Meanderings in the Arabic Literary Genizot

New Texts and New Contexts

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Abstract

The Cairo genizot (plural of Geniza) provide not only new Arabic literary texts but also new contexts. This study explores different kinds of context by presenting several examples of Arabic literary material found mostly in the Ben Ezra Geniza (BEG). The examples include three tales that also appear in the Arabian Nights literature, a Judeo-Arabic fragment of a Šīʿī kitāb al-ḡafr, a Muslim historical work dealing with Muḥammad’s letters to foreign rulers, a playful romantic polemical exchange between a Jewish man and a Christian woman and more. Thinking about different kinds of context is one of the ways to reconnect the study of the documentary and the literary genizot.

Keywords

Geniza – Arabic literature – Arabian Nights – document reuse – kitāb al-ḡafr – religious polemics

This study raises questions and suggests directions for future inquiry rather than provides answers or claims to exhaust a subject. As a social historian studying documentary material in the genizot with an enduring interest also in their literary material, I point to a series of interesting texts I came across during my meanderings in the literary genizot while exploring some of the larger issues they raise.¹ The two general arguments of this study can be stated suc-

¹ On the genizot of Cairo in the plural, see Ben-Shammai, “Is ‘The Cairo Genizah’ a Proper Name,” and Elkin and Ben-Sasson, “Abraham Firkovich and the Cairo Genizas.”
cinctly: First, the *genizot* provide not only new Arabic literary texts and textual versions, but also new contexts for the understanding of these texts. Second, thinking about different kinds of context is one of the ways to reconnect the study of the documentary and the literary *genizot*.

1 **New Texts**

The *genizot* of Egypt are often championed for their promise in providing previously unknown texts, or at the very least, new textual versions of known texts. As repositories of texts that have been removed from general circulation centuries ago, they often preserved texts and textual versions that have not survived through intentional preservation of manuscripts. Indeed, a recurring motif in the conference upon which this special issue is based was that, in various genres and works, the *genizot* preserved either unknown texts, or textual versions that predate other known manuscripts, sometimes by several centuries.

Rather than rehash well-known textual discoveries, this promise of textual versions can be demonstrated through a new example. One of the promising fields in which the literary *genizot* can make a profound contribution is the study of popular Arabic literature. This literature was often oral and did not enjoy cultural prestige, which means that its surviving manuscripts are relatively late.

For example, when it comes to popular epics, the earliest manuscripts are from the 15th century. Jews were part and parcel of Arabic literary culture and eagerly consumed this literature, contributed to it, and later deposited their writings in their *genizot*. Recently, Rachel Hasson-Kenath

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2 Indeed, this was the gist of the call for papers for the conference at The Institute for Advanced Study that was behind this special issue. The promise of retrieving new material has been behind many projects, see Hirschler, “Document Reuse,” p. 39.

3 See also the conclusions of Ahmed, “An Initial Survey,” p. 232.


5 Kruk, *The Warrior Women of Islam*, pp. 4 and 228–229. Krisztina Szilagyi is currently working on *genizot* versions of *Sirat ʿAntar* which might push backward the earliest known manuscripts. The first references to this literature come from the 12th century, see Hirschler, *The Written Word*, p. 166, and the next note.

6 That Jews eagerly consumed popular Arabic literature can be seen, for example, in Samawʿal al-Maṣrī’s testimony that he read popular Arabic epic tales such as “*dīwān aḥbār ʿAntar*” and “*dīwān Dī l-Himma*”; see Samawʿal al-Maṣrī, *Ifḥām al-yahūd*, pp. 77–78 (English) and p. 100 (Arabic). For the continuation of this interest until the modern period, see Schine, “A Mirror for the Modern Man.”
completed an eye-opening dissertation on manuscripts of such popular literature found in the Firkovitch collection. She found there manuscripts beginning from the 13–14th century, with the bulk of the material from the 16th–17th centuries. The Ben Ezra Geniza (BEG) also contains a significant amount of Arabic popular literature. While its items are generally of smaller size than the manuscripts Hasson identified in Firkovitch, at least according to language and script it seems that some of this material comes from the “classical Geniza period”—i.e. from the 11th–13th century.

A pride of place among the popular literary material are versions of tales that eventually became part of the Arabian Nights literature. The textual history of the Arabian Nights is complex but it suffices to say that the manuscripts in our hands are rather late and even the earliest of which, the Galland manuscript that served as the basis of Mahdi’s edition, dates not earlier than the mid-15th century. The genizot, both Firkovitch and the BEG, therefore can shed light on tales that ended up belonging to this literature well before we know them from other sources. Indeed, the role of “archeological” finds to the history of this

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7 Hasson-Kenat, “New Manuscripts.” Before Hasson-Kenat’s work, Victor Lebedev worked on Judeo-Arabic popular literature in the genizot. However, most of his publications are in Russian and thus out of the reach of most scholars. For a useful overview of his work, see Lebedev, “New Material,” and idem, “Cats, Mice, Thieves and Heroes.” Goitein also dabbled with Judeo-Arabic popular literature, see Goitein, “Townsman and Fellah.” This poem was recently republished based on an additional manuscript in Hasson-Kenat, “Qiṣṣat al-Maṣrī wal-Rīfī,” (with reference also to a Russian publication of the poem by Lebedev).


9 As any examination of the catalogues for the Arabic and New Series of the Taylor Schechter collections in Cambridge University library will disclose. For a study of one Jewish popular tale (qiṣṣat Hannah), see Schorreel, “An Edition and Translation of T-S Ar. 54.63,” also studied in Khan, “Vocalised Judaeo-Arabic Manuscripts,” pp. 210–215. See also the study of the Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic Cairene Purim scroll utilizing Geniza and non-Geniza manuscripts in Hary, Multiglossia in Judeo-Arabic. Beyond the linguistic study taken in these valuable studies, such texts should be examined also from a literary and historical perspective.

10 In terms of size, a notable exception is T-S Ar. 13.3 containing some 120 leaves of Sirat ‘Antar.


12 The online cataloguing data of the Friedberg Geniza Project (http://fjms.genizah.org) mentions some twenty manuscripts with tales from Arabian Nights in the Firkovitch collection (identified by Rachel Hasson Kenat) and five more from the BEG. Other fragments in the BEG are described as “in the style of Arabian Nights.” See also Kenat, “New Manuscripts,” p. 11 and Ahmed. “Initial Survey,” pp. 219–223. There are also many fragments catalogued in such general way as “A tale about a king and his vizier” or “A tale about Harūn al-Rashid and Jaʿfar ibn Barmak” that must be further examined. The three items presented briefly below are not included in these counts.
literature is well known. Nabia Abbot published a 9th-century paper fragment containing the title page and the first page of *A Thousand Nights* found in Egypt but originating probably in Syria. Goitein discovered the earliest use of the full title of *alf layla wa-layla* in a notebook of a 12th-century book dealer (warrāq) from the Geniza. Victor Lebedev and Rachel Hasson-Kenath have identified, described and published *Arabian Nights* tales, mostly from the Firkovitch collection.

