On the third day, when they were still in pain, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and came against the city unawares, and killed all the males.

**GEN 34:25 NRSV**

Then answered [Simeon (?) . . . ]
My brother! (You are) more greatly zealous than [all of our brothers (?)]
Rise! Enter in [your] wisdom!
Take my sword; it is yours [ . . . ]
and let us execute judg[ment . . . ].

**RYLANDS P1185–1 RECTO, 8–12**

1 The Sword of Levi in the Rylands Genizah Fragment

1.1 *The Story of the Re-discovery of the Rylands Genizah Fragment*

On the heels of the infamous circumcision deception, Levi and Simeon killed the Shechemites with the *edge of the sword* (לפי־חרב). For this, in Genesis, Levi and Simeon suffered rebuke from their father, Jacob (Gen 34:25–30). On his deathbed, Jacob condemned Levi and Simeon's *weapons of violence* (כלי חמס).
and cursed them for their anger (Gen 49:5–7). With the re-discovery of the Rylands Genizah fragment of the Aramaic Levi Document (ALD), one of the more innovative attempts by Levi’s descendants to rehabilitate their priestly ancestor has now been recovered.

The story of the discovery, migration, and re-discovery of the fragments of ALD, one of the most ancient Jewish texts extant from the Second Temple period, spans more than a century. It begins in the Egyptian Cairo Genizah at the end of the nineteenth century, moves to the libraries of Oxford and Cambridge in the early 1900’s, wends its way through the Qumran desert caves in the 1940’s, only to return in 2008 to England, to the John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester where the Rylands Genizah fragment was waiting to be identified.

This essay is divided into three parts, each exploring the subtly posed answers to subtextual questions that are familiar from the history of traditions concerning Levi and the legitimacy of his wielding of the sword (חרב) against Shechem: Against whom was the sword authorised? In whose hand? By whom and how?

Part I introduces and translates the Rylands Genizah fragment, examining its contribution to the interpretation of the Shechem and Dinah affair in ALD 1–2. Part II introduces Levi as a narrator-candidate of the entirety of ALD and explores the subsequent implications for interpretation of “Levi and the sword.” Part III contextualises the newly reconstructed ALD within an abbreviated but representative history of early Jewish “Levi and the sword” traditions. But first, we tell the story of the re-discovery of this remarkable fragment.

1 Unless otherwise indicated, sword represents the Hebrew חרב throughout the essay.


3 Marty Abegg’s life work in producing searchable electronic concordances of the Dead Sea Scrolls was invaluable for setting the Rylands Genizah fragment within a history of Levi traditions. Hebrew and Aramaic transcriptions of the non-biblical scrolls are from the official editions in the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert series (DJD) as transcribed electronically in Martin G. Abegg, Jr., “Qumran, Non-biblical Manuscripts,” Accordance Bible Software Version 4.1.