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Searching for the Last Genizah Fragment in Late Ottoman Cairo: A Material Survey of Egyptian Jewish Literary Culture

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Abstract

The Cairo Genizah is well known as a repository for hundreds of thousands of manuscripts that the Jewish residents of Fustat (Old Cairo) produced and consumed in the premodern period. Foreign “collectors” acquired most of these manuscripts for European libraries in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the majority arriving at the Cambridge University Library in 1897 under the auspices of Solomon Schechter. Less well known is the fact that hundreds of Genizah fragments were produced in the late nineteenth century, even as European collectors were scouring Cairo for ancient texts. This later corpus includes witnesses to the social and economic history of late Ottoman Cairo and provides copious evidence for the material history of Egyptian Jewish literary activity at that time. Despite this, it remains understudied for both Ottoman and Jewish history. Late Genizah material also raises questions about the integrity of “Cairo Genizah” manuscript collections around the world, as some fragments postdate Schechter’s Genizah “discovery,” and others were never in Egypt at all.

Keywords: Cairo Genizah; Ottoman history; Jewish history; manuscripts; archives

For centuries now, scholars of Jewish history have been preoccupied with ancient manuscripts preserved in the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Fustat (Old Cairo). This preoccupation mainly centers on manuscripts from the famous “Cairo Genizah,” much of which survived in the synagogue’s genizah chamber, but it began with a separate Torah scroll in the care of the Ben Ezra community. Known as the “Scroll of Ezra,” the residents of Fustat claimed it was written by the prophet Ezra himself. This scroll made the synagogue a popular destination for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tourists, some of whom believed it was “the oldest Hebrew manuscript in existence.”¹ More likely, this scroll was produced only in the medieval period, but those visitors remained blind to the presence of much older manuscripts just behind the synagogue’s walls.² It was not until the Genizah discoveries of the 1890s that anyone—Europeans and Cairenes alike—fully grasped the enormous time depth of Genizah material in Fustat, which spans the entire period between the sixth and nineteenth centuries.

¹ Rebecca J. W. Jefferson, “Deconstructing ‘the Cairo Genizah’: A Fresh Look at Genizah Manuscript Discoveries in Cairo before 1897,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 108, no. 4 (2018): 429, 436.

² Elkan Nathan Adler, *Jews in Many Lands* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1905), 30; Jefferson, “Deconstructing ‘the Cairo Genizah,’” 429n33.

But if the Scroll of Ezra is not the oldest Hebrew manuscript in existence (and it is not), then the question “what is the oldest item in the Cairo Genizah?” is not so easy to answer.³ The response depends on precisely what one means by “oldest” with regard to manuscripts produced and consumed by the Ben Ezra community.⁴ Physically, the most ancient Genizah fragments are a pair of folios comprising Aquila’s Greek translation of Kings, dated palaeographically to the fifth or early sixth century. However, this manuscript is a palimpsest, and the Greek undertext was washed away to write Hebrew liturgical poetry around the eleventh century.⁵ A similar palimpsest is a fragmentary section of Augustine’s Latin *Sermon on the Mount*, likely also copied in the sixth century but erased and overwritten with Masoretic lists in the ninth or tenth.⁶ The physically oldest manuscript produced in Hebrew is probably one of two Bible manuscripts, both approximately dated around the seventh or eighth century.⁷ Another contender may be a fragmentary papyrus codex of *piyyut* (liturgical poetry), the only such codex known to be written in Hebrew characters.⁸ Several different fragments have also been claimed as the earliest *dated* documents in the Genizah, including a court record supposedly from 750 and a marriage contract from 870/71, though the former is actually from 1050, and many details about the latter’s provenance have been called into doubt.⁹ The earliest securely dated manuscript is a Babylonian (i.e., Iraqi) Bible fragment from 903/4.¹⁰ Of course, the material age of a manuscript is not a historian’s only concern, and Second Temple scholars may be more interested in the most ancient texts preserved in the Genizah. Among these we may count the Damascus Document, Hebrew Ben Sira, and

³ I use “Cairo Genizah” and its shorthand “Genizah” throughout this article to refer to the entire corpus of manuscripts derived from the multiple Cairene *genizot*, including the Ben Ezra Synagogue genizah chamber, the Basatin Cemetery, and various dig sites in Fustat. Lowercase “genizah” refers to one of these *genizot*. See Haggai Ben-Shammai, “Is ‘The Cairo Genizah’ a Proper Name or a Generic Noun? On the Relationship between the Genizot of the Ben Ezra and the Dār Simḥa Synagogues,” in “From a Sacred Source”: *Genizah Studies in Honour of Professor Stefan C. Reif*, ed. Ben Outhwaite and Siam Bhayro (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 43–52.

⁴ Thank you to Ben Outhwaite and Nadia Vidro for their fruitful discussion on this topic.

⁵ MS Cambridge University Library (CUL), Taylor-Schechter (T-S) 12.184, and MS CUL, T-S 20.50; Francis Crawford Burkitt, *Fragments of the Books of Kings according to the Translation of Aquila from a MS Formerly in the Geniza at Cairo* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1897), 10–11; Ernest Worman, “Unpublished Handlist,” vol. 1 (Cambridge, UK, 1908), 20.50.

⁶ T-S Additional Series (AS) 139.1 and CUL Additional 4320d; see Ben Outhwaite, “St Augustine in the Genizah,” *Fragment of the Month (May)*, Cambridge University Library: Genizah Research Unit, 2007, <https://bit.ly/3KhhH7S>.

⁷ The first is T-S NS 3.21 and T-S NS 4.3, which Colette Sirat argues is especially ancient, possibly pre-Islamic; Colette Sirat, *Hebrew Manuscripts of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 27–28. See Ben Outhwaite, “The Oldest Hebrew Fragment in the Collection? T-S NS 3.21,” *Fragment of the Month (November)*, Cambridge University Library: Genizah Research Unit, 2010, <https://bit.ly/3rUd8KJ>. The second is T-S AS 37.1, which has numerous joins in Cambridge and other institutions, and has been carbon-dated to approximately 700 CE. See S. A. Birnbaum, “A Study of an Eighth Century Synagogue Scroll,” *Vetus Testamentum* 9 (1959): 122–29; Edna Engel and Mordechai Mishor, “An Ancient Scroll of the Book of Exodus: The Reunion of Two Separate Fragments,” *Israel Museum Studies in Archaeology* 7 (2015): 24–69; and Mordechai Veintroub, “More Fragments of an Early Torah Scroll Come to Light,” *Genizah Fragments*, 2019.

⁸ T-S 6H9 through T-S 6H21; see Colette Sirat, *Les papyrus en caractères hébraïques trouvés en Egypte* (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1985), 61–63, 69–80, 89; Sirat, *Hebrew Manuscripts*, 35, 336; Rebecca J. W. Jefferson, “T-S 6H9–21: The Papyrus Codex Rebound,” *Fragment of the Month (July)*, Cambridge University Library: Genizah Research Unit, 2009, <https://bit.ly/3EOpZ6B>.

⁹ The court record is T-S 16.79; Israel Abrahams, “An Eighth-Century Genizah Document,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 17 (1905): 426–30. The marriage contract is MS Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, Center for Advanced Judaic Studies (CAJS) Halper 331; Benzion Halper, “Descriptive Catalogue of Genizah Fragments in Philadelphia,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 14, no. 4 (1924): 514, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1451681>. See J. L. Teicher, “The Oldest Dated Document in the Genizah?” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 3 (1949): 156–58; and Eve Krakowski and Sacha Stern, “The ‘Oldest Dated Document of the Cairo Genizah’ (Halper 331): The Seleucid Era and Sectarian Jewish Calendars,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3 (2021): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186321000122>.

¹⁰ T-S NS 246.26.2; see Hans Peter Rüger, “Ein Fragment Der Bisher Ältesten Datierten Hebräischen Bibelhandschrift Mit Babylonischer Punktation,” *Vetus Testamentum* 16, no. 1 (1966): 65–73, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853366X00430>; Outhwaite, “The Oldest Hebrew Fragment?”

Aramaic Levi, all first discovered in Genizah copies and now confirmed ancient by the Dead Sea Scrolls.¹¹

These oldest manuscripts shed light on periods of Jewish history when extant written sources are scant at best, but the great value of the Genizah is that it extends both ways, connecting Second Temple Qumran to late Ottoman Cairo. Our next question, then, is one that Genizah scholars rarely ask: “What is the latest item in the Cairo Genizah?”