In the past couple of years I happened to come across several additional examples. To give three examples not mentioned in the existing catalogues: one item is a Judeo-Arabic bifolium containing a part of the tale of “Iṣḥāq of Mosul, his Mistress and the Devil” (or as I like to call the tale: “The Curious Case of the Blind Singer at Night Time”). It relates how Iblis, under the guise of a blind singer, brought about a successful lovers’ tryst between Iṣḥāq al-Mawṣili and a beloved slave girl. Another item holds eight pages of a Judeo-Arabic version of the tale of “The Linguist Dame, The Duenna and The King’s Son.” In this fragment we follow the story of a young lad who enters a strange city

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13 Abbott “A Ninth-Century Fragment of the ‘Thousand Nights’”.
14 Goitein, “The Oldest Documentary Evidence.” It is useful to mention here that Lebedev claimed to have found in the Antonin collection of the National Library of Russia (then the Saltykov-Schedrin Public Library) a reference to the title *alf layla* (“*alf layla fīhi ḥadīṯ harūn al-raṣīd*) in a book list scribbled on the back of a 1070 acknowledgement of debt; see *NLR*, Ant. (Yevr. III) B 349, ed. Lebedev, “New Material,” pp. 34–35. However, this fragment has already been discussed by Scheiber who read *al-faḍl ... ḥadīṯ (?) harūn al-raṣīd*; see Scheiber, “Contributions to Medieval Jewish Booklore,” p. 151 and p. 160. Scheiber’s reading has been maintained with one slight (and probably correct) change (*al-faṣl* instead of *al-faḍl*) in Allony, *The Jewish Library in the Middle Ages*, doc. 93, p. 326.
16 I would like to thank Guy Ron Gilboa for helping me identify these fragments and discussing them with me.
19 T-S Ar. 37.149. See Marzolph and van Leeuwen (eds.), *Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, pp. 269–271. The tale is found in the Chavis manuscript. Since I did not have access to this manuscript, I used the translation in Burton, *Supplemental Nights*, vol. 6, pp. 89–111 together with Paris, ms Arabe no. 3637 (476r–504r) and no. 3667 (23r–31r) dated 1772 and 1678 respectively. See further information in Chauvin, *Bibliographie des ouvrages Arabes*, vol. 5, pp. 194–195, no. 114.

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where the local princess swore that she will only marry a man who can beat her in a wisdom contest and had already killed ninety-nine defeated suitors. The third item consists of two Geniza shelfmarks that originate in the same codex and together make six pages from the tale of “al-Ḥağğāg b. Yūsuf and the Young Sayyid”. This tale focuses on the exchange between al-Ḥağğāg b. Yūsuf, the fearsome Umayyad governor of Iraq, and a young mysterious man al-Ḥağğāg is bent on executing. In terms of script and linguistic features, these three Geniza items appear to belong to the classical Geniza period (i.e. 11th–13th centuries). As far as I could see, these three tales are known outside the Geniza only in much later testimonies. So these may very well be the earliest known testimonies of these tales.

All three items contain only part of the tale and do not contain a change of night or tale. Therefore, it is not clear whether they were part of a collection of tales or were independent tales. In later examples from the genizot, we do find transition from one night to the next. For example, we have ten leaves from a Judeo-Arabic codex that include numbered nights. Besides the early date of these three items, they are interesting for the version they contain. Generally speaking, these three geniza versions are substantially shorter than the versions preserved in later sources usually focusing on the essential plot actions while giving less space to descriptions and explanations of the characters’ actions and motivations. At the same time, at least in the case of the Geniza version of “Ishāq of Mosul, his Mistress and the Devil” the interspersed lines of poetry

\[\text{T-S Ar. 43.59 + T-S Ar. 52.136 (join suggested by the Friedberg Geniza Project [FGP]). See Marzolph and van Leeuwen (eds.), The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia, vol. 1, p. 199. The tale is found in the Wortley-Montague manuscript, on which see Moussa-Mahmoud, “A Manuscript Translation.” Here, again, I used the translation in Burton, Supplemental Nights, vol. 5, pp. 39–60 together with Paris, MS Arabe, no. 1363 (196v–205v), no. 1931 (113r–126v), no. 2738 (92r–98v) from 1789, the 17th century and 1762/3 respectively. See further information in Chauvin, Bibliographie des ouvrages Arabes, vol. 6, p. 34, no. 204.}\]

\[\text{Bodl. MS Heb. e 98.51 begins right at the start of the tale, however, it contains no indication of how the story is introduced. The version in I’lām al-nās begins with “qāla isḥāq b. Ibrāhīm al-mawṣili: baynamā anā dāt yawm fi manzīlī” and Bodl. MS Heb. e 98.51 begins with anā dāt layla fi manzīlī.}\]

\[\text{It seems that Victor Lebedev was the first who identified that T-S Ar. 36.68 (four leaves) is from the same codex as NLR, Evr. Arab. II 1276–1278 (each shelfmark is a bifolium from another part of the codex); see Lebedev, “New Material,” p. 35. Lebedev does not explain his dating of the manuscript to the 17th century. Lebedev points to another bifolium which contained numbered nights (nights 85–86) containing “The Hunchback’s Tale” that can be dated to circa 1700; see NLR Evr. Arab. II 1000, Lebedev, “New Material,” p. 36 (here the dating is based on another manuscript written by the same scribe dated to 1699).}\]
are almost exactly the same as in later sources. Thus a systematic comparison of Geniza versions with the later sources promises to help elucidate how these tales expanded and developed with the passing of time and how they changed according to the context in which they were told.

Even though the three Geniza texts are incomplete, it seems that they generally follow a similar plot trajectory as the tales found in later sources. However, on occasions they preserve interesting detail not found so far in other versions. To give two examples, in the Geniza version of the tale of “The Linguist Dame, The Duenna and The King’s Son” after realizing he has been given a letter that orders his own death, the protagonist arrives to a city “white like the sun” (madīna bayda’ ka-l-shams) and later he learns that the city is called “the city of shadow” (madinat al-ẓill). I am not aware of such a city mentioned in this tale or elsewhere in Arabian Nights literature. In the common version of the tale of “al-Ḥağğāg b. Yusuf and the Young Sayyid” al-Ḥağğāg asks the Young Sayyid a long series of questions. In the Geniza version, the young man tells al-Ḥağğāg how he met a strange horseman on the road who asked him these questions, suggesting that the tale had a somewhat different plot. A central part of the questions is trying to determine where the young man comes from. Each time he provides an origin, the strange horseman/al-Ḥağğāg gives an unfavorable description of the people of that place. This leads the young man to retract and say that he is not from there and then he is asked again where he is from, and the cycle continues. The Geniza version goes through Ṭāʾif, Basra, Mecca, Ubulla and Damascus (al-shām) before the text is cut off. Later versions of the tale contain some of these locations while mentioning others. To note a rather interesting difference between the versions, the description of Damascus in the later versions runs along the following lines:

23 The only difference in the lines of poetry is that all non-Geniza versions I checked contain the verse "sarā yaqṭaʿu l-ẓalmāʾa wal-laylu ʿākifū / ḥabībun bi-ʾawqāti l-ziyārati ʿārifū". The Geniza version has ḥabīr instead of ḥabīb. Both versions have things to recommend themselves and it is easy to see how the one could move to the other when copying from an Arabic script manuscript without diacritical marks.


25 A city in Iraq at the head of the Persian Gulf “famed as the terminal for commerce from India and further east;” see “Ubulla” in EI² (J.H. Kramers). True to form, the Geniza text describes it as “you are of those who possess great wealth who aspired to this world and forsook the next behind their back”. It seems that this location is not mentioned in later versions of this tale, which may be due to the decline of this city in later centuries and reflects the early date of the Geniza version.
al-Ḥağğāğ said (to the young Sayyid): “Where are you from, boy?”
He answered: “I am from Damascus.”
Al-Ḥağğāğ said: “you are from the most ill-fated (anḥas) of cities.”
“Why is that?” asked the young man.
Answered al-Ḥağğāğ: “Its people have coarse bodies, weak faith, they are neither Jews nor Christian, tax farmers of the provinces.”
The young man said: “I am not of them.”

