

A Thousand-Year-Old Biblical Manuscript Rediscovered in Cairo: The Future of the Egyptian Jewish Past



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> One should be careful regarding the oversized letters, the miniature letters, the letters that are dotted, the letters that have abnormal shapes, [. . .] and the crooked letters that the scribes have copied from each other in a chain of tradition.
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> Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, The Laws of Torah Scrolls, *7*, 8

Nearly a thousand years have passed since Zechariah Ben 'Anan finished the demanding work of copying *Ketuvim* (Writings), the third part of the Hebrew Bible, in a manuscript that I found by sheer happenstance on a dusty shelf in the Karaite synagogue of Cairo in late July 2017. I arrived at the Egyptian capital for the launch of a project initiated by Magda Haroun, president of the local Jewish community, and her deputy Samy Ibrahim, documenting the synagogues of today's Cairo. I soon found myself involved in yet another vast and challenging project—that of delving into the universe of rare manuscripts that were guarded for hundreds of years by local Rabbanite and Karaite Jews. It may seem that there is little in common between the two projects but in fact their affinity is strong and meaningful, as they both bear on the future of the

This essay could not have been written without the invaluable help and support of Magda Silvera Chehata Haroun and Samy Ibrahim. They spared neither time nor effort to help me in every possible way, and they have earned my deepest gratitude. A grant from the American Research Center in Egypt allowed us to conduct a wide survey of the synagogues in Cairo, including their historic and architectural documentation. I have benefited tremendously from the intellectual exchange with Hilla Jacobson-Meital, who was always ready to discuss my ideas and offer insight. Amitai Glass skillfully served as a research assistant at the inception of this study.

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Egyptian Jewish past. In addition to describing the rediscovery of Zechariah Ben 'Anan's manuscript (hereafter ZBAM) and analyzing its features, this essay discusses the urban and social context in which the Karaite community in Cairo flourished and maintained its collection of rare manuscripts and books for centuries. At the end of the essay, I delve into the issue of preserving the rare corpus that includes this manuscript. The fate of ZBAM offers an exemplar for the broader concern of how to ensure the safety and good handling of assets belonging to the Jewish community in Egypt, where only a handful of Jews remain.

REDISCOVERING THE KARAITES' CORPUS

In one of my recurring trips to Egypt, I flew from Tel Aviv to Cairo on July 24, 2017.[1] A nun in a white habit was seated next to me, holding the beads of the rosary around her neck and whispering an inaudible prayer. "Perhaps this was my last visit to Jerusalem," she noted after a long pause, and a conversation ensued about her impressions of the Holy Land. She had dedicated her life to serving her lord Jesus; she was then almost eighty years old. The exhilarating sight of the Nile Delta was visible from the window, merging with the Mediterranean coastline in the north, while the golden dunes of the Sahara Desert spread from west to east. "Egypt is the gift of the Nile" is not a cliché but rather a reality that has molded the lives of this land's inhabitants for thousands of years. From the metal bird's eye view, fertile land is clearly being ceded to developed space where over one hundred million Egyptians crowd together. Only an hour has passed since takeoff, and the plane is now descending toward landing in the Egyptian capital. The view is amazing. Cairo dominates, a huge urban space occupied by some twenty million. The Nile River meanders northward through the city. On the 26 July Bridge an endless convoy of vehicles advances slowly. Under the bridge is the 'Abbasiya quarter, now a crowded lower-middle-class neighborhood, and once home to thousands of Jews.

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, Cairo's Jews were centered in the Zuwaila quarter, which was consequently dubbed "the neighborhood of the Jews" (Hart al-Yahud). Its narrow streets and alleys were the home of thirteen synagogues (ten Sephardic, two Karaite, and one Ashkenazi), which functioned as centers of communal activity. Like Jew-

1. Over the years I made a point of writing down my impressions during my trips to Egypt, nearly always on the same day or the next. The descriptions in this essay are based on the journal I kept during the six visits I made to Cairo in the years 2017–19.

ish communities elsewhere, Cairo's synagogues served not only as places of worship and reading the Torah but as spiritual and cultural centers as well, incorporating a wide range of activities intended to acquire and preserve knowledge and traditions practiced by both Rabbanite and Karaite Jews.[2]

