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THE DOCUMENTS OF THE CAIRO GENIZA AS A SOURCE
FOR MEDITERRANEAN SOCIAL HISTORY *

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THE STUDENTS of the history of the Mediterranean countries during the High Middle Ages have often complained about the almost complete absence of archives in Muslim countries. In Europe, the church, the feudal lords, the cities, and the guilds kept their documents both as titles of right and for other purposes. Nothing of the kind is to be found in Muslim countries in that period.¹ Now, it is possible to reconstruct the main lines of political history and to a certain extent also the life of the ruling class with the help of literary sources, supplemented by archaeology, epigraphy, and numismatics, *i. e.* the study of extant buildings and utensils, inscriptions, and coins. However, social and economic history, especially of the middle and lower classes, can hardly be studied without the aid of documents, such as letters, deeds, or accounts actually emanating from people belonging to these classes.

Under these circumstances it is most fortunate that a great treasure of documents, hailing from all over the Mediterranean countries, mainly from the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries, has been preserved in the so-called Cairo Geniza.² The Hebrew word *genīza*, like Arabic *janāza* (which means "burial"), is derived from the Persian. In Persian, *ganj* denotes a treasure, and its Biblical derivative, especially in Ezra 6:1, stands almost for archive. In mediaeval Hebrew, Geniza, or Beth Geniza, designates a repository of discarded writings. For just as the human body, having fulfilled its task as container of the [heavenly] soul,

should be buried, *i. e.* preserved to await resurrection, thus writings bearing the name of God, having served their purpose, should not be destroyed by fire or otherwise, but should be put aside in a special room designated for the purpose or in a cemetery. Such a room was attached to a synagogue in Fustāṭ or, as it is known today, Old Cairo, and from there, and to a small extent also from the cemetery al-Basāṭīn near the town, the treasures of the Cairo Geniza, under circumstances which have often been described,³ were dispersed to many libraries all over the world.

This occurred mainly during the last decade of the nineteenth century, beginning with 1890, when a considerable amount of valuable Geniza papers was acquired by the Bodleian Library, Oxford,⁴ and culminating in 1897, when Solomon Schechter transferred the whole of the then still extant treasures of the Geniza chamber to the University Library Cambridge, England. In this country, a very important collection is found at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, brought from Egypt in 1896 by E. N. Adler of London. A smaller, but still extensive collection, whose beginnings go back to 1891, is preserved in the library of the Dropsie College, Philadelphia,⁵ while the Freer Gallery of Washington possesses about fifty, mostly very well preserved documents, which were acquired by Mr. Charles L. Freer in Egypt in 1908. Nothing is known about the provenance of these papers,⁶ but it stands to reason that they came from the cemetery al-Basāṭīn,

* Based on a lecture read at the University of California, Los Angeles, on December 9, 1958.

¹ Cf. J. Sauvaget, *Introduction à l'histoire de l'Orient musulman* (Paris 1946), p. 21, where an explanation of this defect is attempted.

² Aspects of the Cairo Geniza documents different from those discussed here have been treated by the present writer in "The Cairo Geniza as a Source for the History of Muslim Civilization," *Studia Islamica*, III (Paris 1955), 75-91, where further literature on the subject is given.

³ See Paul E. Kahle, *The Cairo Geniza* (Oxford 1959), chapter 1. N. Golb, "Sixty Years of Genizah Research," *Judaism*, VI (1957), 3-5.

⁴ Cf. A. Neubauer and A. E. Cowley, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, II (Oxford 1906), xii-xvi.

⁵ Cf. B. Halper, *Descriptive Catalogue of Genizah Fragments in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia 1924).

⁶ See Richard Gottheil and William H. Worrell, *Fragments from the Cairo Genizah in the Freer Collection* (New York 1927), p. v.

where Mr. B. Chapira of Paris excavated Genizah papers in considerable quantities.⁷ A small collection belonging to the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania was described by the present writer recently,⁸ and there may still be some papers in private hands.

In order to be in a position to evaluate the Geniza papers as a source of social history, we have to form an idea about their nature and contents, and the localities, the times, and the social layers from which they come.

From the very definition given to the term Geniza above it is evident that it is the opposite of an archive. In an archive one keeps documents in order to use them, if and when necessary. Therefore, much care is taken to preserve them well, and in many cases, they are deposited in the archive immediately after being made out. The opposite was the case with the Geniza. Papers were thrown away there only after they had lost all value to their possessors and consequently, in most cases, only a long time after they had been written. Even family letters, let alone business correspondence, would not have been deposited in a place accessible to everybody except after being deprived of all actuality. However, legal deeds, which conferred rights on their holders, had to be kept by them and their heirs often through generations, before they could be disposed of in the Geniza chamber.

There was another good reason for keeping a document a long time before throwing it into the Geniza. Paper was expensive and therefore normally free space on a document was used for all kinds of purposes, such as drafts, short notes, accounts, or even merely for trying out a pen or for exercises. Thus the MS. T.-S. 16.49 of the University Library Cambridge was drawn up in Fustât on April 26, 987; although long and elaborate, it is a mere acquittance, in which a widow confirms to the family of her husband that she has received all that is due to her according to her marriage contract; thus there was no particular need to keep this document for a very long time. However, the backside of the deed was used for trials of the pen, one of which bears the date of

⁷ B. Chapira, *Revue des Études Juives*, LXXXII (1926), 317.