The Geniza text has a slight variation. The strange horseman asks where the young man is from and when the latter replies that he is from Damascus, the first says: “you are from the land of the perplexed who are neither Jews, Christians, Muslims nor infidels, but are the supporters of Mu’awiyya b. Abi Sufyan.” Various explanations can be given for the difference. It is possible that because this was a text that circulated among Jews it could mention also Muslims and infidels. Perhaps once it was al-Ḥağğāğ who conducts the interrogation, and not a strange horseman, he could not be made to say that Umayyad sympathizers are godless. Finally, perhaps simply with the passing of time the harsh anti-Ummayyad stance was no longer relevant and was dropped. In any case, the value of these early versions contained in the Geniza is clear.

The expectation to find new texts must be adjusted by the nature of the genizot, especially that of the BEG. As the resting place for discarded texts, we should not expect to find in the BEG professionally copied manuscripts that are complete and well preserved. Most of the literary material in the BEG consists of separate leaves, bifolia and occasionally quires. Some were cast into the Geniza because they were damaged, while the conditions of others deteriorated in the centuries they endured in what Schechter famously described as a “battlefield of books.” The effect of the different genizot can be seen in the preservation of the different leaves from the 10 pages from a Judeo-Arabic codex of Arabian Nights mentioned above. The three bifolia that ended up in the Firkovitch collection are in a relatively good state of preservation. They are complete, and the text is almost entirely readable. The two
bifolia from the same codex preserved in the BEG, however, have a large hole in the middle, other smaller holes and areas of faded text elsewhere on the page.\textsuperscript{31}

Beyond the state of preservation and the fact that we often find a mere leaf or bifolium of much larger works, it is important to remember that many of the texts thrown to the BEG were drafts or copies of works made for private consumption by Jews who were not professional scribes.\textsuperscript{32} The result is that one often encounters a tantalizing fragment, yet is frustrated either by the partial preservation of the text, the state of preservation, or by the fact that the text is corrupt. As an example, we can look at \textit{ENA} 4100.20c (see Fig. 1). The first seven lines written on this piece of parchment are mostly lost and it is hard to say something definitive about them beyond that they probably contained an originally Muslim Arabic work here transcribed in Hebrew letters. Then, a new text begins with a rather unique invocation (“may the Giver of strength to the (?) be blessed”).\textsuperscript{33} Following the invocation, the text identifies itself clearly: “This is the book of the knowledge of \textit{al-ğafir}, the book of predictions.”\textsuperscript{34} \textit{al-ğafir} is the book or books that were supposedly in the possession of the Shi’i imams in which the destinies of nations and information on the future were recorded.\textsuperscript{35} Indeed, the Geniza text promises to contain information about past and future kings and states and the end of times.\textsuperscript{36} True to the conventions of this apocalyptic literature, the text claims that this secret knowledge was first given to the biblical prophet Daniel. In the last four lines the text becomes harder to make sense with a different hand correcting some

\textsuperscript{31} Compare T-S Ar. 36.68 with NLR, EVR. Arab. 11 1276–1278. See also Jefferson, “Deconstructing ‘the Cairo Genizah,’” p. 442.

\textsuperscript{32} The individual production of books for self-consumption is a general characteristic of medieval Jewish book production; see Beit-Arié, \textit{Hebrew Codicology}, pp. 86–114. The nature of the BEG as a resting place for discarded writings strengthens this general characteristic. See also Frenkel, “Book Lists from the Cairo Genizah,” pp. 247–248, and Olszowy-Schlanger, “Cheap Books in Medieval Egypt.”

\textsuperscript{33} From the Jewish angle, one is reminded of Isaiah 40:29 “He gives strength to the weary.”

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Hāḏā [kit]āb īlām al-[ğa]fr wa-huwa kitāb al-malāḥim.}


\textsuperscript{36} [... \textit{ma} kāna \textit{wa-huwa} \textit{wa-aydun} \textit{mā yakun fī āḫir shay’.}
of the obvious omissions.\textsuperscript{37} The fragment claims that the text was put in writing twelve years after the death of Muḥammad (al-nabī l-ʿarabī l-ummī) by ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib in the city of Yathrib (Medina). The later hand then added that it was written 354 years after their death, putting us around 1004 AD (if we count Islamic years from ʿAlī’s death).\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{37} Some of the completions are clearly necessary. For example, the original hand wrote “ibn Abī” which the later hand completed to “Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib.” This suggests that these additions may have been done either by the original scribe (writing in a much less careful hand) or someone who worked with him.

\textsuperscript{38} This does not mean that the fragment in our hand was written at this date. It is possible
Finding a fragment claiming to contain “the knowledge of al-ğafr” in the 
BEG is of substantial interest. Arabic literary works describe the interest this 
type of works aroused, and Geniza finds like this may give us a clearer picture how this esoteric and apocalyptic literature looked like in this period. Furthermore, the fact that such a fragment was found in a Jewish depository and written in Hebrew script tells us that the reception of this work reached beyond Muslim circles. Indeed, discoveries of such Šīʿī and pro-Alid texts suggest a promising new direction in Jewish Šīʿī studies. While a substantial number of studies are dedicated to tracing Jewish consumption and engagement with Šīʿī kalām, Jewish readership and interest in more popular Šīʿī religious and literary material still awaits systematic study. We have seen an example of such engagement in “the Tale of the Young Sayyid” mentioned above. Goitein and M.J. Kister identified in the Geniza a version of Imam ʿAlī’s ethical will to his son Ḥusayn in Hebrew characters abridged from Ibn Šuʿba’s Ṭuḥaf al-ʿuqūl min ʿal al-rasūl. Geoffrey Khan identified a Šīʿī prayer in Arabic script in T-S Ar. 42.191. The Geniza also preserved three fragments of what has been described as “an extraordinary document”: a letter of a Fatimid dāʾī addressed to a chief Qāḍī. Recently, Esther-Miriam Wagner and Mohamed Ahmed identified Fāṭima’s sermon of Fadak and a Šīʿī ḥadīṯ about ʿAlī in T-S Ar. 51.86a. The inclusion of seven prophets in magical instructions before a journey in T-S Ar. 43.185 may also suggest Ismaʿīlī influence. It would be interesting to explore whether Jewish interest in such popular Šīʿī material has to do with the well-known special relationship between Jews and the early Šīʿa or with the general pro-Alid sentiments found in medieval Egypt and Syria.

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that it was copied from a manuscript written on that date. It is also possible that this date is mentioned only to give an air of authenticity or antiquity to the text.

39 For later Jewish interest in literature that is related to al-ğafr, see Tobi, The Jews of Yemen, pp. 242–254.


42 Khan, “The Arabic Fragments,” 60.

43 Stern, Studies in Early Ismāʿīlism, pp. 243–245 and 253–256. The verso of this letter was later reused to draft a Hebrew literary text.

44 Wagner and Ahmed, “T-S Ar. 51.86a: Shiʿite and Karaite—a Fatimid mélange.”

45 For the relationship between Jews and the early Šīʿa, see Wasserstrom, Between Muslim and Jew, pp. 93–135. For pro-Alid sentiments in medieval Egypt and Syria, see Stewart, “Popular
The Fatimids, it must be remembered, maintained a regular propaganda effort among the dhimmī communities.\textsuperscript{46}

At the same time, the potential of such a textual discovery is substantially curtailed by state of the text. Not only the fragment from \textit{kitāb ʿilm al-ḡafār} contains only eight lines, but some of the text is clearly corrupt and with omissions and additions that hinder the understanding of its exact nature.\textsuperscript{47} Furthermore, since the text on the other side of the page is unrelated, the text may have been connected to what came before it but it may never had a continuation.\textsuperscript{48} Several further examples of limitations to the potential of textual discoveries in the \textit{BEG} can be found in the examples discussed below. These limitations must be born in mind when the promise of the \textit{genizot} for textual discoveries is justly advocated.