Hart al-Yahud gradually emptied of its original inhabitants by the turn of the twentieth century. Many Jewish families moved to Cairo's new neighborhoods, in accordance with their financial abilities. Cairo's chief rabbi, Raphael Ben-Shimon (1891–1921), was a contemporary witness to this process: "In the last few years, due to the expansion of the city, its lots and streets, most of the population moved out of the Jewish streets and settled in the city's suburbs, whose streets are wide and clean and whose air is fresh, and there too they built luxurious and beautiful synagogues."[3] Most of the Jewish families that relocated to 'Abbasiya settled in the centrally located Daher and Sakakini streets. This area gradually became a magnet for ever more Jewish families. According to the Egyptian census, in 1897 the Jewish population of 'Abbasiya numbered 1,038, and by 1937 the neighborhood already housed 12,964 Jews (about a third of Cairene Jewry). 'Abbasiya steadily became a typical middle-class neighborhood, in which Rabbanite and Karaite Jews lived in harmony, with each community preserving its own customs and unique flavor.

The Karaite community inaugurated a new synagogue in 'Abbasiya in 1933. At the initiative of Toviyah Ben Simḥah Levi Babovich (1879–1956), who had just been named the religious leader (*ḥakham*) of Egypt's Karaite community, the exquisite synagogue was named after Moshe/Moussa Der'i, the preeminent medieval Karaite poet. It was constructed in the wake of dramatic changes that affected Egyptian society and the local Jewish communities along with it. The completion of the Suez Canal in 1869 was the impetus for unprecedented commercial and technological development. By virtue of the protection afforded by British troops following the occupation of the Nile Valley in 1882, tens of thousands of minority and foreign entrepreneurs came to dominate the country's financial sector, commerce, and industry. The Ottoman millet system had been replaced by one in which religious minorities were protected by both the local government and powerful European states, and enjoyed privileges (capitulations). Though most of the country's ten million Egyptians (as of 1897) continued to live in villages and in the old quarters of the cities, modern urban neighborhoods with a cosmopolitan feel sprang

2. Yoram Meital, *Jewish Sites in Egypt* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1995), 20–123.
3. Raphael Ben-Shimon, *Nehar Mitsrayim* (Cairo, 1907), 27.



Figure 1. Moshe Der'i synagogue, Cairo (2019).

up like mushrooms after the rain. The dynamism of those who inhabited the cities' new areas, mostly foreigners, local minorities, and the Egyptian Ottoman elite, was reflected in architecture, foreign language study and international schools, fashion, and leisure activities.

Soon after its inauguration, the Moshe Der'i synagogue became the center of religious and cultural life for the Karaite community. The monumental building was built in a style typical of the newer houses of worship that were erected in Cairo at the beginning of the twentieth century (fig. 1).

It is a majestic structure that projects power and exudes the self-confidence of its founders, who felt quite secure amid Egypt's Muslim majority. Surrounded by an iron fence, the entire building is made of local brick sheathed in faux stone. The façade assumes the shape of a four-horned altar. At the center of the roof is a large dome embellished

with colorful stained-glass windows. Interspersed into the façade are several Magen Davids. The tablets of the covenant grace the top-center portion of this same wall. The compound's yard surrounds the building on every side. Benches are scattered among the garden's citrus and ornamental trees, and to the right of the southern courtyard is a designated spot for erecting a sukkah. The paved section of this expanse includes the hall that housed the Court of the Karaite Israelites in Egypt, which, as of 1994, is used as a library.[4]

I first visited the Moshe Der'i synagogue while I was working on my book *Jewish Sites in Egypt* (1995). Since then, I have returned about a dozen times and have spoken with the last remaining Karaites in Cairo. I learned from them that the community's rare Torah scrolls, ancient manuscripts, and books had long been kept at the Dar Simḥah synagogue in Hart al-Yahud. A fire in this prayer house in 1967 damaged some of the manuscripts, and the ones that were saved were transferred to the Moshe Der'i synagogue. Ancient manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible were stored in nearly every synagogue.[5] Generally, these were kept in the Ark or on a shelf next to it. The ancient manuscripts were not used during prayers and were taken out only on special occasions such as Simchat Torah celebrations. The manuscripts were also consulted as an authoritative source when needed in study and to verify the accuracy of the biblical text and Masorah. In addition, a sacred aura was attributed to ancient manuscripts, and they functioned not unlike amulets to protect the community. In short, they were in all respects priceless treasures.