This article explores that question by examining fifty-seven dated manuscripts and printed texts from the final years of the Cairo Genizah (1864–97) and beyond. It demonstrates that a wide variety of texts are extant in late Genizah fragments, some of which are significant sources for nineteenth-century Egyptian history. Furthermore, taken in aggregate, this corpus offers considerable material evidence of Jewish literary activity in late Ottoman Cairo, showing us what Egyptian Jews were reading and often where they sourced their books. It also raises questions about the usage of the Ben Ezra Synagogue’s genizah chamber during this period and the relationship between Cairene Jews and European antiquities “collectors.” Consequently, while these later documents still require further study, historians cannot always interpret them with the same “Genizah context” as medieval manuscripts from the Cairene Jewish community. This analysis joins recent calls for more critical investigations into the history of “the Cairo Genizah” as a monolithic provenance and the composition of “Genizah” manuscript collections around the world.¹²

Cairene Genizot in the Nineteenth Century

The phrase “Cairo Genizah” as it is best known refers to the hidden stores of manuscripts and printed texts that the Cairene Jewish community retired between the eleventh and nineteenth centuries. Most, though not all, of these manuscripts were deposited into the genizah chamber of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Fustat. Through the actions of numerous people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these deposits now reside in archives and libraries around the world. By far the largest portion is in the Cambridge University Library, but New York’s Jewish Theological Seminary, Oxford’s Bodleian Library, Manchester’s John Rylands Library, the British Library, and the national libraries of France and Russia also hold substantial collections. Practically none remain in Egypt. In the context of modern scholarship, “Cairo Genizah” also indicates the corpus of manuscripts in all these “Genizah” collections.¹³

Our inquiry into the latest part of the Cairo Genizah involves two questions that are interwoven with the history of its journey from Egypt to these mainly European library

¹¹ Solomon Schechter, *Fragments of a Zadokite Work*, Documents of Jewish Sectaries 1 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1910); A. E. Cowley and Adolf Neubauer, *The Original Hebrew of a Portion of Ecclesiasticus* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1897); Solomon Schechter, “Genizah Specimens: Ecclesiasticus,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 10, no. 2 (1898): 197–206; H. L. Pass and J. Arendzen, “Fragments of an Aramaic Text of the Testament of Levi,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 12 (1900): 651–56; R. H. Charles and A. E. Cowley, “An Early Source of the Testaments of the Patriarchs,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 19 (1907): 566–83. See also Rebecca J. W. Jefferson, “A Genizah Secret: The Count d’Hulst and Letters Revealing the Race to Recover the Lost Leaves of the Original Ecclesiasticus,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 21, no. 1 (2009): 125–42, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhc/fhp003>; and James Kugel, “How Old Is the ‘Aramaic Levi Document?’” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 14, no. 3 (2007): 291–312.

¹² Jefferson, “Deconstructing ‘the Cairo Genizah’”; Anne Regourd, “Arabic Documents from the Cairo Geniza in the David Kaufmann Collection in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences—Budapest,” *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 3, no. 1 (2012): 3–6, <https://doi.org/10.1163/187846412X624629>; Adina Hoffman and Peter Cole, *Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Geniza* (New York: Nextbook, Schocken, 2011), 38–39; Ben-Shammai, “Is ‘The Cairo Genizah’ a Proper Name?”

¹³ For general overviews of the Cairo Genizah and Genizah studies, see Stefan C. Reif, *A Jewish Archive from Old Cairo: The History of Cambridge University’s Genizah Collection* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000); and Hoffman and Cole, *Sacred Trash*. On the practice of “genizah” itself, see Mark R. Cohen and Yedida Stillman, “The Cairo Genizah and the Custom of Genizah among Oriental Jewry: A Historical and Ethnographic Survey,” *Pe’amim* 24 (1985): 3–35.

collections. The first relates to Solomon Schechter’s “discovery” and acquisition of the Genizah in the winter of 1896–97, as we ask: “What was the last item deposited in a Cairene genizah that Schechter could have acquired before he shipped his crates of manuscripts to Cambridge in 1897?” This question addresses a gap in Genizah studies, namely, we do not know the full extent to which the nineteenth-century Cairene Jewish community used the Ben Ezra Synagogue as an active genizah.¹⁴ Most Cairene Jews lived in Harat al-Yahud (Jewish Quarter)—not Fustat—until at least the 1850s, and with few exceptions they ignored or outright avoided the Ben Ezra genizah chamber until the 1880s.¹⁵ An answer to our question must thus consider all the *genizot* where Cairo’s Jewish community retired their old manuscripts and from which European Genizah collections derive their contents.¹⁶ These *genizot* include the Ben Ezra Synagogue, the Basatin Cemetery on the edge of Cairo, and an unknown number of excavation sites in Fustat.¹⁷

The second question is this: “What is the latest item held in a modern Genizah collection?” The question is relevant to historians who may utilize late Genizah manuscripts to study Egyptian history, as “Genizah” collections contain some items that postdate 1897, as well as some earlier texts that may never have been stored in *genizot* at all. Despite this fact, such manuscripts are still implied when contemporary scholars refer to the “Cairo Genizah” corpus. Most material from the Cairene *genizot* left Egypt with Schechter, either through his direct work in the Ben Ezra genizah chamber or via antiquities dealers who sold manuscripts to him and his associates.¹⁸ European and American collectors acquired many other “Genizah” manuscripts between 1864 and 1909, taking them directly from *genizot* and purchasing them from manuscript dealers.¹⁹ Jack Mosseri, a member of the well-known Egyptian banking family, then collected much of what remained between 1909 and 1912.²⁰ Due to the diverse circumstances of these acquisitions, there are now many manuscripts which are assumed to come from the Cairene community’s *genizot*, but which cannot be confirmed for certain.²¹ Most of these documents are undoubtedly genuine artifacts of Ottoman

¹⁴ Jack Mosseri, a Cairene Jewish manuscript collector who witnessed the aftermath of Schechter’s departure, seems to have been unaware that any manuscripts remained in the Ben Ezra genizah between 1897 and 1909. Upon their discovery, he remarks that he “naturally had them put in a safer place than the Ghenizah [sic].” He further notes that the emptying of the Ben Ezra chamber had prompted the creation of a new genizah in Cairo’s Isma‘iliyya Synagogue (now known as the Sha‘ar ha-Shamayim Synagogue); Jack Mosseri, “A New Hoard of Jewish MSS in Cairo,” *The Jewish Review*, no. 4 (1914): 210, 214. These statements imply that the Ben Ezra chamber did not see regular use as a genizah between 1897 and 1909.

¹⁵ Jacob M. Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, Studies in Near Eastern Civilization 2 (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 29–30; Jefferson, “Deconstructing ‘the Cairo Genizah,’” 430, 435.

¹⁶ See Ben-Shammai, “Is ‘The Cairo Genizah’ a Proper Name?”; and the recent special issues of *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World*, especially Sarah Stroumsa, “The Literary Genizot: A Window to the Mediterranean Republic of Letters,” *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 8, no. 2–3 (2020): 163–87. Though not always emphasized, the fact that “Cairo Genizah” manuscripts come from multiple *genizot* has been known since the inception of Genizah studies. Solomon Schechter describes his own activities in other *genizot*, and some early scholars did question the sources of certain manuscripts; Hoffman and Cole, *Sacred Trash*, 75; Nehemia Allony, “Genizah and Hebrew Manuscripts in Cambridge Libraries,” *Areshet* 3 (1961): 395–425.

¹⁷ Hoffman and Cole, *Sacred Trash*, 39, 75; Jefferson, “Deconstructing ‘the Cairo Genizah,’” 423n6; Jefferson, “A Genizah Secret”; Mosseri, “A New Hoard,” 209–11.

¹⁸ Reif, *A Jewish Archive*, 17; Hoffman and Cole, *Sacred Trash*, 78–79; Jefferson, “Deconstructing ‘the Cairo Genizah,’” 423n6.

¹⁹ Jefferson, “Deconstructing ‘the Cairo Genizah,’” 434–46; Reif, *A Jewish Archive*, 14–18; Stefan C. Reif, *Hebrew Manuscripts at Cambridge University Library: A Description and Introduction* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 29–32; Rebecca J. W. Jefferson, “‘What Cannot Often Be Obtainable’: The Revd Greville John Chester and the Bodleian Genizah Collection,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 31, no. 2 (2019): 271–89, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhc/fhy023>; Rebecca J. W. Jefferson, “Dangerous Liaisons in Cairo: Reginald Q. Henriques and the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Manuscript Collection,” *Judaica Librarianship* 20, no. 1 (2017): 21–51, <https://doi.org/10.14263/2330-2976.1212>.

²⁰ Mosseri, “A New Hoard.”

²¹ See Jefferson, “Deconstructing ‘the Cairo Genizah,’” 447; and discussion of several fragments below.

Egypt, but their different contexts mean that they cannot be evaluated with the same interpretative framework as earlier Genizah fragments.

The reason for this difference between earlier Genizah manuscripts and those produced after about 1860 is the rising interest of European scholars in medieval Cairene manuscripts. A large part of the historical value of Genizah fragments comes from the inherent context associated with them: regardless of the circumstances of their production, we know that they ended their lives in one of the Cairene *genizot*. We also know that, by and large, the people who stored manuscripts in these *genizot* were Cairene Jews, and the manuscripts that they elected to store were chosen due to religious and cultural motivations distilled from the intrinsic influences of their sociohistorical context. However, two foreign scholars—Jacob Sapir and Abraham Firkovich—permanently altered that context. In 1864, the pair persuaded the Cairene Jewish communities to grant them access to their *genizot*, and so became the first “modern” scholars to enter the Ben Ezra Synagogue’s genizah chamber. Sapir spent two days sifting for valuable manuscripts, but his search was hampered by fallen debris from the collapsing synagogue structure, and he reportedly left with only a few folios that he did not consider especially interesting.²² Firkovich took a greater interest in Cairo’s Karaite synagogue, removing thousands of manuscripts from its own genizah, but according to his letters, he also entered the Ben Ezra chamber and considered the site worthy of further searches. Exactly what—if anything—he removed from this genizah is unclear, though he does report taking manuscripts from a Cairene Rabbanite cemetery, likely the Basatin.²³

Sapir and Firkovich did not make any more headway digging through the Ben Ezra Synagogue, but the door had been opened, and by the 1880s, European institutions began to purchase a small trickle of Cairene *genizot* manuscripts via the Egyptian antiquities market.²⁴ These acquisitions accelerated between 1889 and 1892, when the Fustat community dismantled and then restored the Ben Ezra Synagogue. During this period, thousands of manuscripts previously stored in the genizah chamber were left in the synagogue’s courtyard or buried around Fustat.²⁵ This exposure allowed manuscript dealers and European collectors easier access to Genizah fragments than in prior years, and the 1890s saw a comparative flurry of “discoveries” that culminated with Schechter’s journey to Cairo. The persistent inquiries of foreign manuscript collectors—people like Solomon Aaron Wertheimer, Reverend Greville Chester, Reverend Archibald Henry Sayce, Elkan Nathan Adler, Antonin Kapustin, Agnes Lewis, Margaret Gibson, Count Riamo d’Hulst, Reginald Henriques, and indeed, Solomon Schechter—introduced a new, external motivation for the residents of Cairo to preserve their papers.²⁶ Any scrap that seemed sufficiently

²² Jacob Sapir, *Even Sapir* (Lyck, Poland: Meqışe Nirdamim, 1866), 1:21b; Jefferson, “Deconstructing ‘the Cairo Genizah,’” 433–34.