\section{New Contexts}

Beyond the promise of textual discoveries, the \textit{genizot} provide new contexts to literary Arabic texts.\textsuperscript{49} Below, I offer a preliminary taxonomy of different types of such contexts. However, since some of these types of contexts provide points of contact between the documentary and literary material of the \textit{BEG}, it is useful to first comment on this division before we delve into the taxonomy.

More than any other scholar, it was Shelomo Dov Goitein who established the division between the study of the documentary and literary Geniza. Throughout his writings he repeatedly declared that he focuses on the documentary material rather than literary material, which is usually considered

\begin{thebibliography}{49}
\bibitem{46} Stern, \textit{Studies in Early Ismāʿīlism}, pp. 84–96.
\bibitem{47} Arabic sources describe how such predictive works were prone to tampering and outright forgery to boost sales. Are we witnessing in the Geniza fragment such a practice? See the anecdotes from al-Hamaḍānī (d. 1127) and Ibn Ḥalādūn about 11th century Baghdad in De Goeje, \textit{Mémoire sur les Carmathes}, pp. 225–226, and Ibn Khaldūn, \textit{Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn}, vol. 2, pp. 198–199 (English in Ibn Khaldun, \textit{The Muqaddimah}, pp. 227–228).
\bibitem{48} On the back is what appears to be a list of towns (for example: ʿabbās, tḥikr, yḥī, ʿalāms). On the bottom of the fragment there is also some hard-to-decipher writing in Arabic script and what looks like magical symbols whose ink has chipped away.
\bibitem{49} For the importance of context for literary works, see the contribution of Sarah Stroumsa to this volume.
\end{thebibliography}
to be about 90% of the BEG. This division allowed him to successfully champion the idea that the documents of the Geniza are a valuable source not only for Jewish history, but also for general Islamic and Mediterranean social history.50

The division between documentary and literary is heuristically useful as documents tend to require different skill sets in reading and interpretation than literary fragments. It also facilitates better communication for scholars of the documentary Geniza with scholars of similar documentary bent, such as Arabic papyrologists who may be interested in seeing how a Judeo-Arabic bill of sale is composed, but less in understanding piyyut or midrash. However, the division between the study of the documentary and the literary, decades after Goitein’s successful intervention, is quite debilitating. As a social historian dealing with marital disputes, to take a convenient example, I want to know what the people whose marital problems I study read and wrote. I want to know what informed their thinking about law, love and marriage. The literary genizot is a major window into this world, whether I look at legal works, ethical and medical treatises or popular tales.51 Indeed, Goitein himself often made reference to Geniza literary fragments in A Mediterranean Society and assiduously read the works of scholars of the literary Geniza like Ezra Fleischer. The question is then how documentary and literary material can and should be brought together. Since Geniza scholars tended to avoid writing about their methodology, little rigorous thinking has been shared on this question. As will be shown below, some of the different types of contexts found in the genizot can serve as ways of bringing the study of the documentary and literary together.

The most basic type of context is the genizot themselves. As noted above for the fragments of Arabian Nights and al-ğafr, the fact that these non-Jewish texts ended up in a Jewish repository is important to the reception history of these texts. This means more than simply a testimony about the circulation of these works among Jews in a certain time and place. If they are in Arabic script, we should ask what it means that they ended up in Jewish hands and why Jews may have been interested in them.52 When we find these works transcribed to Hebrew characters, we must also think about the motivations of the transcribers who personally could peruse Arabic script manuscripts, but sought to disseminate these works among Arabic speaking Jews who found the

50 Goitein, “The Documents of the Cairo Geniza as a Source for Islamic Social History.”
51 In my dissertation I began thinking about how to bring closer together documentary and literary Geniza fragments, see Zinger, “Women, Gender and Law,” p. 33.
52 See Khan, “The Arabic Fragments in the Cambridge Genizah Collections.”
Hebrew script easier.\textsuperscript{53} Were they responding to demand? Did they have specific agendas in bringing these texts to broader Jewish audiences? Are the texts before us merely transcriptions into Hebrew characters or adaptations for new audiences?\textsuperscript{54} We also would like to know whether this was a one direction process or did the involvement of Jews in the circulation of these works effect the works that circulated in Arabic script or orally among non-Jews. For example, the question of Jewish involvement in the circulation and development of the \textit{Arabian Nights} literature has long been discussed, and the evidence from the Geniza may shed new light on it.\textsuperscript{55}

A second type of context is thematic. It is often possible to bring together Geniza evidence from different genres that involve a similar topic in a way that is mutually illuminating. This is perhaps the most obvious point of contact between the study of literary and documentary materials. I will limit myself to two brief examples of such thematic connections. First, the description of the people of \textit{al-shām} as “neither Jews, Christians, Muslims nor infidels” we saw above, finds a remarkable echo in a Geniza Judeo-Arabic letter written by a man who tried to put a stop to the plans to marry his niece to a certain Jew from \textit{al-shām}. The writer asks his sister: “What do you see in him? His knowledge? His merit? His mind? [... he is] depraved (\textit{fāsid}), he is neither Jewish, nor Christian nor Muslim.” Later in the letter the writer claims that it would be better to sell his niece to the Franks or marry her to a Sudanese. If her maintenance is too burdensome, she ought to be given to a Jew from Egypt who will be happy “to raise her like they raise all the orphans.” After all, “there are plenty of worthy young men in Egypt.”\textsuperscript{56} This does not mean that the writer of the letter knew the “al-Ḥağğāq b. Yūsuf and the Young Sayyid” tale, but it helps us understand that being “neither Jewish, nor Christian nor Muslim” means that someone does not have even the basic shared morality expected of a member of the Abrahamic religions. Moreover, it shows that the stereotype that this is typical of people in \textit{al-shām} had currency that went beyond literary texts. Second, in a recent article, David Torollo and I traced the Mediterranean peregrinations of a literary anecdote in Muslim, Jewish and Christian sources, in which a queen gives advice to her daughter upon the latter’s marriage.\textsuperscript{57} A

\begin{thebibliography}
\bibitem{53} For an interesting testimony about the inability of a Maġribī merchant to read Arabic script, see T-S NS 323.13+T-S 8j16.19 (join made with Friedberg’s “join suggestion” feature).
\bibitem{56} T-S 12.65 unpublished. This letter is mentioned briefly in Goitein, \textit{A Mediterranean Society}, vol. 5, p. 334 (where there is also a reference to a letter with the accusation “You do not have the faith of the Jews, nor even that of the majūs”).
\bibitem{57} Zinger and Torollo, “From an Arab Queen to a Yiddische Mama.”
\end{thebibliography}
Judeo-Arabic version of the advice was found in the Ben Ezra Geniza. In the different versions of the anecdote we find instructions like not to disobey the husband; when he is in a bad mood never to talk back to him; never to show him an upset face and always to appear beautiful before him; not to disrespect his relatives; and never ask him for things he will be hard pressed to provide. We found remarkably similar themes in a variety of Geniza documentary sources, from love magic, legal records of martial disputes and personal letters. Such thematic connections can be used to shed light on the often-complex relationships between normative texts such as marital advice and quotidian practice.