I came across some of these rare manuscripts by serendipity. I arrived at the Moshe Der'i synagogue on Thursday, July 27, 2017, accompanied by members of the Cairo synagogue documentation project.[6] The day was especially hot. The first two hours of the visit were dedicated to recording details of the synagogue's monumental structure and decoration. Later

4. The library's areas of interest were, among other topics, Karaite Judaism, linguistics, and history. Sasson Somekh, "Egypt's Jewish Heritage and the Israeli Academic Center in Cairo," in *History and Culture of the Jews of Egypt in Modern Times*, ed. Ada Aharoni, A. Israel-Pelletier, and L. Zamir (Haifa, 2008), 167–69.

5. A review of Cairo manuscripts published in this journal over a century ago shows that many were found at the Karaite synagogue and others were discovered at Rabbanite synagogues including the Chaim Capoussi, Rabbi David Abi Zimra [*Radbaz*], al-Misriyun, Rabbi Ya'akuv Abu Sha'rah, Ba'al Hannes, and Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon synagogues. Richard Gottheil, "Some Hebrew Manuscripts in Cairo," *JQR* 17.4 (1905): 609–55.

6. The Moshe Der'i synagogue, along with the rest of the synagogues in Cairo, is central to my book in progress, which is tentatively titled "Synagogues and Jewish Heritage in Cairo: Reconfiguring Past and Present."

we moved on to the smaller library hall in the southern courtyard of the temple compound. The shelves were loaded with dusty volumes, and in one corner stood a wooden chest of drawers containing hundreds of library cards, handwritten in Arabic and French, documenting the impressive collection that had been kept in different Karaite synagogues and private libraries and then eventually found its way to the Moshe Der'i synagogue. Today only a part of the collection remains there. One of the catalogue cards was dedicated to the *Al-Yahudiyah* (The Jewess), a story written in Arabic and published in 1920 by Murad Farag (1867–1956), the renowned Egyptian Karaite man of letters.[7]

While trying to locate the book I came upon a bookcase that was facing the right entrance door. I noticed several packages on one of its lower shelves, wrapped in white paper, the type that is sometimes used as a table covering at inexpensive restaurants. On the back cover of the first wrapping someone had written in Hebrew "Gottheil 22." I was utterly overwhelmed when, as I unwrapped the dusty cover, hundreds of parchments were exposed. A quick glance left no room for doubt; this was a biblical manuscript. I conveyed my discovery to Magda and Samy and suggested that we examine the findings later. In the evening, I wrote briefly in my journal: "There are hundreds of pages made of parchment containing biblical texts in the Karaite library. There seems to be an ancient manuscript that requires preservation [. . .]. On the dusty shelves of this modest library there are real treasures."

I did not locate *The Jewess* by Farag that day. Furthermore, the tight schedule did not allow for my return to the library of the Karaite synagogue. When I was back in my office at Ben-Gurion University, I reexamined the notes and photos of my last visit to Cairo. I am a historian of modern Egypt; ancient manuscripts were therefore *terra incognita* and their study required an investment of time. Three months later I was back in Cairo, and though I wanted to return to the Karaite synagogue library as quickly as possible, it was not to be. I wrote in my journal (October 15, 2017), "Constantly on my mind what to do with the Karaite manu-

7. This novelist, poet, and linguist entered public consciousness as a member of the committee charged with drafting the Egyptian constitution in 1923. Lital Levy, "Edification between Sect and Nation: Murad Farag and the Tahdhib, 1901–1903," in *Intellectuals and Civil Society in the Middle East: Liberalism, Modernity and Political Discourse*, ed. M. Bamyeh (London, 2012), 57–78. Sasson Somekh, "Participation of Egyptian Jews in Modern Arabic Culture and the Case of Murad Farag," in *The Jews of Egypt: A Mediterranean Society in Modern Times*, ed. S. Shamir (Boulder, Colo., 1987), 134–38. See also Farag's collection of articles: Murad Farag, *Maqalat Murad* (Cairo, 1912).

scripts; it all started with some crumbling wrapping around the parchments." I also added my disappointment at the unexpected delay in documenting the synagogues that had prevented me from revisiting the Karaite library in 'Abbasiya.