⁸ "The Geniza Collection of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania," *JQR*, XLIX (1958), 35-52.

December 21, 1085, *i. e.* almost a hundred years later.

Naturally, during the many years which elapsed from the execution of a document to its disposal, it deteriorated. The writing became faint, the paper was covered with dark brown stains, it was damaged by holes, and often parts of it were torn away for various uses.

To be sure, many types of paper found in the Geniza, as well as the ink used on them, were of excellent quality, and the scribes of the courts, the clerks of business houses, as well as scholarly persons in general, mostly had a clear and often even a beautiful handwriting. Thus the MS. T. S. 18 J 4, f. 18, represents a business letter sent from Aden to India, to a Jewish merchant from Tunisia, who ran a bronze factory and did other business out in that distant country.⁹ The recipient, having stayed a long time in India, returned to Aden in the autumn of 1149, but remained there and in the interior of Yemen for another three years; then, he had to make the long journey through the Red Sea, the terrible desert between it and the Nile river, and, finally, on the Nile from Upper Egypt to Cairo. Despite the humidity of the climate of India and Aden and the hazards of the journey on sea and through the desert—and the more than eight hundred years which have elapsed since it was written, the letter is in perfect condition, with even the smallest dot or stroke clearly discernible.

Unfortunately, such examples are the exception rather than the rule. Most of the Geniza papers make difficult reading and the great majority of them are fragments, representing the beginning, the end, or the middle or either side of a document, and many thousands are mere tiny fragments.

There is another difference between an archive and the Geniza, which constitutes a great obstacle to research. In an orderly archive, material of the same character normally is kept together in one place, which makes it easy to get information about one topic. However, in the Geniza, everything is topsy-turvy; a volume bound together may contain the following items: a contract for partnership in a glass factory; a letter of congratulation on an appointment; the genealogy of a family; settlement of a claim in Persia; a letter de-

⁹ The letters addressed to, or written by, this merchant are collected in Chapter Three of the book on the India trade prepared by the present writer; see below, note 18.

scribing the state of an ill person; a page from a recordbook of a court; a deed of manumission of a slave; a circular letter of a communal authority; accounts on parchment made in Tunisia; a letter with religious admonitions; a power of attorney for a divorce; a business letter sent from Spain to Algeria; a will made out in Alexandria; a list of the jewelry, the garments, the linen, and the kitchen utensils brought into marriage by a bride *etc.*

There can be no doubt that many prominent Jews and Jewish families kept archives.¹⁰ Thus we find that the Geniza has preserved over 250 papers addressed to, sent from, or referring to Nahray b. Nissim, a prominent community leader, businessman, and scholar, active in Egypt and the adjacent countries during the second part of the eleventh century.¹¹ About fifty papers connected with the Tunisian Jew in India mentioned before (his family was called Ben Yijū after a Berber tribe¹²) were brought together by the writer of these lines in connection with his work on the India trade according to the Cairo Geniza. Even more were found addressed to or written by another India traveller, Halfon b. Nethan'el, who travelled also frequently to Spain, where he became a most intimate friend of the Jewish poet and philosopher Judah ha-Levi. A number of other personalities and families are represented in the Geniza by so many papers that one has to assume that they belonged originally to carefully preserved collections. In the Geniza, however, these were dispersed and mixed up with documents

from other persons, countries and centuries, and it is up to the laborious efforts of the modern scholar to piece them together again.

The cause for the complete chaos in which the Geniza papers are found is to be sought, to my mind, in the fact that the Geniza was in living use during the whole time of its existence. I remember having seen in it a bill of divorce made out in Bombay as late as 1879, and, as it is unlikely that a document of such a character was disposed of in far away Cairo immediately after the legal act attested by it,¹³ it is not impossible that it landed in the Geniza only a few days before Solomon Schechter arrived in Cairo ready to carry off its entire contents. However, the living use of the Geniza was expressed not only by the continuous addition to its contents, but also by the opposite process. Enterprising people undertook the trouble to get into the dark room, formerly in order to find an ancient prayer book, or even legal formularies or mere scrap paper, but in the latter part of the nineteenth century with the aim of selecting manuscripts suitable for being sold to Europeans and Americans hunting for antiquities. The result of all this was that the whole content of the Cairo Geniza was continuously and completely turned upside down. On the other hand, the enormous variety of material included in it enables us to draw a colorful mosaic of the life of the society reflected in it.