²³ Tapani Harviainen, “The Cairo Genizot and Other Sources of the Second Firkovich Collection in St. Petersburg,” in *Proceedings of the Twelfth International Congress of the International Organization for Masoretic Studies 1995*, Masoretic Studies 8 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 32–36; Zeev Elkin and Menahem Ben-Sasson, “Abraham Firkovich and the Cairo Genizot in Light of His Personal Archive,” *Pe’amim* 90 (2002): 51–95. On Firkovich’s biography, see Tapani Harviainen, “Abraham Firkovich,” in *Karaite Judaism: A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources*, ed. Meira Polliack (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 875–92.

²⁴ Jefferson, “Deconstructing ‘the Cairo Genizah,’” 437–39.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 439–42; Mosseri, “A New Hoard,” 211. See also Hoffman and Cole, *Sacred Trash*, 38–39.

²⁶ The Cambridge University Library’s Taylor-Schechter Collection is often singled out as one of the only Genizah collections that was not, on the whole, “purchased” on the antiquities market, but quite a bit of money did move from Schechter’s pockets to those of Fustat’s Jewish residents. Schechter complained vociferously about working with and paying Egyptian workers for their assistance in removing manuscripts from the Ben Ezra chamber. He also purchased some smaller quantity of manuscripts directly from local dealers. On Schechter and the other collectors named here, see Hoffman and Cole, *Sacred Trash*, 39–41, 71–78; Jefferson, “Deconstructing ‘the Cairo Genizah,’” 424n9, 438–44; Jefferson, “‘What Cannot Often Be Obtainable’”; Jefferson, “A Genizah Secret”; Jefferson, “Dangerous Liaisons”; Charles leQuesne, “The Genizah and the Scholarly Community,” in *Fortifications and the Synagogue: The Fortress of Babylon and the Ben Ezra Synagogue, Cairo*, ed. Phyllis Lambert (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994), 240; Reif, *Hebrew Manuscripts*, 30, 32; Reif, *A Jewish Archive*, 15–16; Solomon Schechter, *Studies in*

ancient could fetch a meaningful sum from the right foreign buyer, which would incentivize the preservation of items that otherwise might have been thrown away.²⁷ Manuscript dealers could mix such materials among the Genizah manuscripts that were already reaching European hands on the antiquities market. In fact, in 1898 (after Schechter departed), d'Hulst reports suspicions of some Cairene Jews carrying additional papers into the Ben Ezra Synagogue, supposedly with the plan to sell them.²⁸

In economic terms, the European money allocated for Genizah acquisitions can be described as a “perverse incentive”—that is, a financial incentive with an undesirable consequence not intended by its designers. The most straightforward type of perverse incentive is known as a “cobra effect,” based on a famous historical anecdote from colonial India where the British government placed a bounty on dead cobras. This policy led to a surge in cobra breeding and ultimately an increase in the cobra population.²⁹ In Ottoman Cairo, no amount of money could create new medieval manuscripts, but the perverse incentive of European payments for such manuscripts may have broadened the scope of what was stored in *genizot* and dealt on the antiquities market after 1864. The very act of pursuing Genizah manuscripts distorted that essential context that is so vital to earlier Genizah research.

This new situation means that late Genizah fragments must be evaluated with a careful eye to the status of the Ben Ezra Synagogue and the Cairene Jewish community at the time of their production, as well as the time of their possible storage in *genizot*. The following section surveys dated Genizah manuscripts and printed material from the period after 1864 as potential sources for the history of late Ottoman Cairo and as a corpus of evidence for the material history of Egyptian Jewish literary activity. It concludes with several late texts that do not belong to the “Cairo Genizah” in the traditional sense, despite their current residence in Genizah collections.

Dated Genizah Manuscripts from the Late Ottoman Period

The following is a survey of fifty-seven manuscripts and printed texts dated after 1864, comprising more than one hundred discrete classmarks (i.e., individual fragments or small groups of fragments with a single cataloguing number) from Genizah collections. All these items were produced while European collectors worked to acquire medieval Jewish manuscripts in Cairo, and many were likely sold without ever entering a *genizah*.

Limited solely to dated items, our corpus contains just a fraction of the Genizah material extant from this period. To some extent, such a corpus cannot be representative of all items produced after 1864, but for each fragment discussed below, there are many other late fragments of the same type that remain undated in Genizah collections. It is not currently possible to survey all of these fragments. Most are still uncatalogued, and even those with descriptions are often scattered almost randomly in folders that otherwise contain medieval manuscripts. Especially neglected are the approximately 12,000 printed classmarks from various Genizah collections, which include numerous post-1864 imprints but are almost completely undescribed.³⁰ This section is thus intended as a guide to help future studies

Judaism: Second Series (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1908), 8; and Janet Soskice, *Sisters of Sinai* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 213–14.

²⁷ Lawrence H. Schiffman, James C. VanderKam, and Stefan C. Reif, eds., “Cairo Genizah,” in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls (Electronic Edition)*, Oxford Biblical Studies Online (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com/article/opr/t264/e71; Reif, *Hebrew Manuscripts*, 29–30; Mosseri, “A New Hoard,” 208; Reif, *A Jewish Archive*, 15.

²⁸ Jefferson, “Deconstructing ‘the Cairo Genizah,’” 444.

²⁹ Horst Siebert, *Der Kobra-Effekt: Wie man Irrwege der Wirtschaftspolitik vermeidet* (Stuttgart: Piper Verlag, 2003).

³⁰ Most of the printed fragments are organized in so-called “printed folders” in the Cambridge University Library’s Taylor-Schechter Collection (e.g., T-S Miscellaneous 30-34; T-S New Series 25-30, 79, 85-86, 165-166, 191-192, 212-214, 266-270, 294-296, 313, 330-332; and T-S Additional Series 189-198) and the Gaster Printed Series

delve more deeply into specific aspects of the late Genizah corpus. As such, it is arranged typologically according to the topic of each fragment (marriage contracts, newspapers, printed religious texts, etc.) to give a sense of what documents are extant from this period, and each item receives only a brief description in its respective group. The fragments appear chronologically in Table 1. The information here comes from the limited descriptions that already exist for some fragments, new descriptions from ongoing efforts to catalogue the Taylor-Schechter Collection, and an independent survey by the author of the 12,000 printed classmarks.

The earliest manuscript in our corpus is British Library OR 10653.13, a bill of divorce written in a Yemeni village called al-Malha in 1865 (just a year after Sapir and Firkovich left Cairo). It confirms, with two signed witnesses, the divorce of one Habiba bint Yihya and her husband Da'ud ibn Da'ud.³¹ It is likely at least one of them moved to Egypt between 1865 and 1897, and the bill was probably stored in a genizah upon their death. A similar document is Rylands A 960, another divorce record from 1879 for a Jewish couple in Bombay, one of whom must have traveled to Cairo in subsequent years.³² The happier opposite also appears, with BL OR 10653.1 comprising a Yemeni marriage contract from 1880, again suggesting emigration from Yemen to Cairo prior to the document's interment in a genizah.³³ This movement coincides with several waves of Yemeni Jewish migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³⁴

Marriage and divorce contracts appear in Genizah manuscripts from all periods, so it is not surprising to find them among the later fragments. They would have been stored in *genizot* upon the deaths of their owners, but if they died prior to 1889, then it is more likely that the documents were buried in the Basatin than put in the neglected Ben Ezra Synagogue. It is also possible—though more or less impossible to confirm—that manuscript dealers sold these marriage documents directly to European collectors before they ever reached a genizah. BL OR 10653.1 in particular is on parchment and looks uncommonly old for a nineteenth-century document, which matches exactly the type of manuscript that most interested European scholars. It is also notable that all three of these manuscripts (BL OR 10653.1, OR 10653.13, and Rylands A 960) formerly belonged to the library of Moses Gaster (1856–1939) before the John Rylands and British libraries purchased them in the mid-twentieth century.³⁵ Shelomo Goitein remarks that these manuscripts are “a gleanings which remained after the rich harvest, which fell to the earlier collectors of papers from the Cairo Geniza,” and Gaster himself admits that he amassed most of his library via third-party sellers from multiple countries while he was the head of the Sephardic community in London.³⁶ As such, the precise find-spot of these manuscripts cannot be definitively located in the Ben Ezra Synagogue, nor can we be certain that they were in any *genizot* (or even in Cairo) prior to 1897.

at the John Rylands Library in Manchester, UK. See Nick Posegay, “Hebrew Printing and Printers’ Colophons in the Cairo Genizah: Networking Book Trade in Europe and the Ottoman Empire,” in *Literary Snippets: Colophons across Space and Time*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke and George A. Kiraz (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, forthcoming).