My next visit, several months later, was more fruitful. On Tuesday, March 6, 2018, I arrived, together with Samy, at the Moshe Der'i synagogue library hall. The clamorous sounds of traffic from nearby Sabil al-Khazindar Street kept Samy and me company while we cleaned the dust and dirt accumulated over the years from the manuscripts, measuring the parchment sheets and videotaping and photographing random pages. After three hours of work we repacked the manuscripts and arranged for their transfer to a safe location. That evening, at a popular restaurant, I wrote in my journal: "I've been waiting to revisit the Der'i synagogue for a long time, with a strong feeling that I haven't exhausted all the options at the Karaite library [. . .]. I wasn't disappointed! A true treasure has been awaiting us for decades. Over the books and under heaps of dusty paper we began to unravel, one wrapping after another, more pieces of the MSS that were reviewed by Gottheil [. . .]. I am blown away by the thought of the treasure that has been unraveled before us. Manuscripts that were written hundreds of years ago; some of them might be over a thousand years old."

Over dinner, Magda and Samy and I began to discuss the immense significance of the synagogue's collection and the proper way of treating it. I informed my partners that it was now beyond doubt that the manuscripts were part of the corpus that Richard Gottheil, an authoritative scholar in Semitic studies, had inspected in the Dar Simḥah synagogue at the turn of the twentieth century.[8] We reiterated the principle we had embraced from the beginning of our work: any pieces of Judaica we found must be kept as community assets in Egypt. Additionally, the manuscripts we had rediscovered in the Karaite library should be brought to public attention, one at a time, only after thorough examination. At this point, the pressing matter was to ascertain exactly which manuscripts we had in our hands.

The existence of rare manuscripts and books in the Rabbanite and Karaite synagogues in Egypt was a known fact, but traveling writers, manuscript collectors, rabbis, and scholars (Yaakov Sapir, Elkan Adler, Jack Mosseri, and in earlier periods Al-Maqrizi) had indicated their exis-

8. For a comprehensive survey of his scholarship, see Joshua Bloch and Ida A. Pratt, "Richard James Horatio Gottheil, 1862–1936," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 56.4 (1936): 472–89.

tence without describing their context and uniqueness.[9] Richard Gottheil was the first to conduct a systematic and thorough examination of their content and importance.[10] Soon after his return from Cairo, in 1905 he published an intensive review of his findings in this journal (*JQR* 17.4), modestly titled "Some Hebrew Manuscripts in Cairo." The essay briefly describes a significant portion of the manuscripts and books, including details regarding their content, condition, and dimensions. In cases where Gottheil came across a colophon, he added details pertaining to the scribe who had copied the text and to its owners. He wrote extensively about a small number of the texts, most prominent among them the glorious manuscript of the Hebrew Bible copied by Moshe Ben Asher in 895 C.E., a work that is widely known in both academic and popular writings due to Maimonides' references to it in his monumental interpretation of the Torah.[11]

Gottheil examined the manuscripts several years after Solomon Schechter had emptied out the major part of the Geniza at the Ben Ezra synagogue in Fustat. Already at this early stage it was evident that the removal of items from the Cairo Geniza had essentially altered the historic study of the region, as reflected in Shelomo Dov Goitein's *A Mediterranean Society*.[12] At the beginning of his essay Gottheil noted, "In addition

9. Ya'akov Sapir ha-Levi, *Even Sapir: Yesovev admat Ḥam (masa' Mitsrayim) Yam Suf, hadre Teyman, mizrach Hodu kulo, erets ha-ḥadashah Ostralyah u-teshuvato haramatah Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem, 1967); Elkan Adler, *Jews in Many Lands* (London, 1905); Jack Mosseri, "A New Hoard of Jewish MSS. in Cairo," *JQR* 4 (1913): 208–16; Taqi al-Din al-Maqrizi, *Al-Mawa'iz wa-al-i'tibar fi dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-al-athar* (London, 2002).