A third type of context is the identity of the people who wrote, copied or owned the Geniza texts. Occasionally we can tell the copyist’s identity from a colophon, but more often we can recognize his hand. Knowing who wrote, copied or owned a certain text may give us an idea about the class, profession or motivation of the people who had access and disseminated such texts. It can also lead us to consider the relationship between different texts associated with that person. This type of context is particularly productive in connecting documentary sources to Jewish literary sources. For example, in recent years scholars of liturgical poetry have published the liturgical poetry (Heb. pīyyūt) of several poets who also held a prominent position in the legal arena as attested in Geniza documentary sources. These scholars noted documentary sources in which these poets appear or ones they composed. However, much more can be done by way of integrating the literary with the documentary than merely mining documentary material for biographical data.

This type of context is also relevant for Arabic literary texts. In 1986, Mark Cohen suggested that the six leaves from “an Arabic common-place book” published by Richard Gottheil in 1934 are from Hilāl ibn al-Muhassin al-Ṣābī’s (d. 1056) epistolary treatise Ġurar al-balāḡa. With the publication of this work this identification can now be confirmed. The Geniza text may offer useful

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58 The shelfmarks are listed in Zinger and Torollo, “From an Arab Queen to a Yiddische Mama,” pp. 509–510 note 109.
59 See the many publications of Tova Be’eri, Sarah Cohen, Shulamit Elitzur and Joseph Yahalom.
60 A wonderful example of how the study of the literary and documentary can be fruitfully combined is Miriam Frenkel’s exploration of literary activity as a form of cultural capital and way of forming social ties among the Jewish communal leadership, see Frenkel, “The Compassionate and Benevolent” esp. pp. 220–221.
61 Gotthiel, “Fragments from an Arabic Common-Place Book.” Cohen, “Correspondence and Social Control,” pp. 40 and 47.
textual variants. However, the more interesting feature of the Geniza text is the identity of the scribe (and probably the original transcriber from Arabic script to Judeo-Arabic). Cohen identified the hand of the Geniza text as that of Ḥalfon ha-Levi b. Menasse, the clerk of the Jewish court in Fustat active between 1100–1138. Ḥalfon is known not only from the hundreds of legal documents he wrote, but also from letters in his hand: his own letters, letters he wrote for relatives, and formal petitions he composed on behalf of needy people. It is probable that Ḥalfon copied al-Ṣābī’s epistolary guide as an aid for composing private letters and petitions. Since, as far as we know, most of Ḥalfon’s writings were in Judeo-Arabic it was useful to have al-Ṣābī’s formulas in Hebrew characters. All this gives us a concrete idea about the social profile of consumers of al-Ṣābī’s work about a century after its composition. Further work may seek to find traces of al-Ṣābī’s formulas in the letters written by Ḥalfon.

The fourth type of context provided by the Geniza is the company a text keeps. We can distinguish two subtypes. The first is when we have more than one literary text written in the same codex, occasionally in the same format and layout. The second is when we have different texts, usually both literary and documentary, written in a way that suggests that the addition of later texts was not the original intention of the writer. The first type of context may give us a

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63 The most significant variance I noticed so far is that the Geniza text adds the phrase “al-ṣāḥib al-sayyid al-ağall al-mu‘ayyad al-muṣaffar al-‘ādil muhaḍḍab al-dawla” to the text “wa-lamā kāna mawlānā aṭāla allāh baqāʾahu” between mawlānā and aṭāla, ibid., p. 46.

64 Many (but by no means all) of the legal documents written by Ḥalfon were published in Weiss, “Legal Documents.” For a few examples of letters that Ḥalfon wrote: ENA 4020.30 and Mosseri IV.91.1 + T-S 829.15 are letters written by Ḥalfon to his brother-in-law. T-S 13J20.22 is a letter from Ḥalfon’s wife to her brother written in Ḥalfon’s hand; Mosseri v.355, T-S 13J8.14, T-S 12.57 + T-S AS 150.23 (join suggested by the FGP) are examples of formal petitions Ḥalfon wrote on behalf of others.


66 A fifth type of context, that will not be explored here, is physical reuse. Geniza fragments often bear the traces of physical, or non-textual use. As examples, see PER H 20, T-S 12.141 and the connection based on similar physical reuse between ENA 2727.46 and ENA NS 57.10. I hope to dedicate a special study to this topic in the future.

67 In this second subtype the reuse could be done by the original writer or copier, but the layout or the execution of the writing suggests that the reuse was not originally contemplated. This distinction is not watertight, and it raises a host of questions. For example, do we include a legal deed on which a related later entry was added (i.e. a fasl) or a letter on the back of which a response was written? However, for the present discussion, this distinction I believe is still a useful one. An entirely different case is the situation in which a literary and a documentary text are tightly integrated in a single text. For example, Ahmed studies two lines of a poem in T-S NS 102.104 and noted that they also appear in the Arabian Night literature; Ahmed, “Initial Survey of Arabic Poetry,” pp. 219–220. In fact, the three (!)
sense of how a text was understood, the interests of its consumers and where it was likely to be found. To give an example of this subtype, in the already mentioned study on the peregrinations of marital advice across the Mediterranean, the Judeo-Arabic version in the Geniza was found on a leaf of a bifolium. We have been able to find so far nine leaves (eighteen pages) belonging to the same codex. Besides the anecdote on marital advice, the codex contained also a Judeo-Arabic version of midrash King Solomon’s Throne (ṣifat kursī Shelomo ben David ‘alayhi l-salām) and at least a section from kitāb al-farağ ba’d al-şidda of Nissim ben Jacob ibn Shāhin (d. 1062). While the original setting of the anecdote was a marriage between a royal south Arabian tribe and a northern tribe, the inclusion of the Geniza version in a codex with patently Jewish works shows the naturalization of the anecdote into a Jewish context.68

The second subtype brings us to the topic of reuse which has been receiving much attention lately in Islamic studies.69 Studying the reuse of documentary and literary material can tell us not only how a certain text was understood, but also about the life of the physical item carrying the text and the archiving practices of its consumers.70 When it comes to the Geniza, Marina Rustow is currently finishing a large project on the reuse of government paper and what it tells us about the archiving practice of medieval Egyptian Jews. Yet the reuse of paper and parchment was a broad social practice and much remains to be done about the reuse of non-government paper in the Geniza.71 Guided by specific research questions, Geniza scholars have tended to focus on a particular text of interest and pay only cursory attention to the other sets of writing on a given fragment. This is one of the scholarly practices profoundly changed by the digital revolution in Geniza studies. Prior to the Friedberg Geniza Project, scholars often made a transcription from the original or from microfilm and continued working on the text mostly from their transcription. Today, when the images of

68 This naturalization takes place without changing the substance of the marriage advice. See Zinger and Torollo, pp. 493–495 and 504–505. In thinking about how the company a text keeps reflects on its reception, we were influenced by Riddy, “Mother Knows Best.”


the documents are readily available, we experience and internalize the visual and material aspects of documents with greater intensity, which leads us to ask new sets of question.\(^{72}\) Thus, we can notice new and interesting texts even on documents that were repeatedly discussed in scholarly literature. Moreover, the relationship between the different sets of writings may tell a story that goes beyond the content of each individual text.