What type of society is reflected in the Cairo Geniza? Before trying to answer this question, it is necessary to discuss briefly a third feature of the Geniza documents, which, in addition to their poor state of preservation and their utter disconnectedness, makes their study so difficult: the language in which they are written. To be sure, the Geniza contains many hundreds of documents written in a beautiful Hebrew, as it was known from contemporary literary sources. Most of this material has been published and used for historical research. However, the vast majority of the Geniza papers, namely most of the private letters and legal deeds, and all business letters and bills were written in Arabic, and of course not in literary, but in living Arabic, which varied according to the country, the century, and the social layer from which they came. The writing of Arabic with

¹⁰ Most probably, the documents were kept in a bag or piece of cloth, folded into narrow strips, as they were sent. Scores of such "archives," consisting of deeds conferring titles of right or important letters, were brought from Yemen to Israel in 1949-50 by the immigrants from that country, where mediaeval customs have in many ways persisted to our days. While the folding into narrow strips—as the Cairo Geniza shows—tends to damage the lines crossed by the folds, it seems, on the other hand, to be conducive to the preservation of a document as a whole. Cf. also R. Gottheil, *JQR*, XIX (London 1907), 469, where the documents from the archive (not the Geniza!) of the Jewish community in Cairo are described as lying folded and rolled in bags.

¹¹ They form the subject of a Ph.D. dissertation by Mr. Murad Michael.

¹² The pronunciation Yago, suggested in *Speculum*, XXIX (1954), 191, note 17, cannot be maintained in the face of the fact that the family name Ben Yijū, spelled in the French way Benichou, is common all over western North Africa even today.

¹³ The document is in the Gaster collection of the John Rylands Library, Manchester, England, and bears the number A 960.

Hebrew letters had its contemporary parallel in the writing of the same language by the Syriac Christians in their holy script and in modern times in the writing of Yiddish, which is a Germanic dialect, with Hebrew characters. The Arabic language used by the Jews was not a particular Jewish dialect, although some Hebrew phrases were of course used by the writers, but as the Jews were less tradition bound than their Muslim contemporaries, who wrote in Arabic characters, their Arabic, as a rule, is more colloquial and resembles a language which appears only in later literary sources or in the modern Arabic dialects. Thus the present writer would not have been able to translate quite a number of passages in letters written in Aden in the twelfth century, had he not devoted much time to the study of Arabic as it is spoken in Yemen today.

All this explains why the majority of the Geniza documents, sixty years after their transfer to European and American libraries, still have remained unpublished. For the same reason, it is not surprising that, when their systematic study was taken up again of late, quite a number of unexpected finds were made. To confine ourselves to letters emanating from famous personalities, we have now a letter to Moses Maimonides from his only and beloved brother David on the eve of his setting out on the Indian Ocean, where he perished,¹⁴ significant letters by and about Abraham, the son and successor of Maimonides,¹⁵ and new autograph responsa by Maimonides himself.¹⁶ The most rewarding finds were perhaps four autograph letters by the Spanish-Jewish poet and philosopher Judah ha-Levi and a number of letters to and about him, especially during his journey to the Holy Land, which he immortalized by his poems.¹⁷

¹⁴ To be published as No. 178 of the collection of documents concerning the Indian trade; see note 18.

¹⁵ Cf. the present writer's "New Documents from the Cairo Geniza," *Homenaje a Millas-Vallierosa* (Barcelona 1954), I, 707 ff.; "The Renewal of the Controversy over the Prayer for the Head of the Community in Abraham Maimuni's Time," *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume* (Jerusalem 1958), II, 49 ff. A bunch of even more significant documents emanating from Maimonides' son and successor is being prepared for publication.

¹⁶ "New Autograph Responsa by Maimonides," *Tarbiz*, XXVIII, 2 (1959).

¹⁷ Published in four instalments in *Tarbiz*, XXIV and XXV with two others to follow. The whole material has been discussed in a paper presented to the American Academy of Jewish Research, called "R. Judah ha-

However, it was not for the sake of these and similar interesting finds that a new study of the Arabic Cairo Geniza documents was undertaken. The aim was to attack the vast material as a whole and to make it available in a suitable form to all those interested in the study of the social and economic history of the Mediterranean countries, including the trade routes to India, in the development of the Arabic language, and of course, in Jewish history. As far as the India trade is concerned, all the available documents, 275 in number,¹⁸ have been assembled, and a full edition with an English translation and commentary is nearing completion. However, the Mediterranean material, which comprises many thousands of items, mostly shorter and more fragmentary than the papers concerning the Indian trade, is still largely in an early stage of research. Therefore, all which can be said here about social and economic life in the Mediterranean countries as reflected in the Cairo Geniza documents is to be taken as an outline of preliminary results and a directive for further study.

First of all, the time with which we are concerned here, has to be defined with more precision. The Geniza chamber was located in a synagogue which originally was a Coptic church, sold to the Jewish community by the Coptic patriarch in 882.¹⁹ However, comparatively little documentary material has survived from the tenth century. The reason for this is simple, although it occurred to me only last summer, when I found and studied various documents concerning the early history of that synagogue. Around 1012, the Fatimid caliph al-Hākim ordered the destruction of the Christian and Jewish houses of worship, including the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and, as we now know positively, the synagogue under discussion also was burnt out.²⁰

Levi's biography in the Light of the Geniza Documents," Vol. 28 New York, 1959, 41-56.

¹⁸ At the time of the first report given about the subject, *Speculum*, XXIX (1954), 184, only 130 items were available. By now, it seems, everything obtainable in European and American libraries has been registered. However, the collection of Geniza material in the Public Library of Leningrad, which is not catalogued, may contain some relevant documents.