10. Gottheil was aware of the descriptions given in previous accounts. When referring to a specific manuscript he found in one of the Rabbanite synagogues, he noted that it was not the manuscript described by Yaakov Sapir. Gottheil, "Some Hebrew Manuscripts in Cairo," 620.

11. Moshe Ben Maimon, *Mishneh Torah* (Jerusalem, 1990), *Halakhot sefer Torah*, chap. 8, 4. For intensive research into older versions of the Hebrew Bible, specifically the Aleppo Codex and the Leningrad Codex, see Malachi Beit-Arié, *Hebrew Codicology: Tentative Typology of Technical Practices Employed in Hebrew Dated Medieval Manuscripts* (Jerusalem, 1981), fn. 1; David Samuel Loewinger, *Masorah gedolah shel keter aram-tsovah* (Jerusalem, 1977); Mordechai Breuer, *Keter aram tsovah veha-nusaḥ ha-mekubal shel ha-mikra'* (Jerusalem, 1976); Aron Dotan, ed., *Torah Nevi'im u-Khetuvim—Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia: Prepared According to the Vocalization, Accents, and Masora of Aaron Ben Moses Ben Asher in the Leningrad Codex* (Peabody, Mass., 2001).

12. Shelomo Dov Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza* (Berkeley, Calif., 1967–83), 6 volumes; Marina Rustow, *Heresy and the Politics of a Community: The Jews of the Fatimid Caliphate* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2008). A recently published study convinc-

to the treasures unraveled in the Cairo Geniza, there are more manuscripts in this city, unknown to many, that are worthy of some attention."[13] This is an understatement; the corpus that he examined included items so rare that they are of no less value than many fragments found in Egypt's genizot.

Gottheil's forty-six-page essay reviews thirty-four manuscripts, in addition to thirty-three ancient books, preserved over hundreds of years in the Rabbanite and Karaite communities in Cairo, Alexandria, and Jerusalem. The major part of the review is dedicated to the manuscripts that were preserved in the old Karaite synagogue in Cairo's Hart al-Yahud. In the first pages, Gottheil details his interactions with the heads of the Karaite community and describes the miserable conditions in which these manuscripts were kept:

> They are looked upon with great awe and with intense superstition. They are regarded as amulets; but their real value is not appreciated. In the worst possible state are the MSS kept in the Ark and in the two side-cupboards of the Karaite Synagogue at Cairo. The only one that is preserved with a little care is the Codex of Moses Ben Asher. A wooden box with a glass cover has been provided; into this the pages of the MS. have been *stuffed*: the word is no exaggeration; the box is not large enough, and the pages must be fitted to its size![14]

About three decades later, the same corpus was reexamined by *ḥakham* Babovich. The chief Karaite rabbi left his impressions on small single pages attached to some of the manuscripts, where he briefly noted some informative details, including the titles of the biblical books, the chapters he identified, and the date the manuscripts were copied. The punctilious rabbi used the official stationery of the Karaite community and added the date on which he had performed his assessment (October 29, 1935), signing with his full name. The dramatic developments that the Jewish communities underwent during the twentieth century are beyond the scope

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ingly deconstructs both the conception of *the* Cairo Geniza and the Schechter-centric narrative: see Rebecca Jefferson, "Deconstructing 'the Cairo Genizah': A Fresh Look at Genizah Manuscript Discoveries in Cairo before 1897," *JQR* 108.4 (2018): 422–48. For a well-written account that focuses on Schechter's personality, intellectual worldview, and passion for the Ben Ezra synagogue's geniza, see Adina Hoffman and Peter Cole, *Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Geniza* (New York, 2010).