³¹ MS London, British Library, Oriental 10653.13, also known as MS Gaster 1673.13; S. D. Goitein, “Geniza Papers of a Documentary Character in the Gaster Collection of the British Museum,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 51, no. 1 (1960): 46, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1453738>.

³² MS Manchester, John Rylands Library, A 960.

³³ MS British Library Oriental 10653.1, also known as MS Gaster 1673.1; Goitein, “Geniza Papers,” 46.

³⁴ Amir Ashur and Ben Outhwaite, “A Jewish Marriage Deed from Nineteenth-Century Yemen,” *Chroniques Du Manuscrit Au Yémen* 25, no. 6 (2018): 42–43.

³⁵ Moses Gaster, “The Story of My Library,” trans. Brad Sabin Hill, *British Library Journal* (1995): 16; Goitein, “Geniza Papers,” 34.

³⁶ Goitein, “Geniza Papers,” 35; Gaster, “The Story of My Library,” 19; Jefferson, “Deconstructing ‘the Cairo Genizah,’” 447. Gaster became the *hakham* of this community in 1887; Geoffrey Alderman, “Gaster, Moses (1856–1939),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/33351>.

Table I. Late dated fragments in Cairo Genizah collections (1864–1929)³⁷

Date of Production	Place of Production	Classmark	Identification
1864	Vienna	T-S NS 26.270	Printed book of Leviticus
1864	Trieste	T-S NS 166.133	Printed Passover Haggadah
1865	al-Malha, Yemen	BL OR 10653.13	Bill of divorce
1865	Unknown	Moss. Xa.2.57	Introduction to a book list ³⁸
1866	London	T-S NS 26.172	Printed Latin book of Psalms
1866	Jerusalem	T-S NS 30.176	Printed edition of <i>Sefer ha-Goralot I-Ahitophal</i>
1866	Livorno	T-S NS 25.179	Printed book of weekly Torah readings
1867	Vienna	T-S AS 197.294	Printed book of Genesis
1868	Paris	T-S NS 267.60/T-S AS 190.21	Printed French drill book <i>Nouvelle méthode simplifiant l'enseignement de la lecture</i>
1869	Vienna	T-S NS 30.233	Printed book of Numbers
1869	Vienna	T-S NS 26.145	Printed Jewish religious texts
1872–97	Jerusalem	T-S AS 198.194	Printed wall decoration
1872–97 (possibly 1891/97)	Cairo	T-S Ar.41.93/T-S NS 306.145/T-S NS 192.11 a-c	Qur'anic writing exercise
1873–97	Alexandria	T-S AS 193.141-150 and various others ³⁹	Printed amulets
1875	Salonika	T-S Misc. 34.11	Printed edition of <i>Pirkei Avot</i>
1875	Undetermined	Moss. Xa.2.24	Letter
1875–97	Probably Russia	T-S NS 30.101/T-S NS 30.209	Printed Hebrew book with information on Russia
1875–76	Vienna	T-S AS 194.401	Printed Yiddish text
1876	Izmir	T-S Misc.34.21	Printed Ladino novel <i>El Salvador</i>
1876–77	Livorno	T-S AS 192.201	Printed Hebrew religious text
1877	Vienna	T-S NS 165.200	Printed book of Genesis
1878	Vienna	T-S NS 25.149	Printed book of Leviticus

(Continued)

³⁷ Some other relatively late dated fragments include T-S K2.92 (1821-1822); T-S K10.16 (1822-1823); Manchester Gaster Ar.47 (1826); T-S 10J13.27 (1827); T-S Misc.34.26 (1842); Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) VII.E.239 (1852); T-S NS 269.101 (1858); T-S NS 25.129 (1858-1859); T-S NS 340.2 (1859); T-S NS 266.10 (1860s); Rylands B 3129/AIU VII.D.117 (1861-1862); Rylands B 1938/Rylands A 376 (1862-1863); and Manchester Gaster Ar.345 (1863).

³⁸ Israel Adler, *Catalogue of the Jack Mosseri Collection*, ed. Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts (Jerusalem: Jewish National and University Library, 1990), 302.

³⁹ T-S NS 26.226; T-S NS 27.10; T-S NS 30.140; T-S NS 270.40; T-S AS 191.767; T-S AS 192.311; T-S AS 194.80; T-S AS 194.83; T-S AS 194.303; T-S AS 194.316; T-S AS 195.548; T-S AS 197.239; T-S AS 197.610; T-S AS 198.123; and T-S AS 198.128.

Table I. (Continued.)

Date of Production	Place of Production	Classmark	Identification
1878	Warsaw	T-S AS 191.716	Printed book of Psalms ⁴⁰
1879	Bombay	Rylands A 960	Bill of divorce
Probably 1879–82	Cairo or Alexandria	T-S NS 306.197/T-S NS 306.203	Arabic newspaper
1880	Yemen	BL OR 10653.1	Marriage contract
1880/87	Undetermined	T-S I3J15.25	Business letter
1880–97	Possibly Safed	T-S K10.13	Diagram of important grave sites
1880–97	Probably Paris	T-S AS 192.145	Printed French book catalogue
January 25, 1881	Istanbul	T-S AS 195.544-547	<i>El Tiempo</i> Ladino newspaper
1881	Cairo	T-S NS 266.113	Arabic wedding invitation
1882	Vienna	T-S NS 165.62	Printed book of Genesis
1882–83	Livorno	T-S AS 197.357	Printed Hebrew religious texts
1883	Cairo	T-S NS 28.85	End of printed Arabic book
1884	Vienna	Gaster Printed Series 175/ Gaster Printed Series 213	Printed Jewish religious texts
1885	Alexandria	T-S AS 145.108	Letter
1886	Cairo	T-S NS 28.312-313 and various others ⁴¹	Printed Arabic drill book
ca. 1885–90	Cairo	Rylands A 1053/Rylands B 2699	French wedding invitations
1887	Livorno	Gaster Printed Series 161	Unknown printed Hebrew text
1887/88	Cairo	T-S NS 85.96/Moss. IXa.8.9	Printed Hebrew drill book, <i>Hinnukh l-Na'ar</i>
1887–1918	London	Rylands AF 53	Personal papers of Moses Gaster, including a letter
February 9, 1888	Cairo	T-S NS 269.170	French wedding invitation
1888	Undetermined	T-S I0J19.25	Business letter
1888	Cairo	T-S AS 192.467	<i>ElFalah</i> Arabic newspaper
1888	Cairo (Bulaq)	T-S Ar.39.420	Printed Arabic book on commerce
May 1889	Cairo	T-S NS 268.24	End of printed Arabic book
1889	Vienna	T-S NS 165.17	Printed Hebrew Pentateuch
1890	Cairo	Moss. X.112	Bill of divorce
1890	Cairo	Moss. Xa.2.104	Marriage contract

(Continued)

⁴⁰ Discussed at length in Julia G. Krivoruchko, “A Tale of a Torn Title Page: T-S AS 191.716,” *Fragment of the Month (February)*, Cambridge University Library: Genizah Research Unit, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3OEGarG>.

⁴¹ T-S NS 191.39; T-S NS 269.112; T-S NS 269.167; T-S NS 269.321; T-S NS 297.210; and Gaster Printed Series 597.

Table I. (Continued.)

Date of Production	Place of Production	Classmark	Identification
1892	Yemen	CAJS Halper 374	Marriage contract ⁴²
1894	Cairo	T-S NS 305.55	Printed magazine title page
Spring 1895	Cairo or Alexandria	T-S NS 332.29	Arabic newspaper
Summer 1895	Cairo or Alexandria	T-S NS 297.284-285	Arabic newspaper
January 22, 1897	Leeds	T-S AS 194.391-393/T-S AS 194.408/T-S AS 194.414/T-S AS 194.419	<i>Jewish Express</i> Yiddish newspaper
June 14, 1899	Sanaa	Moss. VII.19	Marriage contract
1902	London	Gaster Printed Series 181	Yiddish newspaper
1929	Berlin-Steglitz	T-S NS 270.183	Printed book price list

A similar issue arises with Moss. Xa.2.104, a Cairene marriage contract dated to 1890, and Moss. X.112, a bill of divorce copied near Fustat that same year.⁴³ They are part of the “Mosseri Collection,” the corpus of several thousand fragments that Jack Mosseri collected in Cairo between 1909 and 1912.⁴⁴ Many Mosseri fragments are assumed to come from the Ben Ezra genizah chamber, and Schechter did leave some (mainly printed) fragments in the synagogue when he left Egypt.⁴⁵ However, we also recall Riamo d’Hulst’s claim that the synagogue’s custodians mixed additional papers in among the remnants.⁴⁶ Furthermore, a number of Mosseri’s manuscripts came from excavation sites around Fustat, and he mentions (hyperbolically) other manuscripts “formerly scattered in the hundred and one synagogues of the Musky [*sic*], the Jewish quarter in Cairo.”⁴⁷ In actuality, there were perhaps ten active synagogues in late nineteenth-century Cairo.⁴⁸ Certainly, many fragments now in European “Genizah” collections derive from the excavations of Mosseri (and d’Hulst, among others), but it would not be surprising if manuscripts from these various synagogues also made their way onto the antiquities market in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, and have since be attributed to the Ben Ezra Synagogue.

