century are found in the Seminary Library. Ten letters of divorce from the eleventh and

⁹⁰ See note 38.

⁹¹ *JQR*, NS III, 204–11.

⁹² Mann, *Texts* I, 23–27.

⁹³ *Ib.* 27–30 with information of the indignities the Jews of Toulouse had to undergo annually.

⁹⁴ *Ib.* 21–23.

⁹⁵ See e. g. ספר הישוב II.

⁹⁶ Ed. Asaf in Fishman's נאון סעדיה, Jerusalem, 1943, 65–97, 674–77.

⁹⁷ ספר השטרות לרב האי נאון ed. Asaf, Jerusalem 1930 as חשלום התרביץ I.

⁹⁸ Ed. I. Abrahams, *JQR* XVII, 428.

twelfth centuries have been published [in L. Blau's book on divorce.⁹⁹ So far only a limited number of different kinds of documents have been made accessible.¹⁰⁰ We may expect many new data from further publications in this field.

About thirty booklists have been printed¹⁰¹ which record titles of many lost books of the early period and are of great value for literary history. Incidentally, they throw some light on private libraries, their extent and contents in those days.¹⁰² Some collections were dispersed by auction and we get records of prices¹⁰³ and even, in some instances, of the names of buyers.¹⁰⁴

This brief sketch cannot do full justice to so vast a subject and certainly cannot try to exhaust the results of half a century's research in the Cairo treasure trove in respect to Jewish history. It only aims to give an idea of the increase in the knowledge of our past for a few centuries for which our information had been particularly scanty and inadequate.

⁹⁹ *Die Jüdische Ehescheidung* II, Budapest 1912, 96–102; cf. 3. Blau also published there, 102 f., a deed of manumission of a slave; another in *JQR*, NS, I, 434.

¹⁰⁰ See e. g. Asaf, *מקורות ומחקרים בחולדות ישראל*, Jerusalem 1946, where a number of letters and documents from the Geniza are published. Among them we find a few Yiddish letters of a mother to her son. These, however, date from a later period than that with which this paper is concerned.

¹⁰¹ They are recorded in *קריית ספר* XVIII, 273 note 2 in the latest such publication by Asaf.

¹⁰² E. g. the library of Abraham he-Hasid, a member of Maimonides' court, whose books were sold at auction under the supervision of Abraham, Maimonides' son, in 1023 on two subsequent Tuesdays; on the first his Jewish books, on the second his secular library, medical and scientific. The list was edited by Worman, *JQR* XX, 460–463; cf. Poznanski, *ZfHB* XII, 112–14. The list of the library of another physician, Abu'l-Izz, ed. Bacher, *REJ* 40, 56 f.; cf. Poznanski, *ib.* 264–67.

¹⁰³ Prices are indicated in a few lists, e. g. Poznanski, *ZfHB* XII, 114 f., Gottheil, *l. c.* (note 77), 150 f., 155–57, a list of which Asaf published the conclusion in *קריית ספר* XVIII, 280.

¹⁰⁴ The two lists mentioned in note 102 both record the prices brought by each item as well as the names of the buyers. Some names of buyers appear in both lists which evidently come from the same period.