13. Gottheil, "Some Hebrew Manuscripts in Cairo," 609.

14. Gottheil, "Some Hebrew Manuscripts in Cairo," 610.

of this essay but it should be noted that Babovich conducted his review during the heyday of Jewish life in Egypt, including the Karaite community. Political, national, and financial developments in Egypt and the Middle East conflated to alter Egyptian society in the following decades. The status of foreign and minority groups, especially Jewish, Greek, and Italian communities, changed drastically. Armed confrontation between Israel and Arab countries continued to escalate, and the war of 1948 led the first wave of Jews to depart from Egypt. The events of late 1954 (Operation Susannah), and later the Suez Canal War, were turning points in the history of Egyptian Jews, and the Rabbanite and Karaite communities dwindled rapidly.[15] While some Judaica was taken out by Jews who fled Egypt, the Karaite collection remained intact in the Moshe Der'i synagogue's safe.

A renewed interest in the last remaining Jews in Egypt and the manuscripts followed the signing of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty (March 26, 1979). On June 28, 1981, a team from the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts (IMHM) in Jerusalem visited Cairo. Their documentation included a photocopy of the Karaite corpus and a microfiche copy at a later date.[16] In the manner of Babovich they attached a brief inscription with salient details, written on stationery carrying the IMHM logo, to each manuscript. Those details matched up with the ones on Gottheil's list. The Israeli team's work was manifest in the corpus that we rediscovered in the Karaite library thirty-six years later. As mentioned, each of the manuscripts was wrapped in white paper and its number in Gottheil's list had been added in Hebrew. The dated notes were microfilmed with the manuscripts and are available in the Department of Manuscripts and Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts of the National Library of Israel.

In other words, the manuscripts were documented, in varying degrees of quality, each time they were examined. Gottheil's analysis is more extensive and in general more impressive than those that followed, despite the limited time and the relatively humble means available to him when he visited the Dar Simḥah synagogue in the old Jewish quarter. That is likely the reason for the inaccuracies found in the excerpts from

15. Mohamed Abu al-Ghar, *Yahud miṣr min al-izdihar ila al-shatat* (Cairo, 2004); Joel Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora* (Cairo, 2005); Yoram Meital, "A Jew in Cairo: The Defiance of Chehata Haroun," *Middle Eastern Studies* 53 (2017): 183–97.

16. The quality of the microfiche allows for reasonable reading of a large part of the manuscript, but dozens of pages are illegible, likely because limited technological resources were available to the institute in 1981.

ZBAM that appear in several sections of his 1905 *JQR* essay. Gottheil's documentation and that of the IMHM were intended to make the corpus accessible to the public, mainly to other researchers. The purpose of Babovich's analysis and documentation might have been in the context of his learning about the Karaite community and its assets, shortly after he became the local *ḥakham*. It is also probable that Babovich was unaware of Gottheil's essay, whereas the researchers at the Jerusalem institute had identified the content of the collection based on the essay and had even catalogued the manuscripts in correlation to the numbers on the list prepared by the renowned scholar. Thus, the Ben Asher manuscript, numbered 34 in Gottheil's essay, appears similarly in the IMHM microfiche.[17]

The more I studied this collection, the more my work plan changed. My next visit to Cairo (July 2, 2018) started with sorting the manuscripts and comparing them to the microfiche created by the IMHM. It soon became evident that there were discrepancies between Gottheil's review and some of the manuscripts we rediscovered in the Karaite library, which were a result of mixing parchments from different manuscripts. Once the manuscripts were re-identified, I realized that we had a full copy of manuscript number 13 on Gottheil's list, which he had stated was one of the most valuable in the entire corpus.[18] Initially, Magda, Samy, and I affectionately called this manuscript "Old Cousin," but, in writing this essay, I chose to name it the "Zechariah Ben 'Anan Manuscript" (ZBAM), after the scribe who had copied it.

17. It is worth mentioning that these manuscripts were also in the possession of the Karaite community and were kept safe for hundreds of years in the same synagogue in the Jewish neighborhood in Cairo. Ben Asher's codex was part of the corpus when Gottheil visited Cairo and it was microfilmed by IMHM in 1981, but it was not there when we arrived at the Karaite synagogue in 2017. How is it, one wonders, that those manuscripts I found, which are a part of those described by Gottheil, are the ones that remained? It can be assumed that the Ben Asher manuscript, which was widely known and had a unique status, was removed from Egypt. At this point, we do not know whether it has been kept in its entirety or has been cut into several parts, nor do we know who is in possession of it or them. It can also be assumed that whoever removed the manuscript was well aware of its value. In addition, hardly any illustrated manuscripts remain from the collection described by Gottheil, and it can be assumed that whoever removed them from the full corpus did so deliberately, perhaps under the assumption that their monetary value would be higher.