Speaking of marriage and Mosseris, there are three wedding invitations among the latest Genizah fragments. One is Rylands A 1053/B 2699, a French invitation to the Cairo wedding of Moise Mosseri (ca. 1855–1933) and Henriette Nahmias (1868–1943). The extant fragments

⁴² MS Philadelphia, Centre for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania, Halper 374; see Rebecca J. W. Jefferson, *The Cairo Genizah and the Age of Discovery in Egypt: The History and Provenance of a Jewish Archive* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2022), 182.

⁴³ MSS Paris, on loan at the Cambridge University Library, Mosseri Xa.2.104 and Mosseri X.112; Adler, *Catalogue*, 297, 304.

⁴⁴ Adam Guerin, “Mosseri Family,” in *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, ed. Norman A. Stillman (Leiden: Brill, 2010), <https://bit.ly/37MWGoX>; Kurt Grunwald, “On Cairo’s Lombard Street,” *Zeitschrift Für Unternehmensgeschichte* 17, no. 1 (1972): 18–20, <https://doi.org/10.1515/zug-1972-0103>; Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, 127–30; Mosseri, “A New Hoard.” Mosseri refers to these manuscripts as the “Cairo collection.”

⁴⁵ Jefferson, “A Genizah Secret,” 133; Mosseri, “A New Hoard,” 210.

⁴⁶ Jefferson, “Deconstructing ‘the Cairo Genizah,’” 444.

⁴⁷ Mosseri, “A New Hoard,” 211, 215; see also Jefferson, “A Genizah Secret,” 134, esp. n155; Hoffman and Cole, *Sacred Trash*, 39.

⁴⁸ Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, 60n36.

are from two copies of this invitation printed in highly calligraphic script.⁴⁹ Another French invitation is T-S NS 269.170, printed in Cairo on February 9, 1888, just one week before the marriage of Raphael Lagnado and Bienvenue Eliakim.⁵⁰ The third is T-S NS 266.113, this one printed in Arabic script.⁵¹ It invites the recipient to a ceremony on the afternoon of June 10, 1881, to be followed by a celebration at a house on the street Khan Abu Taqiyya.⁵² That street is almost seven kilometers away from the Ben Ezra Synagogue, but it is just a short walk from the Rabbi Moshe Synagogue in the Jewish al-Muski neighborhood. It is thus unlikely that the newlywed couple lived in Fustat in 1881, so this fragment may have reached Solomon Schechter from the Basatin or another genizah, rather than the Ben Ezra.⁵³

Other prominent members of Middle Eastern Jewish communities also appear in late Genizah material. For example, Moss. Xa.2.24 is an 1875 letter in Ladino addressed to Yom Tov ben Elijah Israel (d. 1890).⁵⁴ Yom Tov succeeded his father as chief rabbi of the Cairo community in 1866, holding that office until 1890 (just as European collectors were taking interest in Cairene *genizot*).⁵⁵ His successor, Aharon ben Shim'on (d. 1928), ultimately gave Schechter permission to remove what he liked from the Ben Ezra genizah.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, T-S K10.13 is a painted diagram of important grave sites in the Holy Land, possibly used for pilgrimage travel, which includes the grave of one Rabbi Abraham Ashkenazi. This name most likely refers to Palestine's chief rabbi from 1869 until his death in 1880.⁵⁷ As such, T-S K10.13 must have been produced between 1880 and 1897. Another document is T-S AS 145.108, a Judaeo-Arabic letter sent from Alexandria in 1885 and addressed in French to Brahim Aghion (Fig. 1). Like the Mosseris, the Aghions were a prominent business and banking family who played a major role in establishing Jewish schools in Alexandria.⁵⁸ There are also numerous late letters written by Jewish merchants, including two dated to 1880/87 (T-S 13J15.25) and 1888 (T-S 10J19.25).

Other fragments offer insights into the Egyptian education system at the same time when the Aghions were opening their Alexandrian schools, but they raise some suspicions about whether they ever made their way into *genizot*. Among them are numerous folios from the 1886 edition of *Kitab Tariq al-Hija' wa-l-Tamrin 'ala al-Qira'a fi al-Lughah al-'Arabiyya* (The Book on the Method of Spelling and the Practice of Reading in the Arabic Language), attributed to Egypt's director of education, 'Ali Mubarak Pasha (1823–93).⁵⁹ It is an alphabetic drill book for learning Arabic writing, and the book's owner inscribed his own name on the title page:

⁴⁹ MSS Manchester, John Rylands Library, A 1053 and B 2699. Both fragments belong with Rylands B 2977.

⁵⁰ MS Cambridge, University Library, Taylor-Schechter New Series (NS) 269.70.

⁵¹ The only Egyptian Hebrew-script printer in 1881 was in Alexandria, so this couple would not have had the choice to print in Hebrew characters, although that is not necessarily to say they would have preferred Hebrew script. It was increasingly common for Cairene Jews to write and print in Arabic script in the second half of the nineteenth century; Diana Rowland-Smith, "The Beginnings of Hebrew Printing in Egypt," *British Library Journal* (1989): 21; MariaLuisa Langella, "Jewish Writing in Arabic in Arabic Characters in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in *Approaches to the History and Dialectology of Arabic: Papers in Honor of Pierre Larcher*, ed. Manuel Sartori, Manuela E. B. Giolfo, and Philippe Cassuto (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 476, 482.

⁵² See Nelly Hanna, *Making Big Money in 1600: The Life and Times of Isma'il Abu Taqiyya, Egyptian Merchant*, Middle East Studies Beyond Dominant Paradigms (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 121.

⁵³ See Jefferson, "Deconstructing 'the Cairo Genizah,'" 423n6.

⁵⁴ MS Paris, on loan at the Cambridge University Library, Mosseri Xa.2.24. See description in Adler, *Catalogue*, 300.

⁵⁵ Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, 99, 103, 155.

⁵⁶ Hoffman and Cole, *Sacred Trash*, 68–70; Reif, *A Jewish Archive*, 79; Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, 99.

⁵⁷ Herman Rosenthal and Isidore Singer, "Ashkenzai, Abraham," in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Isidore Singer (New York; London: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1906).

⁵⁸ Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, 75–80; Brock Cutler, "Aghion Family," in *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), <https://bit.ly/3vGfgaa>.

⁵⁹ MSS Cambridge, University Library, Taylor-Schechter New Series 28.312; T-S NS 28.313; T-S NS 191.39; T-S NS 269.112; T-S NS 269.167; T-S NS 269.321; and T-S NS 297.210. These fragments may come from multiple copies of this work. See Lorne M. Kenny, "'Ali Mubarak: Nineteenth Century Egyptian Educator and Administrator,'" *Middle East Journal* 21, no. 1 (1967): 35–51. On the effect of Ottoman-era educational reforms on Jewish writing, see Langella, "Jewish Writing in Arabic," 479–80.

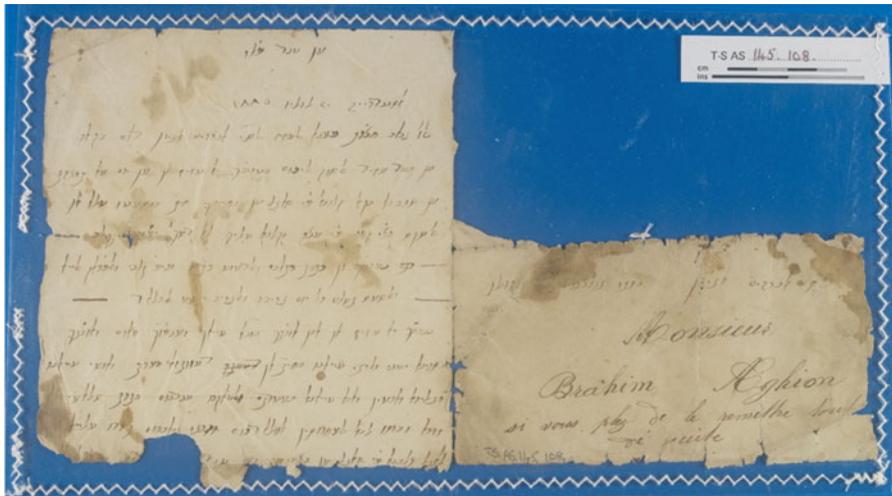


Figure 1. T-S AS 145.108, a Judaean-Arabic letter addressed in French to Brahim Aghion, sent from Alexandria in 1885. Image courtesy of the Syndics of the Cambridge University Library.

Malik Shaykh. Another pedagogical item is T-S Ar.41.93, which joins to T-S NS 306.145 and belongs with T-S NS 192.11a, b, and c. They comprise two drafts of a single section of the Qurʾan, seemingly a student’s writing exercise, and one leaf contains an ad hoc colophon attributing the work to *Madrasat al-Qarabiyya* (Qarabiyya School).⁶⁰ This moniker refers to one of two Cairene public schools that operated in the late nineteenth century. The first, a Cairene primary school for boys, was among the earliest public schools founded under ‘Ali Mubarak Pasha’s educational reforms. The second was a Cairene primary school for girls that operated from 1875 to 1879. The boys’ school operated from 1872 until at least 1915, so this manuscript must have been produced between 1872 and 1897.⁶¹ There is also an undeciphered note in the margin of T-S Ar.41.93 that might include the year 1891 or 1897, but this reading is uncertain.