The next two examples show some of the issues and questions raised by reuse while noting, as was done above, some interesting new literary texts found in the BEG. As far as I can tell, T-S J3.5 has not been mentioned in previous literature or described in any catalogue. It seems that it was originally meant to be a bifolium (see Fig. 2). On the right leaf is a Jewish text with the title: “from tractate rosh ha-shana.” It appears to be a selection of quotations from Tractate New Year of the Babylonian Talmud with interpretations, first in Hebrew and later in Judeo-Arabic.\(^{73}\) On the left leaf, we find a literary text in Arabic script written mostly without diacritical dots. While so far, I have not been able to identify its exact source, it was clearly part of a Muslim historical work.\(^{74}\) The text retells the well-known episode of Muhammad’s letters to foreign rulers. In the top of the page we read of Muḥammad’s letter to the Jupiter-worshipping king of the Turks: “Do not be elated with your possessions and do not be haughty for your appointed time is at hand. Your time is up. The crown is falling from your head and your aspirations and works will come to naught.”\(^{75}\) At the lower half of the page we hear that when Muhammad appeared in Arabia, Bāḏān, the governor of Ṣanʿāʾ, wrote to Khosrow II (کسرى) to inform him that a certain Arab has appeared claiming to be God’s prophet to humanity and that the Arab tribes are flocking to him.\(^{76}\) A selection

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\(^{72}\) For the interest in the physical and material aspects of Geniza documents, see Frenkel, \textit{Texts as Objects}; Rustow, “The Diplomatics of Leadership;” and Bohak, “Reconstructing Jewish Magical Recipe Books.”

\(^{73}\) Perhaps it was supposed to be used as an aid to the delivery of a sermon or sermons for the new year. Beginning with Deuteronomy 23:24 (“You must fulfil what has crossed your lips and perform what you have voluntarily vowed to the \textit{Lord} your God, having made the promise with your own mouth”), it may have begun with an exhortation to give charity, a common sermon topic.

\(^{74}\) The beginning of the second section begins by stating the source of the report. However, the text is written without the diacritical dots and I have not been able to make sense of it.\(^{75}\) T-S J3.5, recto, left side, ll. 2–3.

\(^{76}\) The text has him as Bāḏān b. Šahar or or \textit{šamal} or \textit{šamal} in Arabic sources he is usually called Bāḏān b. Sāsān and it is his son that is called Sahar. In our text Sāsān appears as an advisor to Khosrow. On Bāḏān, see the article “Bāḏām, Bāḏān” in \textit{EI} \(1^{2}\) (C.E. Bosworth). On this episode see Abū Ġa’far Muḥammad al-Ṭabarī, \textit{Taʾrīḥ al-rasul}}
and commentary on Tractate New Year in Hebrew script and a Muslim chronicle in Arabic script make for rather strange manuscript fellows.\textsuperscript{77} Regardless of the interest of each text in itself,\textsuperscript{78} the relationship between the two, or the lack of it, is worth pondering. Were the two texts supposed to be part of one codex (i.e. our first subtype)? If so, what sort of codex would join such texts together and who might have such disparate interests? If not, how did these texts end up as neighbors? If these questions are not enough, on the other side of these texts, someone later wrote a Judeo-Arabic legal formula for an acknowledge-

\begin{footnotesize} 
\textsuperscript{77} After writing this, I noticed Goitein’s observation that “many strange bedfellows have been found together on one Geniza sheet,” see Goitein, \textit{A Mediterranean Society}, vol. 2, p. 233.
\textsuperscript{78} Notice that neither Ibn Hišām nor al-Ṭabarī mention Muhammad as contacting the king of the Turks. Furthermore, in al-Ṭabarī’s account Muhammad first sent a letter to Khusrow who orders Baḏān to investigate, while in the Geniza text it is Baḏān’s initiative to contact Khusrow.
\end{footnotesize}
ment of debt together with a reed trial. This was done probably after it was clear that the two literary texts will not serve (or finished serving) their original purposes, whatever that may be.

Often the existence of several sets of writings on the same item is completely ignored. T-S 8J22.27 contains a petition to Mašliḥ Gaon, the head of Egyptian Jewry in the years 1127–1139, from a wife who has been suffering for fifteen years from a violent and neglectful husband. This petition was translated by Goitein in the 3rd volume of A Mediterranean Society in 1976, edited in 2000, re-transcribed in 2015 and mentioned in several other works. Unmentioned in all these studies, on the back of the petition there is a playful romantic polemical literary exchange between a Jewish man and a Christian woman: ‘She said: ‘show me what is your religion, perhaps I will desire (you/it)’. I said: ‘(I am) Jewish’. She turned me down, laughing: ‘I am looking to the Jews for a man with the true faith of their forefathers about He who came for us and their saying that the Messiah was crucified.’” While the text is incomplete, difficult to understand and at times probably corrupt, it is clearly of interest, if only because no other example of such romantic polemical literature between Judaism and Christianity in this period is known. It is not clear which of the texts, the petition or the literary exchange, were written first. It is also difficult to suggest any relationship between the two texts.

79 Interestingly, after acknowledging the debt, the debtor also releases the creditor from any claim or oath made in the past or in the future. Perhaps first there was a dispute and the debtor made various accusations against the creditor. Once the dispute was resolved, the debtor acknowledged the debt and had to release the creditor from his previous claims and demands.


81 As opposed, of course, to Muslims who claimed that Jesus was not crucified (Qurʾān 4:157).

82 The difficulty of the text must have been the reason previous scholars, who must have seen the text when they dealt with the petition, did not mention it. Goitein knew of the text as he made a preliminary transcription of it in his “typed texts.” From there it was uploaded to the Princeton Geniza Project with the title “Letter dealing with a relationship between a Jewish boy and a Christian girl” (I am not sure whether the title is Goitein's or not, in any case it is not a letter). What is not copied in Goitein's transcription are three difficult to read lines of Arabic script without diacritical dots.

83 The literary exchange was written in two columns with the piece of paper folded in the middle. Only three lines in Hebrew script were written in the second column and then the writing was interrupted. In the petition side, the text from the top of the petition clearly smeared on the bottom of the page. This may help an expert in codicology reconstruct which text was written first.
The last two examples show that often we cannot know why two texts ended up sharing the same medium. In other cases, it is possible to venture a connection, for example when we find literary advice for lovers in Judeo-Arabic on the back of a torn marriage agreement (ketubah). However, such connections are usually quite tenuous. To demonstrate the potential of thinking about the relationship between different texts on the same Geniza item, I turn to a more extended example from the documentary Geniza. ENA NS 17.31 is a piece of paper measuring 23.5 × 23 cm that contains five separate sets of writings, some written in different hands (see Fig. 3). The recto contains the lower part of a large and carefully executed mostly Aramaic power of attorney in a matter of inheritance written in Aleppo and dated to Tuesday, 8 August 1083. At a certain point in the following months, the top of the deed was cut off and then the fragment was flipped along its horizontal axis, and its verso was divided into two equal halves. On the right-hand side there is a fascinating legal formula for what can only be termed adoption: a man whose wife died at childbirth “sold” his sixteen-day old baby girl to another couple to raise and care for in exchange for five dinars. The left-hand side begins with a legal testimony of a commercial matter carried out in Fustat dated to Thursday, 4 April 1084. In the midst of line 8, however, the record gives way abruptly to an entirely different

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84 “Texts found on the same writing support can have different degrees of relatedness; in some cases, it is almost certain that no relationship existed. The reuse of commercially sold and bought second-hand writing material might account for such cases, a scenario that has been mentioned explicitly regarding the Cairo Genizah material by Goitein,” see Richter, “A Scribe,” p. 298 n. 4 (citing Goitein, A Mediterranean Society, vol. 2, p. 233).

85 T-S 12.537, unpublished. Since the Ketubah contains an immersion clause, it can be dated to after 1176, the year of Maimonides’ immersion enactment. The literary advice was written after the ketubah was torn in half, as was done when the wife received (or admitted having received) what she was owed after divorce or widowhood. After invoking God (“might is God’s alone!”), the text begins with: “I commend all of you lovers to obey all jesters (translation uncertain) and prostrate yourself before them in worship” (וְמִכְלַעַד נְזָזִים וְשָׂכַר אֶלֶּהָ ולאֶשֶׂךָ בַּעֲשָׁתוֹ לְאֵל灰色 דִּכְלַעַד נְזָזִים). Hollow letters denote partially preserved letters.