18. Gottheil dedicated two detailed pages to ZBAM. "Some Hebrew Manuscripts in Cairo," 627–28.

THE ZECHARIAH BEN 'ANAN MANUSCRIPT: FORM AND CONTENT

In terms of content and form, ZBAM is set apart from other rare copies of the Hebrew Bible written up to the beginning of the eleventh century.[19] It comprises 313 leaves handwritten on both sides of the parchment (i.e., 616 pages), containing all the books and scrolls included in the Writings, plus twelve additional pages containing clarifications of the Masorah and the vowels.[20] The rare manuscript is clearly dated and includes the full name of the scribe who copied the biblical text, vocalized it, and wrote the Masorah, the place it was copied, and the name of the person who had commissioned it.

It would be difficult to remain indifferent to the beauty of this manuscript, which reflects the extraordinary talent of the artisans involved in its production.[21] Especially impressive are the fine square Hebrew letters of the biblical text, the illustrations, the ornamentation, and the vocalization. The text was written in high-quality ink on well-processed parchments made of leather, possibly goatskin. The markings for the rows are still clear and they were made by a sharp tool on the flesh side of the parchment.[22] Both sides of the leather are similarly processed and well

19. Beit-Arié, who has intensively studied similar manuscripts, wrote that "existing dated manuscripts up to the twelfth century are quite rare. Of some 2700 extant dated Hebrew manuscripts until 1540, 6 dated codices from the tenth century, 8 from the eleventh century and 22 from the twelfth century are known to us, most of them Oriental." Beit-Arié, *Hebrew Codicology*, 11.

20. In one instance, I located a whole page cut out from the manuscript. On another page a piece was cut from the margins of the sheet but there was no damage to the text.

21. The preparations for the manuscript started with the selection of the leather and its processing, as well as ascertaining the quality of ink to be used in the book. This was the groundwork without which it was not possible to produce a manuscript that could survive many hundreds of years. The names of these artisans are not mentioned in the manuscript, but their expertise is documented in the fragments of the Cairo Geniza. On the preparation of animal hide, see Ronald Reid, *Ancient Skins, Parchments, and Leathers* (London, 1972). Obviously, the scribe copying the text had a critical role, as did, later, the person who had to proof and vocalize the text. In terms of style, the scribe of the Masorah was free to design the content in a variety of ornaments, such as circles and ovals and various kinds of linear and geometric figures. In quite a few cases the name of the scribe who copied the text and Masorah is mentioned on the colophon.

22. For a detailed discussion of the technique of marking rows in ancient manuscripts from the East, see Beit-Arié, *Hebrew Codicology*, 74–83. For an overall comprehensive discussion of methods of processing sheets of hide and writing on them, see Reed, *Ancient Skins*, 46–85.

buffed.[23] The color of the ink in the biblical text is reddish brown, and in the Masorah the hue is blackish. In most parts, the parchment is in very good condition, though a few dozen pages have been damaged by moisture, with the ink faded, and the written part lost.[24]

In terms of form, ZBAM is quite similar to other ancient manuscripts, among them the famous Ben Asher codex and the Leningrad codex. The method of vocalizing, the style of the Masorah, and the various markings all attest to that. The text in ZBAM is written on a large parchment (36.4 cm x 34.6 cm), and each of its pages contains a vocalized biblical text, Masorah, and Torah trope.[25] The Masorah appears at the head of the page, on the margins, at the bottom, and occasionally between the columns. The text and the Masorah are written in Oriental style. The major part of the biblical text is divided into three columns of eighteen rows. However, in some of the books the scribe shifted to a two-column structure, as in the books of Psalms and Job as well as in song-pieces (for example, the poem of David thanking God is presented in two columns while keeping the eighteen-line format).[26]

The order of the books in ZBAM is different from the order in the Tanakh of a later date: the Book of Ezra appears without the customary separation of its ten chapters from the thirteen chapters of the Book of Nehemiah. Similarly, the twenty-seven chapters of 1 Chronicles and the

23. Beit-Arié describes the tanning of similar manuscripts as highly glossy with "the hair-side [. . .] yellowish while the flesh-side is whitish." Beit-Arié, *The Makings of the Medieval Hebrew Book*, 112.