¹⁹ Cf. Paul Kahle, *The Cairo Geniza* (London 1947), p. 1. It has been surmised that the building originally had been a synagogue, and was converted into a church in Byzantine times.

²⁰ The main structure of the basilica-like building

The rebuilding of the synagogue was a lengthy affair, and I venture the surmise that the Geniza chamber was added at that time. In any case, from 1015 onwards we have dated documents for almost every year and, for many years, several dated documents—I believe, for 1066, the year of the conquest of England by the Normans, about 10—and of course we are able to fix the time of countless others according to the persons mentioned in them, the script,²¹ and the subject matter. This goes on for a little over 250 years until 1266, when dated documents suddenly became rather rare. There is very little from the fourteenth century and next to nothing from the fifteenth. However, even a document made out in Cairo in 1482 resembles in paper, script, and legal formularies the deeds of the classical period of the Geniza, and Cairo still is called “Cairo which is situated near Fustāṭ of Egypt,” which means that in legal terminology Fustāṭ, the present Old Cairo, still was regarded as the capital of the country.²²

Then suddenly everything changes. Dated documents begin to appear again from the second quarter of the sixteenth century on, but then the paper obviously is not any more locally made, but European; the script is entirely different, now being Spanish-Jewish; the language, as a rule, is Hebrew and not any more Arabic, and in some cases, even Ladino, the Castilian dialect used by the Spanish Jews. In other words, the Jewish

remained intact until it was finally pulled down in 1890. The Geniza chamber adjacent to the synagogue was not removed; however, its contents began to attract the attention of antiquities dealers and scholars in that year. See above, note 3.

²¹ The handwritings of the more prominent scribes of the rabbinical court of Fustāṭ (Old Cairo) are known for about 240 years (1020-1260), and the same holds true for a number of prominent personalities in various town and countries. However, utmost precaution is recommended with regard to the identification of handwritings. Definitely different persons used almost identical scripts—perhaps because they learned how to write with the same teacher. This is especially true of close relatives, as *e. g.* Maimonides and his bother David.

²² Ms. of the University Library Cambridge 13 J 4, fol. 16. The subject matter of this document is “mediæval” as well: a personality of high standing, having concluded, obviously very reluctantly, a levirate marriage with the widow of his deceased brother, regulates in this document the future relations between his two wives, especially on which occasions he was to be accompanied by which wife. Cf. also E. J. Worman, *JQR*, XVIII (1906), 10, for a document dated 1496, “introducing” Cairo as above.

East was completely overwhelmed by the refugees from Spain, who had to leave their country in 1492 and became prominent in the Ottoman empire shortly afterwards, just as in modern times the Jewish East became assimilated to the emigrants and refugees from Eastern and Middle Europe.

Here we are solely concerned with what has just been termed as the classical Geniza, *i. e.* documents which appear in a trickle during the second part of the tenth century and become a flood for the subsequent two and a half centuries. This means for the Muslim historian, that the Geniza is a first rate source of social and economic history for the Fatimid and Ayyubid periods and, as far as European history is concerned, for the century preceding the Crusades and for Crusader times themselves.

Naturally, most of the material found in the Geniza emanated from Jews, although there are some hundreds of pieces written in Arabic characters and originating from government chanceries or from private persons of Muslim or Christian persuasion.²³ As the Geniza chamber was situated in Egypt, it stands to reason that its contents first of all reflect the life of the Jewry of that country. At that time Jews lived not only, and perhaps not mainly, in the cosmopolitan towns of Cairo and Alexandria or the provincial capitals, such as Damietta, which then played a great role as the Eastern Mediterranean port of Egypt, like Port Said today, or Qūṣ in Upper Egypt, which was then the terminal for the Indian trade,²⁴ but were dispersed all over the Nile delta, the Fayyum oasis and Upper Egypt. Many letters, some quite charming, and a very considerable number of legal deeds have come from these little towns of the so-called Rif, the Egyptian countryside. Much research will be required to find out whether this population was old, that is whether it represented

²³ Mr. M. S. Stern, Fellow of All Souls College, has published a number of documents from the Fatimid chanceries in the Geniza, *e. g.* “An Original Document from the Fatimid Chancery concerning Italian Merchants,” *Studi orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi Della Vida* (Rome 1956), II, 529 ff. I understand that Mr. Stern is to follow up the subject in subsequent publications.

²⁴ The merchants and their merchandise were transported on the Nile up to that town and crossed from there the desert to the East African port ‘Aydhāb, from where ships set out to South Arabia or to India directly.

a continuation of the Jewish settlements from Roman and Byzantine times, which also were largely rural, or originated after the Muslim conquest. It should be noted in this connection that there exist some old deeds (old here means the late tenth and early eleventh centuries) coming from such little places, written in Hebrew, not Arabic, and containing Greek names and Greek legal terminology.²⁵

On the other hand, one has to bear in mind that the eleventh and twelfth centuries were turbulent times and Egypt was flooded with refugees from Palestine and Syria, which were in a state of complete dissolution even during the century preceding the Crusades, as well as from Byzantine and Western Europe territories. We positively know from the Geniza that the communal authorities in Old Cairo and Alexandria sent these refugees on to the little towns and villages. Therefore, when we find there so many people referred to as Shāmī (Syro-Palestinian), Rūmī (Byzantine), Franjī (French), Ashkenāzī (German),²⁶ we have to understand that these constituted recent additions to the local population, and very often this is clearly evident from the content of the documents concerned.