86 Yet I would argue that keeping an open mind even to tenuous connections may be the best way to detect in the future meanings and patterns that today seem far-fetched.

87 A legal formula presents the format of a legal document while replacing the specific details that make the legal act unique (time, place, names of legal actors, sums of money, etc) with fillers (such as ‘John Doe’). It is occasionally difficult to tell apart drafts and formulas as the latter were often derived from actual cases and preserved specific details and names. Furthermore, as Goitein notes about this document, drafts occasionally also used fillers to prevent the use of the draft as a legal instrument. The adoption text retained the names of some of the parties involved, but left out the place and time. Goitein considered it a draft, but I suspect that the neat layout on the page suggest that this was a formula derived from an actual case, meant to serve as a model in the future.
text written in a different hand (or at least with a different reed): a draft for the marriage agreement of a couple that divorced in Tyre but decided to remarry in al-Mahalla, a middle size town in the Nile delta. This hard-to-read remarriage agreement lists the monetary arrangements, and then continues to the other side of the page (i.e. to the recto) where several conditions for the marriage are jotted down on the margins of the Aleppo deed. 88 Finally, continuing on

88 The minimum gift of twenty-five zuz suggests that the marriage was never consummated.
the margins of the Aleppo deed, we find a draft of what appears to be a literary opening for a letter in rhyming prose, written in what looks to be the same hand as the marriage agreement.

This interesting array of texts did not escape scholars’ notice. In 1975, Goitein published an English translation of the adoption-like formula.\(^8\) In her 1990

\(^8\) Goitein, “Parents and Children,” pp. 65–68.
MA thesis on the Jewish community of Aleppo, Miriam Frenkel transcribed the power of attorney. In his 2007 PhD dissertation on commercial partnerships, Phillip Ackerman edited the commercial testimony together with part of the remarriage agreement. Beyond these studies, various other scholars have mentioned some aspects of this fragment. In studying “their” specific text in the fragment, some of the scholars noted the existence of other writings on the fragment, usually in order to date the text they were concerned with. However, the question what the different type of texts are doing together on a single piece of paper has not received a satisfactory answer. I would like to suggest a scenario for how these texts came to inhabit the same piece of paper: After the Aleppo power of attorney was cut (did the agent fulfill his role?) the bottom half was kept by someone who found the large blank space on the verso useful. This person took the deed with him when he travelled to Egypt, where he wrote himself, or allowed others to write, drafts and formulas of legal records on the verso. When the space on the verso was exhausted, he turned to write on the margins of the recto. When most of the paper was full, our writer used the remaining margins to draft what appears to be a literary opening to a letter.

Luckily, the fragment allows us to offer a probable candidate for who this person may have been. From the six people who signed the Aleppo deed, two names are familiar from other documents. The first is the writer of the deed, Baruch b. Isaac, who became the leader of the Jewish community of Aleppo around the turn of the 12th century and thus cannot be our person. The second is Joseph ha-Levi b. Halfon, a member (ḥaver) of the Palestinian Yeshiva and an accomplished poet whose movement from Syria to Egypt can be traced from several Geniza documents. In 1081, we find him in Tripoli (modern day Lebanon), writing a power of attorney and signing its validation clause. In 1083, he signed “our” document in Aleppo. Like many of his contemporaries,
Joseph left Syria to Egypt, probably due to the general instability following the Seljuk conquests. A letter, which can be dated to 1084–1100, was addressed to Joseph when he was already residing in Fustat.\footnote{Bodl. MS Heb. c 28.19. Joseph is asked to pass a message to ha-rav ha-muvhaq, i.e. Judah ha-Kohen b. Joseph. Judah was still alive in 1090, see Cohen, \textit{Jewish Self-Government}, p. 105.} In 1092 he signed the validation clause of a complicated debt settlement in the court of David b. Daniel in Fustat.\footnote{T-S 20.31.} In her edition of Joseph's extant poetry, Shulamit Elizur suggested to identify him with Joseph the \textit{excellent haver} who was the local Jewish appointed leader (\textit{muqaddam}) in al-Maḥalla in a well-known communal dispute around 1105.\footnote{Elizur, \textit{Sheʾerit Yosef}, p. 16; Cohen, \textit{Jewish Self-government}, pp. 322–334. Unaware of Elizur's work I made the same suggestion in Zinger, \textit{Women, Gender and Law}, p. 408.} It is possible to point to two further likely references to Joseph as the local judge in al-Maḥalla.\footnote{CUL Or. 1080 J276, ed. Zinger, \textit{Women Gender and Law}, doc. 19, pp. 405–410 and T-S 13J9.6, r.21–2, a letter to the community of al-Maḥalla where in lines 20–21 I read: \[ץכיו
הלףסויאנברואנרמ֗ק֗ג֗כרבחלאיאלומ
דעלרוצורמש\].} By 1117, Joseph was no longer alive, as indicated by the pre-nuptial agreement of his son, Ḥalfon ha-Levi.\footnote{T-S 24.75, ed. Ashur, \textit{Engagement and Betrothal}, doc. H-23, pp. 321–324. Other documents involving his son are T-S 13J8.15 (a 1147 letter to Ḥalfon); T-S NS 246 22, r.19, ed. Allony, \textit{A Twelfth Century List of Personalities}, pp. 127–133; and T-S K15.47, v. 1–2 (where we learn that Ḥalfon was a physician), see Goitein, \textit{A Mediterranean Society}, vol. 5, pp. 578–579, n. 38.} By 1117, Joseph was no longer alive, as indicated by the pre-nuptial agreement of his son, Ḥalfon ha-Levi.\footnote{There is also a degree of similarity between some of the writings on ENA NS 17.31 and Joseph's handwriting as it is known from the Tripoli deed. However, since generally speaking, I am suspicious of identification based on handwriting, I merely note here that the identification is not ruled out by the handwriting.} Joseph's known movements, Tripoli → Aleppo → Fustat → al-Maḥalla closely agree with the order in which the different texts in ENA NS 17.31 were written, Aleppo → Fustat → al-Maḥalla. Furthermore, Joseph ha-Levi b. Ḥalfon's association with the court wherever he went agrees with the writing of legal drafts and formulas, while his poetical interests fit with the rhymed epistolary introduction on the recto's margins.\footnote{The move from Aleppo to Fustat is not too significant because, found in Fustat, the BEG tends to attest to movements to Fustat from other places. However, the fact that ENA NS 17.31 and Joseph's itinerary include al-Maḥalla makes the identification of Joseph's as the carrier of ENA NS 17.31 much more compelling.} All this evidence suggests that it was Joseph who kept the Aleppo deed and took it with him in his later Egyptian legal career.\footnote{There is also a degree of similarity between some of the writings on ENA NS 17.31 and Joseph's handwriting as it is known from the Tripoli deed. However, since generally speaking, I am suspicious of identification based on handwriting, I merely note here that the identification is not ruled out by the handwriting.} Finally, it is possible that Joseph's son, who resided in Fustat as can be seen from his pre-nuptial agreement and was not associated with the court, had no need for his father's legal drafts and formulas so he discarded ENA NS 17.31 in the Geniza.

