

Fragment of the Month: August 2010

## **Recovering the Kuzari, Mosseri III.258.1**

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The Unit's ongoing work on the fragments of the Jacques Mosseri Genizah Collection, which are undergoing conservation, digitisation and description in the University Library, often turns up pleasant surprises, of which this month's fragment is an example.

On the microfilm, the manuscript Mosseri III.258.1 was a congealed mass of medieval paper, tentatively identified by the original catalogue as a commentary on tractate *Berakhot*. The identification, however, was an heroic attempt based on an extremely poor microfilm image taken in the 1970s, in which hardly anything was legible.

Fragment of a Hebrew manuscript on parchment, showing several lines of text in a medieval script. The parchment is heavily damaged, torn, and stained, with significant portions missing. The text is written in a cursive style, typical of medieval Hebrew manuscripts. The fragment is irregular in shape, with jagged edges and numerous holes and tears. The ink is dark, and the parchment is a light brown color. The text is arranged in horizontal lines, though some are broken or obscured by the damage. The fragment appears to be a single leaf or a small section of a larger document.

MOSSERI III. 258.??  
cm  
in

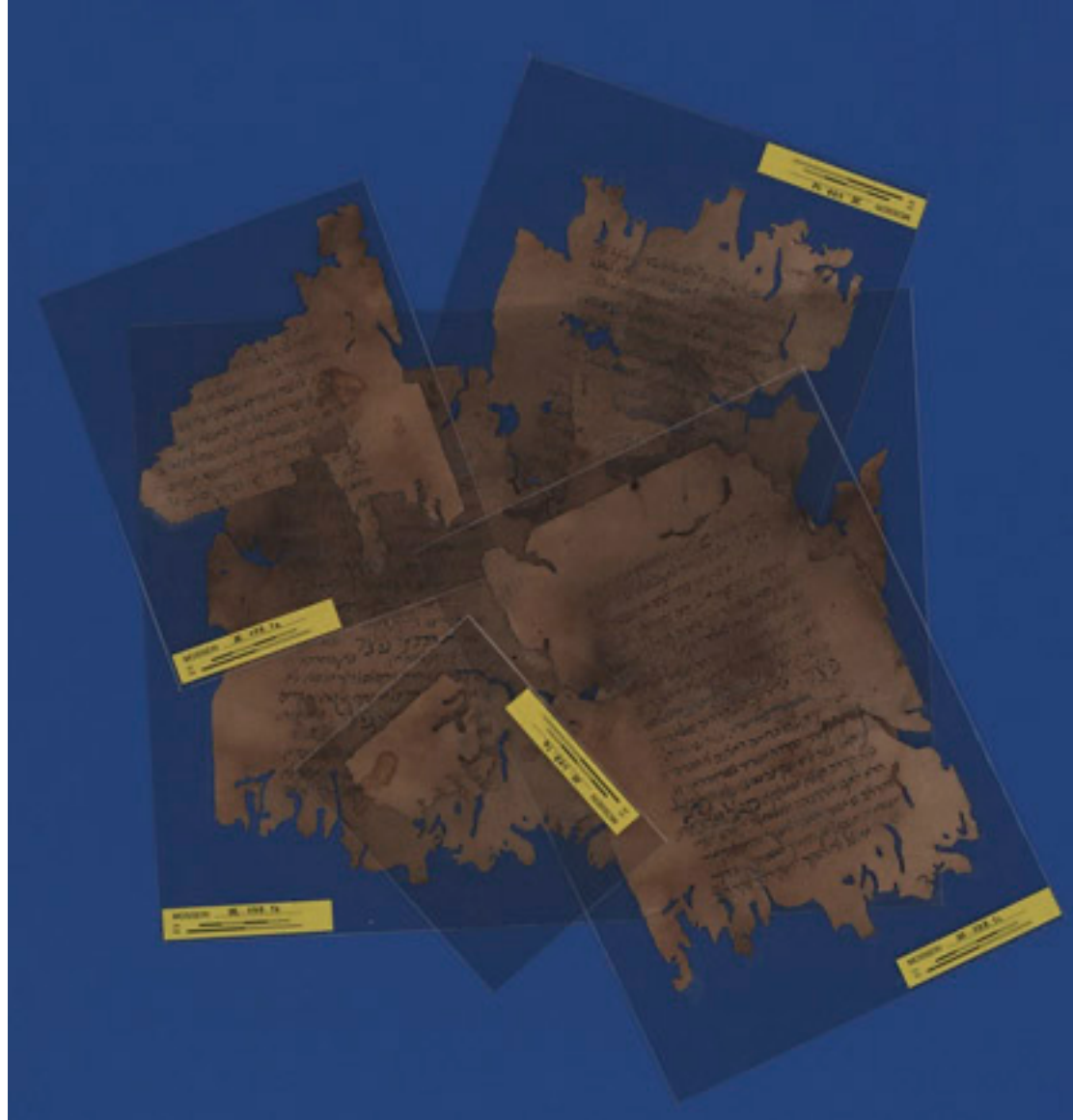
BEFORE CONSERVATION

Mosseri III.258 after it had been unfolded, but before further conservation

After Lucy, the Genizah conservator, went to work on the fused layers of paper, however, III.258.1 became five separate fragments as she carefully separated, cleaned, flattened and repaired them. Far from being an unknown commentary, all five fragments belong to a handsome manuscript of Judah Halevi's *Refutation and Proof of the Despised Faith*, commonly referred to as the *Book of the Kuzari*, and probably date from within 100 years of the composition of the work. Even better, these five pieces belong with other leaves from the very same manuscript, which have turned up in the T-S (T-S Ar.26.45) and Bodleian (Bodl. MS Heb. d. 61 ff. 1–6) Collections.

As is well known, Halevi's book takes the form of a dialogue between a rabbi and the king of the Khazars, who is on a personal quest to choose a religion to follow. There are two sections in the Mosseri manuscript, both of which are from the fifth treatise and are set after the king's conversion to Judaism while he tries to understand and learn about his new religious commitments.

There is a very noticeable difference in colour between the fragments in the T-S Collection and the new Mosseri fragments, perhaps indicating the less than ideal conditions under which some of the fragments were kept over the last 100 years. The Unit's current conservation programme aims to halt and ameliorate past strains and damage on these documents so their content can be fully revealed and safely preserved for future generations.



All the pieces of Mosseri III.258.1 separated, flattened, cleaned and repaired.

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