However, the Jewish population of Egypt as a whole, of course, with the exception of Hellenistic times, which produced Philo of Alexandria and a number of other illustrious men, never played a major role in Jewish history, such as did those of Babylonia-Iraq on the one hand and Spain on the other and those of some other European countries in later centuries. Egypt remained basically a country of transit and exchange. The most important Egyptian Jew—and indeed the greatest Jew of the High Middle Ages—no doubt was Moses

²⁵ To be sure, Greek terminology was not uncommon in the Jewish courts under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Academy right to the end of the eleventh century. Thus, the word *akolytos* (ἀκολύτως), “unhindered,” i. e. ratified, concludes a marriage contract not only in Mastaura, Asia Minor, in 1022 [Cf. Joshua Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire* (Athens, 1939), p. 189], but also in Ramle, Palestine, in 1052 [See S. Assaf, *Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem 1953), p. 105], as well as in the small town Damsis in the Nile Delta in 1083 [S. Assaf, *The Formulary of Hai Gaon* (Jerusalem 1930), p. 58]. In addition to such terms, however, which had a rather wide diffusion, there appear in ancient Geniza documents others which are quite uncommon and which might represent some local usage.

²⁶ The two latter terms designate also persons coming from Western Europe in general.

Maimonides. However, he was born in 1135 in Cordova in Spain and came to Egypt at the age of thirty-two, when he was already a famous man, and he always referred to himself as an Andalusian or a Ma'aravi, a person from the Muslim West. His contemporary and colleague, the Chief Justice of the Jewish community of Alexandria, was called Anatoli, French Anatole; he came from Marseilles and we know in fact that he was insulted by a local dignitary, who referred to his inferior, i. e. European, origin.²⁷ Egypt had obtained ecumenical importance for Judaism long before Maimonides, however not through its own resources, but through the influx of prominent scholars and communal leaders, either from Babylonia-Iraq or from the Palestinian Academy, which, having left Jerusalem in 1070 for Tyre and later on Damascus, finally settled in Old Cairo in 1127.

Thus it is not surprising that the Cairo Geniza reflects not so much the Egyptian local, as the Mediterranean scene in general. I purposely use the term Mediterranean, because from the countries east of Palestine and Syria, the great Jewish centers of Iraq and Persia, very few private letters and deeds have reached the Geniza. Countless people from Iraq and Persia settled in Egypt, as we may learn from their family names, which range from Samarkand in Central Asia and Nīsābūr in Northeast Persia to those of smaller towns in Persia and Iraq, such as Kāzarūn, 'Ukbara and Hit. Sometimes we are able to conclude from the mistakes in Arabic made by persons bearing Persian family names that they had arrived only recently in the country.²⁸ But documentary mate-

²⁷ When one compares a legal opinion written by Anatoli—as that printed in *Abraham Maimuni Responsa* (Jerusalem 1937), pp. 167-170—with those composed by his contemporaries and colleagues Moses and Abraham Maimonides, one is indeed struck by the contrast between a man who had not studied with the Greek and those who did. This contrast between Spanish and Oriental Jews, who were imbued, in addition to their religious learning, with secular culture, and the “Ashkenazim” or European Jews, who confined themselves to religious education, continued right down to the seventeenth century. As late an author as David Conforte, born in Salonica, 1618, writes: “All Ashkenazim are by nature inarticulate in speech, stammerers and stutters; they are unable to speak properly and to bring forth in writing the thoughts resting in their hearts.” Cf. M. Kosover in *Homenaje Millas-Vallerosa* (Barcelona 1954), I, 754.

²⁸ They mix up masculine and feminine, make an

rial from Iraq and Persia is very rare, far rarer *e. g.* than that from the trade route to India, which via East Africa and South Arabia was frequented by Egyptian merchants.

How is this to be explained? It would be rash to attribute this scarcity of material from the East to the political situation, *i. e.* to the fact that Egypt was ruled by the Fatimid caliphs, while Iraq and Persia were under the sway of their adversaries, the Seldjuks, who paid homage to the Abbasid caliphs. For we have in the Geniza a lot of *official* Jewish correspondence from Iraq, mainly from the presidents of the Jewish academies there, but also from the Resh-Galutha, the political head of the Diaspora. Strangely enough, the Nagid, the political head of the Jews in Fatimid Egypt, got his letter of installation from the Resh-Galutha in Seldjuk Baghdad. Therefore, there must be another reason for the rarity of private documentary Geniza papers from the East. The most feasible explanation is perhaps that in those days, as in our own times, there was very little trade between Iraq and Persia on the one hand and Egypt on the other, and where there is no business, there is no correspondence.