\footnotetext[97]{97}{Bodl. MS Heb. c 28.19. Joseph is asked to pass a message to ha-rav ha-muvhaq, i.e. Judah ha-Kohen b. Joseph. Judah was still alive in 1090, see Cohen, \textit{Jewish Self-Government}, p. 105.}
\footnotetext[98]{98}{T-S 20.31.}
\footnotetext[100]{100}{CUL Or. 1080 J276, ed. Zinger, \textit{Women Gender and Law}, doc. 19, pp. 405–410 and T-S 13J9.6, r.21–2, a letter to the community of al-Maḥalla where in lines 20–21 I read: \[ץculo
הלףסויאנברואנרמ֗ק֗ג֗כרבחלאיאלומ
דעלרוצורמש\].}
\footnotetext[101]{101}{T-S 24.75, ed. Ashur, \textit{Engagement and Betrothal}, doc. H-23, pp. 321–324. Other documents involving his son are T-S 13J8.15 (a 1147 letter to Ḥalfon); T-S NS 246 22, r.19, ed. Allony, \textit{A Twelfth Century List of Personalities}, pp. 127–133; and T-S K15.47, v. 1–2 (where we learn that Ḥalfon was a physician), see Goitein, \textit{A Mediterranean Society}, vol. 5, pp. 578–579, n. 38.}
\footnotetext[102]{102}{There is also a degree of similarity between some of the writings on ENA NS 17.31 and Joseph's handwriting as it is known from the Tripoli deed. However, since generally speaking, I am suspicious of identification based on handwriting, I merely note here that the identification is not ruled out by the handwriting.}
\footnotetext[103]{103}{The move from Aleppo to Fustat is not too significant because, found in Fustat, the BEG tends to attest to movements to Fustat from other places. However, the fact that ENA NS 17.31 and Joseph's itinerary include al-Maḥalla makes the identification of Joseph's as the carrier of ENA NS 17.31 much more compelling.}
Like many of his contemporaries at court, Joseph “took his work home,” and when he left Aleppo, ENA NS 17.31 went with him. During his legal career in Fustat and al-Maḥalla, he or the local court clerk used the shrinking empty space on the fragment for the drafting of three different legal records and finally the opening of a letter in rhyming prose. The blank space gave the item remarkable vitality, allowing multiple reuses for changing purposes until the space ran out and it was discarded in the Geniza. Combining the context provided by the identity of the writer with the context supplied by the relationship between neighboring texts allowed us to offer a likely reconstruction of the history of this item, view the personalized nature of archiving practices among Jewish court officials, and detect the connection between the movement of texts and people in the eastern Mediterranean.

3 Conclusion

Our meanderings in the genizot led us to new texts, but also to a variety of new contexts. These contexts can provide surprising connections between literary texts and points of contact between the literary and the documentary. Often, as it was shown, the explanation why a certain text was placed next to another or why was it copied by this specific writer escapes us. The purpose of this study was to raise these issues so that explanations can be suggested in the future. Moreover, even if no explanation can be given for a given fragment, it may turn out that meaningful insights could be derived from an aggregate of cases. In other words, what is needed is a systematic survey of reuse in the BEG. Such a survey could tell us what genres tend to get reused, for what type of genres items were reused, are there genres commonly found together, how much time could pass between the original texts and the reuse, was reuse merely pragmatic and frugal due to the cost of writing material, or were there deeper symbolic or cultural issues involved, etc. The usefulness of these questions

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104 For a parallel, see Hirschler, “From Archive to Archival Practices,” p. 17.
105 Similarly, we would like to know why some documents were used until every free space was exploited, while others with blank versos and plenty of available space were cast to the Geniza without being reused.
106 While the BEG is a rich resource for document reuse, it is not clear whether the same is true for the Firkovitch collection in St. Petersburg due to its different nature.
107 The question whether reuse is merely pragmatic or involves other cultural issues has been much discussed regarding architectural spolia, see Kinney, “The Concept of Spolia.” On the use of paper by Geniza scribes, see Goitein, A Mediterranean Society, vol. 2, pp. 232–233. For the price of paper, see Ashtor, Histoire des prix, p. 212 and Goitein-Friedman, India
can be shown by offering an impression that waits systematic confirmation. It seems that the most common genres for which paper was reused were drafts of legal documents, liturgical poetry, sermons and charity lists. If this impression is correct, it points us to the synagogue and the mid-level communal officials associated with it (court scribes, cantors and welfare officials) as the central spatial and social axes for reuse of the documents that ended up in the BEG. Involved with the synagogue, these officials had access to a rich supply of documents, probably intended for the Geniza. According to criteria that still await to be determined, they took what they needed, reused it and later threw it back to the Geniza. A systematic survey of reuse thus promises to supply us with a clearer image of the circulation of paper in the Jewish community of medieval Egypt and a better understanding of the nature of the Geniza.\(^\text{108}\)

Beyond the Jewish communities, the fact that in many cases no connection can be suggested between the texts found on the same page may hold important consequences for our understanding of the medieval Islamicate world. It suggests a world in which texts of diverse kinds circulated, mixed and were entangled together with little separation in terms of genre, religious affiliation, and occasionally even language. Of course, it can be argued that the BEG brought together things that were kept apart in the world outside of it.\(^\text{109}\) However, this cannot explain why we find on the same Geniza page a legal transaction, an account of Muhammad and a Talmudic selection and exegesis. Furthermore, a similar multilingual and multicultural diversity was found, according to Arianna D'Ottone, in the documents from the qubbat al-ḫazna in the courtyard of the Umayyad Great Mosque in Damascus.\(^\text{110}\)

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\(^{109}\) Understanding the circulation of paper and the position of the Geniza in it may help us get away from the pervasive language of chance when discussing what was thrown to the Geniza and what was not, in other words, the idea that the Geniza represent a random selection; see the general argument about papyrology in Bagnall, Everyday Writing, p. 28.

\(^{110}\) It is often assumed that the BEG represents a cohesive body of texts, an assumption that allows scholars to speak about “Geniza society.” I believe this assumption need to be made openly and interrogated. I plan to address this question in the introduction of the book I am currently writing. See also Jefferson, “Deconstructing the Cairo Genizah,” p. 448.

\(^{110}\) D'Ottone, “Manuscripts as Mirrors of a Multilingual and Multicultural Society.” An important difference between the genizot and the qubbat al-khazna is that while D'Ottone describes the Damascus find as multilingual and multi-graphic, she admits that it “shows no language interference. This means that we cannot find among (its documents) specimen of a ‘polyphonic text’ that reflects the simultaneous presence and active interaction
Hirschler’s work on the catalogue of the Ashrafiya Library in Damascus also shows not only the plurality and diversity of works held in a medium sized library, but also that a single codex could contain a very broad range of works.\textsuperscript{111} These parallels suggest that Schechter’s “battlefield of books” can be extended both to the single Geniza item, but also to the medieval islamicate world at large. By examining the physical and graphic aspects of the ‘sacred trash’ of the Cairo genizot, like the company a text keeps, its script, reuse and its destruction, it is possible to recover the entangled state of this world following the Abbasid ‘book revolution’ and the social process of textualization in subsequent centuries. Systematic study is needed to corroborate or refute this impression.\textsuperscript{112}

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\textsuperscript{111} Hirschler, *Medieval Damascus*, pp. 102–132. For the bewildering diversity of topics that a single popular work can contain, see also idem, *The Written Word*, pp. 188–191.

\textsuperscript{112} As a final testimony to the unexhausted capacity of the genizot for textual discoveries, I note another example. In 1905, Hirschfeld published T-S 6a1.1, two pages of a Judeo-Arabic poem attributed to Samaw’al (undoubtedly Ibn ‘Adiyā’); see Hirschfeld, “The Arabic Portion.” Hirschfeld’s publication led to a lively debate regarding the poem’s attribution and a search for textual parallels. As I was making the final revisions of this article, I came across eight additional pages of this fascinating text in DK 332 through Friedberg’s join suggestions. Guy Ron Gilboa and I plan to publish the whole text in a future study.
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