Neither of these texts—the Arabic drill book and the Qurʾanic exercise—are what most people think of when considering the materials deposited in a Jewish genizah. They may instead have landed in rubbish pits or on the heaps of manuscripts lying outside the Ben Ezra Synagogue during the renovation period between 1889 and 1892. It is also possible that manuscript dealers mixed them in with other more genuine “Genizah” fragments to attract extra money from collectors. On the other hand, there are plenty of Genizah examples of Arabic teaching texts and writing exercises from earlier periods, so perhaps these two are not that irregular after all.⁶² Either way, they are both evidence of day-to-day activity in the early Egyptian public education system.

⁶⁰ MSS Cambridge, University Library, Taylor-Schechter Arabic Series 41.93; Taylor-Schechter New Series 192.11a-c; T-S NS 306.145. The colophon is on T-S NS 192.11a recto. See Nick Posegay, “Following the Links in T-S NS 192.11: A Qurʾanic Exercise from a Cairene Public School,” *Fragment of the Month (January)*, Cambridge University Library: Genizah Research Unit, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3LmClzM>; and Magdalen M. Connolly and Nick Posegay, “A Survey of Personal-Use Qurʾan Manuscripts Based on Fragments from the Cairo Genizah,” *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 23, no. 2 (2021): 27, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2021.0465>.

⁶¹ Amin Sami, *al-Taʿlim fi Misr fi Sanatayn 1914 wa-1915* (Cairo: Matbaʿat al-Maʿarif, 1917), 25, 30; appendix 3, 89; Hoda A. Yousef, *Composing Egypt: Reading, Writing, and the Emergence of a Modern Nation 1870–1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 55.

⁶² For instance, T-S NS 301.25 is a twelfth- or thirteenth-century Judaean-Arabic excerpt from *Kitab al-Jumal fi al-Nahw*, a Classical Arabic grammar by Abu al-Qasim ‘Abd al-Rahman b. Ishaq al-Zajjaji (d. 949). T-S Ar.42.145 is probably another Qurʾanic writing exercise from earlier in the Ottoman period. See Nadia Vidro, “Arabic Vocalisation in Judaean-Arabic Grammars of Classical Arabic,” in *Semitic Linguistics and Manuscripts: A Liber*

A large number of late fragments—in fact, a majority of our corpus—come from texts that European and Middle Eastern publishers printed at the end of the nineteenth century. T-S NS 30.176 includes five bifolia from an early printed edition of *Sefer ha-Goralot l-Ahitophal* (The Book of Lots by Ahitophal), a kabbalistic book of lots originally written in the medieval period.⁶³ The Jerusalem publisher Abraham Rotenberg printed this edition in 1865/66, and it must have made its way to Cairo before 1897. Sometime between 1872 and 1897, another Jerusalem publisher, Isaac Gashtsinni, printed a decorative wall hanging depicting famous sites in Jerusalem, which now survives as T-S AS 198.194 (Fig. 2). T-S Miscellaneous (Misc.) 34.11 is the title page of an edition of the Mishnaic tractate *Pirkei Avot*, printed (with Ladino translation) by Sa'adi ha-Levi Ashkenazi in Salonika in 1875.⁶⁴ Then there are around two dozen fragments in the Taylor-Schechter Collection from multiple amulets printed by Abraham Zaytuni at the Alexandrian press of Faraj Mizrahi.⁶⁵ Mizrahi's press opened in 1873 as the only Egyptian printer that handled Hebrew type, so these fragments cannot be older than that.⁶⁶ More specifically, T-S NS 85.96 includes two different versions of the title page of a Hebrew drill book (one with a star of David and one without) that Mizrahi printed in 1888. Additionally, a surprising number of late fragments come from Hebrew-script religious texts printed in Europe, including at presses in Trieste, Livorno, Warsaw, and especially Vienna.⁶⁷ Other printed European miscellanea include a French book catalogue from no earlier than 1880 (T-S AS 192.145), an early edition of a French textbook by Pierre Régimbeau (T-S NS 267.60/T-S AS 190.21), an unidentified Yiddish text from Vienna (T-S AS 194.401), a Hebrew book about Russia in the 1870s (T-S NS 30.101/T-S NS 30.209), fragments of Istanbul's *El Tiempo* Ladino newspaper (T-S AS 195.544-547), a Ladino novel (T-S Misc.34.21), and a Latin book of Psalms produced in London in 1866 (T-S NS 26.172).⁶⁸ Many of these books must have traveled from Europe to Egypt before 1897.

A bit closer to Fustat are fragments from three Arabic books printed in the 1880s. First, T-S NS 28.85 is the last page of a book printed by Muhammad Abu Zayd in 1883 at Cairo's al-Bahiyya press, and it includes a handwritten note in Hebrew characters. Second, T-S Ar.39.420 is torn from the title and index pages of a book on commerce, printed in the Bulaq district of Cairo in 1888. The leaf was reused for handwritten Arabic notes and accounts.⁶⁹ Bulaq is notable as the location of Egypt's first state-sponsored printing press, founded in 1820, so that may be the source of this fragment.⁷⁰ Third, T-S NS 268.24 is the final folio of a thirty-two-page text printed at the 'Amira Sharafiyya Press in Cairo in early May 1889. The recto also has several cursive Latin-script jottings in purple ink, with

Discipulorum in Honour of Professor Geoffrey Khan, ed. Nadia Vidro et al. (Uppsala: Uppsala University Library, 2018), 342-43; Connolly and Posegay, "A Survey of Personal-Use Qur'an Manuscripts," 3, 24.

⁶³ MS Cambridge, University Library, Taylor-Schechter New Series 30.176. Another Genizah fragment dated to 1416 preserves the same text (MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hebrew f. 56/32c). See Adolf Neubauer and A. E. Cowley, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, vol. 2 (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1906), no. 2821.

⁶⁴ On Sa'adi ha-Levi's career as a printer, see Dov Cohen, "Sa'adi ha-Levi Ashkenazi (Salonika, 1819-1903): An Updated Biography," *Sefunot* 29 (2019): 405-44.

⁶⁵ T-S AS 193.141-150 and various others (see Table 1).

⁶⁶ Rowland-Smith, "The Beginnings of Hebrew Printing in Egypt," 21.

⁶⁷ Nearly all the Viennese fragments come from the publishing house of Josef Schlesinger. For classmarks, cities, and dates for these imprints, see Table 1.

⁶⁸ On the Ladino novel, see Dov Cohen, "Missing Treasures: Tracking Lost Ladino Books," *Zutot* 17, no. 1 (2020): 64. He also identifies two more. The first is T-S AS 195.170, which he notes is late but undated. He gives an incomplete classmark ("T-S NS 28") for the second (*ibid.*, 64n37).

⁶⁹ MS Cambridge, University Library, Taylor-Schechter Arabic 39.420. Colin F. Baker and Meira R. P. Polliack, *Arabic and Judeo-Arabic Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections: Taylor-Schechter Arabic Old Series (T-S Ar.1a-54)*, Cambridge Genizah Series 12 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 345.

⁷⁰ Dagmar Glaß, "Creating a Modern Standard Language from Medieval Tradition: The Nahḍa and the Arabic Academies," in *The Semitic Languages*, ed. Stefan Weninger (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2011), 836-37, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110251586.835>.



Figure 2. TS AS 198.194, a decorative wall hanging printed by Isaac Gashtsinni in Jerusalem between 1872 and 1897. Image courtesy of the Syndics of the Cambridge University Library.

the lower right corner possibly reading “Mousseri.” These 1888 and 1889 dates are significant, being just before the Fustat community dismantled the Ben Ezra Synagogue for renovations. This is also the period when Greville Chester’s (and others’) persistent inquiries about the community’s manuscripts increased the financial incentive to sell them on the antiquities market, and any of these fragments could have been stored with the intent of bolstering the genizah inventory for sale.⁷¹ It is not entirely clear why else these latter two Arabic books would be in *genizot*. A similar item is T-S NS 305.55, the title page of an Arabic agricultural magazine founded in September 1894, which likewise seems to have no business in a *genizah*.⁷²

Other printed material includes fragments of Arabic newspapers produced in the 1880s and 1890s. Arabic newspapers operated in Egypt from the early nineteenth century onward, but most of the dated fragments do not indicate which publications they belong to.⁷³ One is T-S NS 306.197, which joins with T-S NS 306.203 to form part of an anti-revolutionary polemical article. The text is most likely a response to the failed ‘Urabi revolt of 1879–82. It may be noteworthy that the Alexandrian presses of the famous *al-Ahram* newspaper were destroyed

⁷¹ Ibid., 441–43. See also Reif, *A Jewish Archive*, 236; and Reif, *Hebrew Manuscripts*, 30–32, on Solomon Wertheimer’s role in moving *genizah* manuscripts out of Egypt in the 1890s.

⁷² See also Avihai Shvitiel and Friedrich Niessen, *Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections: Taylor-Schechter New Series*, Cambridge Genizah Series 14 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 439.