There might have been in operation, however, an additional and quite accidental circumstance. The Geniza chamber formed a part of the so-called synagogue of the Palestinians, *i. e.* where prayers were said according to the traditions followed in Palestine, where ministers were appointed and officers confirmed by the Head of the Academy of Jerusalem, and where, naturally, people connected with Palestine and Syria prevailed. It stands to reason, that some arrangement for a Geniza had been made also in the other main synagogue of Fustât, that of the Babylonians. Had that Geniza been preserved, perhaps we would have had more letters and deeds coming from Iraq and Persia.

Turning now to the Mediterranean proper, we find that, in addition to Egypt itself and Palestine and Syria, by far most of the material is provided by Tunisia and Sicily. This again may have had its cause in the conditions of commerce at that time. The products of India and the Far East, as well as those of Egypt itself, were brought to Tunisia and Sicily and exchanged there for the

goods of Muslim Spain and western North Africa as well as for those of Christian Europe. There might have been however, an additional circumstance, similar to that just mentioned. Shortly after the churches and synagogues in the Fatimid empire had been destroyed, permission was given to rebuild them. However, as we know from a number of Geniza papers as well as from Christian sources, the afflicted communities incurred great difficulties in raising the funds needed for reconstruction. In this time of hardship, the leaders of the Palestinian synagogue hit upon an expedient often adopted also by modern community leaders: they admitted the Maghribis, by which mainly the Tunisian merchants were meant, to public offices and showered upon them honorific titles, confirmed in bombastic letters sent from the seat of the Academy in Jerusalem. As we know from a Geniza document, the strategem was successful and the Maghribis joined the Palestinian synagogue; therefore it is perhaps not surprising that so many documents from Tunisia and Sicily, which culturally was at that time only an appendage to Tunisia, should have been found in the Geniza; cf. the present writer's "Eleventh Century Tunisia in the Light of the Cairo Geniza Documents," *Mémorial E. Levy-Provençal*, Paris 1960.

It would be erroneous to assume that only letters addressed to Old Cairo and deeds made out there have been preserved. We have letters sent from one town in Spain to another, from Spain to Morocco, from Sicily to Tunisia, and even one sent from Jerusalem to Toledo in Spain. Even from Christian Byzantium a very considerable number of documents has come to light. We have letters from Southern France. The ships and the merchants of the Italian city republics of Genoa, Pisa, Gaeta, and Venice are occasionally mentioned; as however, with the exception of Venice, no considerable Jewish communities lived in those towns at that time, no documents coming from there have been found so far. Scholars called *Bunduqî*, which certainly means Venetian,²⁹ were found in Old Cairo as early as the eleventh century.

Thus, the Geniza documents provide informa-

incorrect use of the article, and are unsure concerning certain typically Semitic sounds—in short, they have difficulties similar to those incurred by American students studying Arabic.

²⁹ The word could mean "trader in hazelnuts." However, as similar derivations, such as *fustuqî*, "trader in pistachios," have not been found in the Geniza papers, and as the translation "cross-bow maker" is ruled out for so early a time, *bunduqî* must mean "Venetian."

tion concerning many countries during a considerable span of time, and it is natural that there should be differences between the various places and periods. However, as far as Egypt and the adjacent countries are concerned, a rather consistent picture of a society with very definite features emerges. This picture is not entirely complete. One layer of the society, the upper high class, the very rich Jews, who were connected with the government, is only sparsely represented. The reason for this is simple: they did not live in Fustāt. They had their residence in the fashionable suburb and seat of government, Cairo, where they had a synagogue and court of justice of their own. There are many references to this state of affairs in the Geniza papers. A sister, writing a letter from the capital to her brother with all the latest gossip, reports that a high official was fired from his post and was asked to leave Cairo immediately and take up his domicile in Fustāt. This was an easy matter, since rich Jews had houses in both places. Thus an India traveller, recommending to his brother in Fustāt two distinguished Tunisian merchants whom he had met in the East, asks him to put them up—but, in his house in Cairo. Mevorakh, the head of the Egyptian Jews for over thirty years (ca. 1080-1110), lived in Cairo, but took temporary residence during the month of Tishri, the month of the High Holidays, in Fustāt, when he also used to settle public affairs in consultation with the leaders of the community. The many petitions to him found in the Geniza certainly were submitted to him on the occasion of such visits. On the other hand, Maimonides, who was not very rich (after all, he was a refugee from Spain and, in addition, had lost his money when his brother perished in the Indian Ocean), lived in Fustāt, and, as he was a court physician, had to ride every day two and a half miles from his house to the Sultan's palace. His son and successor Abraham also was a court physician and, like his father, stayed in Fustāt. This we know from a little note³⁰ asking him when he would come and spend a weekend in Cairo. In short, we have to make allowance for the fact that the life of the upper stratum of the society is reflected only very imperfectly in the Geniza papers.³¹

³⁰ MS. University Library Cambridge, T.-S. N. S. 94 J 59.