⁷³ Elisabeth Kendall, “Between Politics and Literature: Journals in Alexandria and Istanbul at the End of the Nineteenth Century,” in *Modernity and Culture: From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean*, ed. Leila Tarazi Fawaz and C. A. Bayly (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 331.

during the revolt, though they resumed printing in 1882.⁷⁴ T-S AS 192.467 is the front page of Cairo's *al-Falah* (*ElFalah/Salvation*) newspaper from April 21, 1888, helpfully providing both the AD and AH dates as well as the month Nisan (Fig. 3). T-S NS 297.284-285 is from a different newspaper describing political events in the summer of 1895, smack in the middle of the peak period of genizah acquisitions by the likes of Chester, Adler, Sayce, Lewis, and Gibson.⁷⁵ T-S NS 332.29 then appears to be from a slightly earlier issue of the same newspaper, with the verso including an article that describes a conflict between the British and French near Rangoon, and the recto listing the sale of goods at the court in al-Mahalla al-Kubra.⁷⁶ Located about 100 kilometers north of Cairo, al-Mahalla al-Kubra had a small Jewish community and maintained an active synagogue for at least part of the nineteenth century.⁷⁷

These newspaper articles conclude our search, with T-S NS 297.284 being the last fragment with a confirmed date (summer 1895) before Solomon Schechter emptied the Ben Ezra genizah in the winter of 1896/97. Of course, this survey only examined fragments that are specifically dated between 1864 and 1897, and there are many more Genizah fragments from that timeframe which cannot be dated so precisely. All of them are available as potential evidence for the history of late Ottoman Cairo, especially the history of Ottoman Jews and Egyptian Judaism in the context of European colonial control. They also offer a glimpse into the world of printing and manuscript production in Cairo while European collectors were actively seeking manuscripts from Cairene *genizot*. Once again, for that very reason, we cannot be sure that all these fragments were deliberately retired in *genizot*, let alone in the Ben Ezra genizah chamber.

The aforementioned fragments were all produced prior to Solomon Schechter's arrival in Cairo, but that is not the case for every folio in so-called Genizah collections. Because of the disparate nature of the Genizah corpus and the complicated compilation histories of library collections, from time to time certain items are mislabeled as "Genizah" when they cannot have been in Cairene *genizot* before 1897. This situation is troublesome for examining the latest Genizah material, as many of the misattributed fragments are relatively modern productions. One example is Rylands AF 53, which was once among the manuscripts that the John Rylands Library purchased from Moses Gaster's personal library in 1955.⁷⁸ This purchase included thousands of Genizah fragments, but it also encompassed many of the personal papers that Gaster left behind upon his death in 1939.⁷⁹ AF 53 clearly belongs with these papers rather than the Genizah material, as its fifth folio is a Hebrew letter sent to Gaster from one Israel Isbitsky. Isbitsky gives his own London return address, and he refers to Gaster as the *hakham* (wise man, leader) of the London Sephardi community, a position which the latter held from 1887 to 1918.⁸⁰ Despite this British provenance, the

⁷⁴ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Al-Ahram," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, August 17, 2017, www.britannica.com/topic/Al-Ahram.

⁷⁵ On these genizah acquisitions, see Jefferson, "Deconstructing 'the Cairo Genizah,'" 443–45; Hoffman and Cole, *Sacred Trash*, 77–78; and Soskice, *Sisters of Sinai*, 213–14. Agnes Lewis and Margaret Gibson did not intentionally source the manuscripts that they purchased in Cairo from the Ben Ezra Synagogue, but what is now known as the Cambridge/Oxford Lewis-Gibson Collection contains some manuscripts (perhaps nearly the whole collection) that came from Cairene *genizot*. For example, MS Cambridge, University Library, Lewis-Gibson Arabic I.150 belongs to the same codex as T-S Ar.27.55 and T-S Ar.53.12; Nick Posegay and Estara J. Arrant, "Three Fragments of a Judaeo-Arabic Translation of Ecclesiastes with Full Tiberian Vocalisation," *Intellectual History of the Islamic World* 9, no. 3 (2021): 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.1163/2212943X-bja10001>.

⁷⁶ Shvitiel and Niessen, *Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic Manuscripts*, 405. The typesetting, borders, and paper are similar to T-S NS 297.284-285 (dated 1895), and the recto text refers to a sale occurring on "Tuesday 23 April." The 23rd of April was a Tuesday in 1895.

⁷⁷ Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, 60, 179.

⁷⁸ MS Manchester, John Rylands Library, AF 53. See Gaster, "The Story of My Library," 16.

⁷⁹ Maria Haralambakis, "Box List of Moses Gaster's Working Papers at the John Rylands University Library, Manchester (Unpublished Handlist)," Manchester Centre for Jewish Studies, 2012, <https://bit.ly/3rSYUK8>.

⁸⁰ The address is 23 Lucas Street (modern Lukin Street), Commercial Road, London. See Alderman, "Gaster, Moses (1856–1939)." MS Manchester, John Rylands Library, Gaster Printed Series 588 also has a London address.



Figure 3. TS AS 192.467, front page of Cairo's *ElFalah* newspaper from April 21, 1888. Image courtesy of the Syndics of the Cambridge University Library.

University of Manchester Library (as of May 2022) lists AF 53's discovery location as the Ben Ezra Synagogue.⁸¹ The same is true for Gaster Printed Series 181, a Yiddish newspaper printed in London in 1902, which must also have been among Gaster's personal papers.

Another post-Schechter manuscript is Moss. VII.19, a Yemeni marriage contract copied in Sanaa on June 14, 1899. It is actually a replacement contract for a document that the Jewish couple misplaced, and at least one of them probably moved to Cairo between 1899 and 1912.⁸² While there are several Yemeni marriage documents among the latest Genizah fragments (see above), this one postdates Schechter by more than two years. It is most likely from one of the other Cairene synagogues where Mosseri claims to have gathered manuscripts, but could also have been stored in the Ben Ezra Synagogue after Schechter departed.⁸³ This raises questions about other Mosseri fragments that are not explicitly dated—how many of them were produced (or brought to Cairo's synagogues) in the fifteen years after Schechter?

Finally, there are a few more printed "Genizah" texts that highlight the difficulties of accurately tracking the history of library holdings since the 1890s. When Schechter returned from Cairo in February 1897, he set about sorting the Genizah material at the Cambridge University Library. Much to the chagrin of the librarian assisting with the project, his methods were sometimes disorganized and hazardous to the manuscripts' safety.⁸⁴ It seems that a few not-Genizah fragments were accidentally mixed into the collection during the subsequent half decade. At least six are from the Yiddish newspaper *Jewish Express*, torn out of

⁸¹ University of Manchester Library, "Genizah Collection: AF 53 - 5," <https://bit.ly/3LngvSb>.

⁸² Ashur and Outhwaite, "A Jewish Marriage Deed," 41–42. Jack Mosseri finished collecting manuscripts in 1912.

⁸³ Mosseri, "A New Hoard," 216.

⁸⁴ Hoffman and Cole, *Sacred Trash*, 83, 85–86.

an issue printed in Leeds just one week before Schechter finished packing the Cairene manuscripts for shipment to England.⁸⁵ It is probable that other non-Cairene material entered the Taylor-Schechter Collection during its first few years in Cambridge.

Schechter moved to New York in 1902, at which point the monumental project of sorting the Genizah fragments fell to Ernest Worman, but when Worman died prematurely in 1909, less than a quarter of the manuscripts had even been conserved.⁸⁶ The task of shepherding the Taylor-Schechter Collection then officially passed to E. J. Thomas, a specialist in Buddhism who had comparatively little time for Genizah work. Meanwhile, most of Cambridge's Hebrew specialists moved on to other projects that involved somewhat less contact with moldy unsorted heaps.⁸⁷ The last hope that the remaining fragments might be organized was effectively dashed in 1923 with the death of Schechter's long-time ally in the Genizah saga, university librarian Francis Jenkinson. His successor, A. F. Scholfield, did succeed in preventing the destruction of the unsorted material, but he failed to improve its situation. He removed the unsorted crates from the main Genizah research room, and shortly after moving to the modern university library site in 1934, they were relegated to the attic. Those neglected crates contained what would eventually become the Taylor-Schechter New Series and Additional Series—approximately 150,000 fragments in total—but they remained out of sight until Shelomo Goitein's visit to Cambridge in 1955.⁸⁸

The New Series emerged from these crates in the late 1950s and 1960s due to the efforts of Goitein and his students, and it contains what is by far the latest item that I have found in any "Genizah" collection. T-S NS 270.183 consists of several folios from a printed German price list of German, Persian, and Arabic books. Among them are a handful of titles from the 1920s, and beneath the heading "new" is the date January 1929.⁸⁹ This list is not from the Cairo Genizah, yet it is in the Taylor-Schechter Collection and must have been added to Schechter's haul after it arrived in Cambridge. What probably happened with these fragments is that between 1929 and Goitein's "rediscovery" of the unsorted Genizah material, some researcher or librarian used the leftover crates as their own sort of "genizah," depositing a few loose pages with "oriental" writing that they otherwise would have discarded.⁹⁰ This possibility is not exactly earth-shattering for Genizah studies, but it does raise an intriguing question: Was anything else added to the Cambridge Genizah hoard before it was fully sorted and conserved? If so, what, when, and how often? We cannot say for sure unless more of these post-Schechter fragments turn up. An investigation of these questions might begin by examining Worman's contributions to the Cambridge Genizah collections. It appears that after his death in 1909, the surviving Cambridge library staff added some of his personal papers to the Taylor-Schechter Collection for fear of accidentally discarding genuine Genizah fragments that were at his desk.⁹¹

These "not-Genizah" texts show some of the complications of working with later Genizah material, as the lines between production and acquisition become confused. They all

⁸⁵ T-S AS 194.391-393; T-S AS 194.408; T-S AS 194.414; T-S AS 194.419. See Hoffman and Cole, *Sacred Trash*, 78.