³¹ In addition to the reason given, there might have been another cause for the scarcity of material concern-

We are compensated for this loss by the richness and enormous variety of material concerning the middle and lower classes. The society which left us the Geniza documents is entirely different from that of the Jewish communities in Europe at the same time. Owing to a murderous legislation of economic discrimination, the Jews in Europe were confined to a small number of precarious occupations. In the Islamic East, no such discriminatory laws were in existence. In addition, Jews had lived in the countries concerned from time immemorial. Therefore, the distribution of occupations was far more normal, with persons engaged in manual work most probably forming the majority of the population.

Even agriculture and animal husbandry are by no means absent from the Geniza. The main protein food during the weekdays was cheese; on Saturdays one had chicken or meat. Therefore, the Geniza papers refer to this product as frequently as do the Arabic papyri of the eighth and ninth centuries. Cheese had to be religiously "pure" or "permissible" (Hebrew *tāhōr* and Arabic *ḥalāl*; the term "kosher" was used in Sicily, from where much cheese was imported, as from Palestine). Therefore, special precaution had to be taken in its preparation, about which we read with regard to various parts of the country. The Jewish sheepbreeders had the same difficulties with the milking of the animals on Saturdays that the religious Kibbutzim have in Israel today. Beekeeping, with its products of honey and wax being of equal importance, was another familiar occupation, perhaps brought with them by the ancient immigrants from Palestine, although it was indigenous also in Egypt. Even Jews of modest income possessed fields where wheat was grown, and the trade in wheat looms very large in the Geniza papers; however, how far they were actively engaged in this branch of farming is not yet discernible from the documents studied. On the other hand, the processing of flax, the second staple crop of Egypt at that time, and its making into linen are frequently referred to in the Geniza as Jewish occupations.

ing the uppermost stratum of the Jewish society, about which we know both from literary sources and, mostly, from petitions addressed to its representatives, found in the Geniza. As they were close to the Court, they most likely used Arabic and not Hebrew letters in their communications and perhaps also applied to government rather than to Jewish courts with their lawsuits.

This brings us to the most important field of manual occupations, industry, arts, and crafts. It is easy to compile a long list of different branches of manual work referred to in the Geniza. However, their relative importance will be found out, if ever, only after much additional research. At present, it seems that the Geniza mostly refers to the textile industry, the spinning, weaving, and dyeing of silk, linen, cotton, and wool, and above all to dyeing; in the second place, to copper- and silversmiths; of almost equal importance were the glass industry and the production of sugar, which is as frequently mentioned as that of honey. Of the many minor crafts referred to in the Geniza, I would like to mention that of the *muzawwig*, or painter of murals. We are here in early Fatimid times, when this art, as we know from the magnificent paintings in the Cappella Palatina of Palermo, was still in vogue.

As in Roman times, there was no clear-cut division between industry and commerce. A man who produced a commodity also traded in it. Naturally by far most of the Geniza documents are concerned with commerce. A systematic perusal of them will greatly enlarge our knowledge of the history of enterprise, the enormous variety of goods handled, the routes of trade, the methods and morals of business, and its legal basis. In general, one is favourably impressed by the sound organization, the subtle technique, and the high moral standard of business at that time. In particular, one is moved by a certain detachment towards worldly possessions. Everybody, of course, wanted to make money. However, one was not too much depressed, when one suffered losses. *Al-'āqiba ila 'l-ḥair* "At the end, everything will turn to the good."

Business could flourish only if it was protected by law. Law was mainly personal, not territorial, and the religious minorities were juridically autonomous to a large extent. There was a great difference between Muslim and Jewish legal organization. The Muslim kadi was a government officer who acted as a judge alone. The Jewish court consisted at least of three members, who did their job, with the exception of the professional member, who served also as scribe, without remuneration as a service to the community. As people were busy, one had to have a large number of persons qualified to act as judges. This explains the wide extent of religious learning among the Jews and the spirit of common sense and expe-

diency prevailing in the legal decisions. All these judges were seasoned businessmen, and naturally sometimes had to go to court themselves. It is therefore not surprising to find a man on one page of a record book as a judge and on the next as a litigant. Cases were settled mostly not according to the rigorous religious law, but by agreements based on usage.³²

On the other hand, family life still was regulated by the religious law. Therefore, we find for example such an ancient institution as the levirate marriage still in force (a man, even when married, was obliged to marry the widow of his brother, in case the latter had no male offspring). Indeed, the extremely rare cases of polygamy we find in the Geniza are due mainly to this law. As a rule, the marriage contract contained the condition that the husband was not allowed to marry a second wife, and even where the contract was not available, the courts saw to it that "the usual condition," as it was called, was adhered to. The society of the Geniza papers was not a man's world. Women very frequently appear as parties to a deed and as writers or receivers of letters. Much is to be learned from them about the relations between husband and wife, between parents and children, brothers and sisters, and in the so-called extended family. It is perhaps too early to draw general conclusions. Family attachment was very strong, but it was expressed not so much by tenderness between husband and wife, as by mutual devotion of parents and children, and brothers and sisters.

In addition to the subjects mentioned, there are a great number of other aspects of social life in the Mediterranean countries which are illustrated by the Cairo Geniza documents, such as material civilization (housing, clothing and food, prices and standards of living), daily life, weekends and holidays, travel by land and by sea, illness and doctors, death and burial, social etiquette, and social ideals. Much is to be learned about the community, its officers, and the social services, such as the provision for the poor, widows, orphans, invalids, captives and foreigners; about interfaith relations; about the government, its institutions, and their influence on the life of the individual.