⁸⁶ Reif, *A Jewish Archive*, 238-39; Reif, *Hebrew Manuscripts*, 31. See also Rebecca J. W. Jefferson, "The Historical Significance of the Cambridge Genizah Inventory Project," in *Language, Culture, Computation: Computing of the Humanities, Law, and Narratives*, ed. Nachum Dershowitz and Ephraim Nissan, Lecture Notes in Computer Science (Berlin: Springer, 2014), 9-37.

⁸⁷ Reif, *A Jewish Archive*, 239.

⁸⁸ One crate was supposedly labeled "rubbish"; Reif, *A Jewish Archive*, 241-42, 245-46; Hoffman and Cole, *Sacred Trash*, 192-93.

⁸⁹ T-S NS 270.183, f.2 recto.

⁹⁰ There is not much use in speculating here, but some library staff in this period had a rather cavalier attitude about the fragments' safety. In 1927, library assistant B. C. Nightingale remarked that the unsorted crates held "nothing of any interest or value" and apparently wanted to burn them (Reif, *A Jewish Archive*, 242; Hoffman and Cole, *Sacred Trash*, 194-95). In the 1940s, Scholfield admitted, "I have once or twice rummaged through the box . . . They might from their size and condition be described as a dust heap" (Hoffman and Cole, *Sacred Trash*, 195).

⁹¹ The folder classified as CUL T-S Misc. 31 seems to contain this Worman material; see T-S Misc. 31.35, pp. 4, 10, and 26. Thank you to Ben Outhwaite for alerting me to these folios.

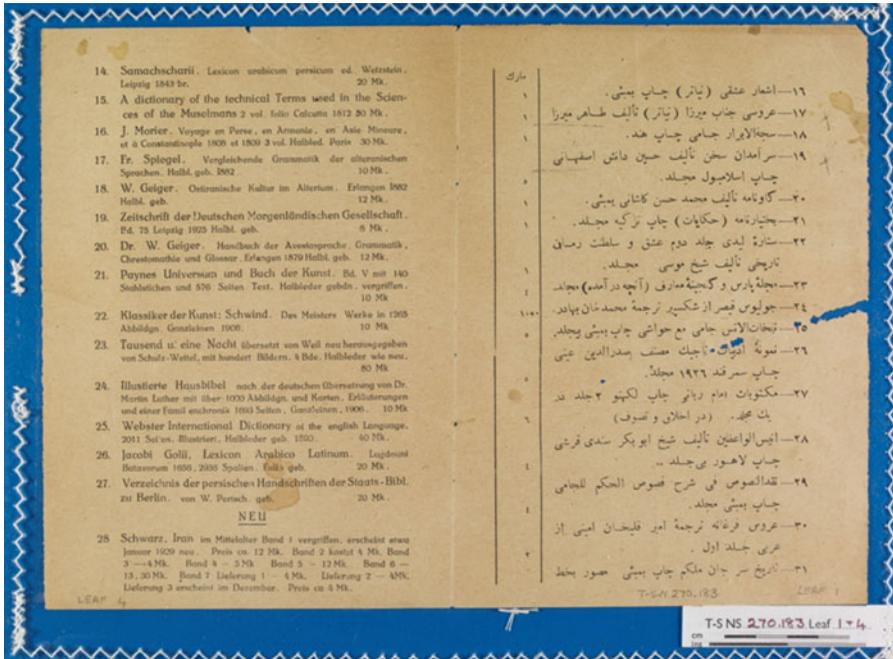


Figure 4. T-S NS 270.183, a book price list printed in Berlin in 1929. Image courtesy of the Syndics of the Cambridge University Library.

“officially” belong to Genizah collections, with the John Rylands, Mosseri, and Taylor-Schechter collections being three of the most well-known in the field. However, researchers accessing manuscripts via the Friedberg Jewish Manuscript Society database or the myriad institutional websites that host images of Genizah fragments could be misled by these classifications, as they appear divorced from the context of their acquisition and archival history.

The Search Continues

The Cairo Genizah is a remarkable resource for tracing Middle Eastern history between the seventh and nineteenth centuries, but many of its latest fragments (ca. 1864–97) remain unidentified and understudied. They include texts directly related to marriage and divorce customs, the history of Middle Eastern printing, Jewish migration patterns, book trade between Europe and Egypt, and the lives of prominent members of the Egyptian Jewish community. Altogether, they show a complex literary landscape in this community, one which drew materials in many languages from around the Mediterranean basin.

In contrast to earlier Genizah material, any manuscript or printed text produced after 1864 also has a confounding factor of European scholarly influence in its life cycle, as collectors and representatives of foreign universities sought to purchase Egyptian manuscripts for European libraries. This new financial incentive may explain why certain late items wound up in Genizah collections despite having no clear reasons to be stored in *genizot*—items like Arabic newspapers, textbooks, and writing exercises.⁹² It also makes it nearly

⁹² On the other hand, there are numerous medieval Arabic manuscripts, even Qur’an fragments, that have no clear reasons to be in Jewish *genizot*. See Geoffrey Khan, “The Arabic Fragments in the Cambridge Genizah Collections,” *Manuscripts of the Middle East*, no. 1 (1986): 54–60; and Mark R. Cohen, “Geniza for Islamicists, Islamic Geniza, and the ‘New Cairo Geniza,’” *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*, no. 7 (2006): 129–45.

impossible to say whether many ostensible “Genizah” fragments from the second half of the nineteenth century were ever in fact consigned to Cairene *genizot*, or whether certain fragments would have been deposited if there had been no financial incentive. There is no doubt that most of these late fragments are artifacts of late Ottoman Cairo, but we cannot be sure that anyone stored (or intended to store) them in a *genizah*.

Returning to our original inquiry: What is the latest item in the Cairo Genizah? The last dated item produced before Schechter’s arrival seems to be T-S NS 297.284, a fragment of an Arabic newspaper from the summer of 1895. Moreover, the latest item held in a Genizah collection is T-S NS 270.183, a German book price list printed in 1929 which never spent a day in a *genizah* (Fig. 4). The modern usage of the term “Cairo Genizah” to designate a corpus of manuscripts held in “Genizah” collections inevitably includes this not-Genizah text, and if it were not explicitly dated then we could not know whether it was added to the Taylor-Schechter hoard in Cairo or Cambridge. These qualifications are especially salient for the study of late Genizah fragments, as they were produced during a period of great change and colonial influence that complicates their simple attribution to Cairene *genizot* in the traditional sense.

These fragments should nevertheless be examined in the study of both Ottoman and Jewish history. However, to utilize them effectively, several steps must be taken. First, preferring to keep the focus on the late nineteenth century, this article has not dealt with any of the so-called new Cairo Genizah discoveries—that is, additional manuscripts excavated by Egyptian archaeologists at the Basatin Cemetery in the late 1980s.⁹³ The evaluation of these fragments alongside our corpus would allow us to map the composition of the late Genizah more accurately and better guide historians seeking to study it further. Second, using the fragments gathered here as a typological guide, institutions that hold late Genizah material must devote resources to the cataloguing and description of late items, including the neglected printed classmarks. Such cataloguing will require assistance from bibliographers and specialists in post-medieval languages, including Ladino and Modern Arabic, among others. Once this data is available, it will also be possible to compare subsets of late fragments with library acquisition records, potentially enabling archivists to detect correlations between manuscript subcollections and the activities of known Genizah collectors. Third, scholars from outside of Jewish and Genizah studies proper, such as Ottomanists, Arabists, and European book historians, can use this information to conduct more targeted studies of late Genizah material. Such studies would put these fragments into proper context with non-Genizah evidence known from nineteenth-century Cairo. They might also include more comprehensive surveys of specific types of late documents or deeper analysis of each fragment’s unique features. It will require cooperation from scholars of many adjacent fields, but the late dated items surveyed here—as well as hundreds more undated fragments—merit further investigation that may yet illuminate the history of late Ottoman Egypt.

Acknowledgments. I would like to thank Ben Outhwaite and Magdalen Connolly for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article and for bringing additional late fragments to my attention. I am also grateful to Nadia Vidro and Amir Ashur for their assistance in dating several fragments. This work was supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation [OPP1144].

⁹³ Cohen, “Geniza for Islamicists,” 139–41. See Hassanein Mohamed Rabie, ed., *Dalil Watha’iq wa-Awraq al-Janiza al-Jadida* (Cairo, 1993); Muhammad Khalifa Hasan and al-Nabawi Jabr Siraj, *al-Janiza wa-l-Ma’abid al-Yahudiyya fi Misr* (Cairo, 1999), esp. 145–207; and Sa’id ‘Abd al-Salam al-‘Uksh and Jahlan Isma‘il Muhammad, *Watha’iq al-Janiza al-Yahudiyya fi Misr* (Cairo, 2017).

Cite this article: Nick Posegay (2022). “Searching for the Last Genizah Fragment in Late Ottoman Cairo: A Material Survey of Egyptian Jewish Literary Culture.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743822000356>