³² The usage of the merchants or other professions was sometimes fixed in writing in the form of a testimony deposited in court. Such a testimony is contained, *e. g.* in No. 196 of the book on the India trade referred to above note 18.

Finally, we learn a lot about the spirit of the age. Religion was of course paramount; however, its actual meaning for the average man still has to be defined; a strong group-consciousness was paired with an outspoken individualism; one lived in a glorious past, which formed an unquestioned model, and in anticipation of future, and perhaps imminent, physical and spiritual redemption. The ideal of everybody, even the businessman, was to be a learned man, and poetry fulfilled an important social function completely different from that in our own times.

The present writer hopes to publish, in the not too distant future, a representative selection of Geniza papers, illustrative of Mediterranean society in mediaeval times. By this and similar publications³³ some indirect service will be done

also for another branch of mediaeval research: Arabic papyrology, which, so far, has occupied itself comparatively little with the material contemporary to the Geniza documents.³⁴ Thus, it is to be hoped, the joint efforts of Geniza research and Arabic papyrology will compensate for the lack of archives in Muslim countries indicated in the opening passage of this article.

³³ In addition to the studies referred to above, note 11 and note 18, mention should be made of the edition of the magnificent collection of deeds and documents T.-S. 18 J of the University Library Cambridge now in preparation by Dr. N. N. Golb of Cincinnati.

³⁴ Cf. A. Grohmann, *From the World of Arabic Papyri* (Cairo 1952); *Einführung und Chrestomathie zur arabischen Papyruskunde* (Prague 1955). Albert Dietrich, "Die arabischen Urkunden," in *Zum gegenwärtigen Stand der juristischen Papyrusforschung* (Stuttgart 1957).

URARTIANS AND HURRIANS

WARREN C. BENEDICT

THE VIEW IS NOW widely held that the Urartian state, which controlled the area centered on Lake Van from about 850 B. C., represented a reconsolidation of a fragment of the Hurrian states, which had been broken up in the late fourteenth century B. C.¹ This interpretation is most clearly stated by A. Goetze, e. g.:

¹ A. Goetze, *HCA—Hethiter, Churriter und Assyrer*, Institut für Sammenlignende Kulturforskning, Serie A: Forelesninger XVII (Oslo, 1936), pp. 102-104, 172-175, esp. 174; A. Goetze, *Kleinasien*, Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft III, 1, 3, 3, 1, 2d Ed. (München, 1957), 190-91; H. A. Rigg, Jr., *The Kingdom of Van (Urartu), its origins in relation to the Hurrian problem* (Harvard Univ. Diss., 1936, unpub.), pp. 155-204. I quote from the works of Goetze because his statements are fuller and clearer than those of other writers. Many authors state that the Hurrian area of occupation reached to Lake Van, or even that they originated in that area, but are noncommittal about the origin of the Urartians. See, e. g., N. Adontz, *Histoire d'Arménie* (1946), p. 26, cf. pp. 272-73; K. Bittel, *Grundzüge der Vor- und Frühgeschichte Kleinasiens* (1950), pp. 78-81, esp. 79; Louis Delaporte, *Les peuples de l'Orient Méditerranéen I: Le Proche-Orient Asiatique* (1948), 237; P. Jouguet (Ed.), *Les Premières Civilisations* (1950),

Aus einer Zusammenfassung der vielen Nairi-Länder entsteht zu Beginn des I. Jahrtausends das urartäische Reich, das seinen Mittelpunkt in Tušpa—d. i. das heutige Van—hat. Ich sehe im urartäischen Reich eine Erneuerung alter politischer Traditionen, die sich bis in die Zeit der höchsten Blüte der Hurriter zurückführen lassen, und finde in diesem Zusammenhang ein weiteres Argument für die These, dass das Vansee-Gebiet altes Hurriter-Gebiet ist.²

The opposite view—that the Urartian state was founded by people newly arrived in the area—is specifically denied by Goetze:

Es scheint wichtig zu betonen dass so die Überlie-

p. 352; A. Moortgat in Scharff and Moortgat, *Ägypten und Vorderasien im Altertum* (1950), p. 432; I. M. D'iakonov, *Istoriâ Midii* (1956), pp. 98-99. Hrozný apparently at one time leaned toward this view (*Massis*, 9 [1937], 12), but in his *Ancient History of Western Asia, India and Crete* (n. d.), p. 110 he seems to consider the Urartians later arrivals.

² *HCA* 104. Essentially the same view is expressed in *Kleinasien* 191, though not as explicitly as in *HCA*. More succinctly, in *HCA* 174 he refers to Urartu as "entstanden aus einem neuen Zusammenschluss der hurritischen Länder."

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[Footnotes]

⁸ **The Geniza Collection of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania**

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¹⁰ **An Eleventh-Century Document concerning a Cairo Synagogue**

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¹² **From the Mediterranean to India: Documents on the Trade to India, South Arabia, and East Africa from the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries**

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