24. For example, the ink has faded in Prov 20, from the middle of verse 7 up to 12, and the major part of the text in Lamentations and Esther, the beginning of Daniel, and the last chapter of Ecclesiastes 11 and 12. Moisture has damaged the text in Ps 15–16, 78 toward the end, 79, and 80. In chapters 81 through the end of 88 the damage is at the bottom of the sheet but most of the text is legible.

25. According to Gottheil its dimensions are 36.25 cm in length and 33 cm in width. "Some Hebrew Manuscripts in Cairo," 627. Beit-Arié provides slightly different dimensions: 367 (mm) in length and 330 (mm) in width. Malachi Beit-Arié, *The Makings of the Medieval Hebrew Book: Studies in Palaeography and Codicology* (Jerusalem, 1993), 117. In the IMHM notes, the dimensions differ from the ones Beit-Arié is presenting. The note-page from Cairo is also filmed on microfiche and the dimensions there are 365 mm on 344 mm. It is possible that the slight discrepancy in the dimensions we took is due to the passage of time and the inadequate preservation that is evident on the sheets of hide.

26. Gottheil had indicated that the pages are divided into three columns, each containing eighteen rows, but did not refer to the fact that some of the books are designed in two columns. "Some Hebrew Manuscripts in Cairo," 627. Beit-Arié indicates that this manuscript contains nineteen rows in three columns and the size of the font is 0.90 mm, *The Makings of the Medieval Hebrew Book*, 117.

thirty-six chapters of 2 Chronicles are presented in this manuscript as a single book. A more significant expression of this different editing can be found in the location of the books of Chronicles in the corpus. The biblical narrative on the lineage of humanity, from Adam to the Edict of Cyrus, appears as the first book of the Writings, and not the last.

Deviating from the usual partitioning of verses and chapters typical of the Tanakh in that period, ZBAM shows no such division. In general, the biblical text is presented uninterrupted and with no indication of breaks between chapters.[27] Occasionally there is a blank row between paragraphs that will later be organized as chapters. Such is the case in Chronicles between the end of chapter 5 and the beginning of chapter 6. More prevalent are the visible spaces inserted between words within one row, separating what in today's Bible are identified as verses.[28] Sometimes a blank row (approx. 2 cm.) has been inserted in the transition between verses in the same chapter (e.g., in Job 42, between verses 6 and 7). In most cases, there is some indication of the number of verses included in the book, and spaces or illustrations have been inserted when moving from one book to the next. Generally, the ending of one book and the beginning of the next appear on the same page, and only in rare cases does the beginning of a new chapter appear on a separate page. Thus on one parchment we find the end of Chronicles and the first chapter of Psalms (fig. 2). Similarly, the transition to Ruth occurs within one page, as does the shift to the Song of Songs.

The caption regarding the quantity of verses appears in three slightly different versions. At the end of Proverbs the text reads: "*Total* number [סכום] of verses in Proverbs nine hundred and fifteen." At the end of Daniel the following appears: "The *mark* [סימן] of verses in Daniel three hundred and fifty seven." A significantly different style is presented at the end of Nehemiah, which, in ZBAM, is combined with Ezra: "The *amount* [מנין] of verses in the book Ezra here sixty and eighty and five."[29] Contrary to all of these, at the end of Ruth and the Song of Songs there is no caption indicating the number of verses.

27. In some cases, the shift to the next chapter is indicated by a blank row (as between Ps 1 and 2) or by placing the opening words for the chapter in the middle of the row (as between Ps 2 and 3).

28. A similar method of marking can be detected in the Ginsburg Bible (1926, vol. 4, Writings), which I used during work on this essay. The front page explains: "Diligently revised according to the Masorah and the early editions with the various readings from MSS and the ancient versions."

29. The emphasis is mine. The reason for counting the verses in this manner (sixty and eighty and five) is unknown to me.

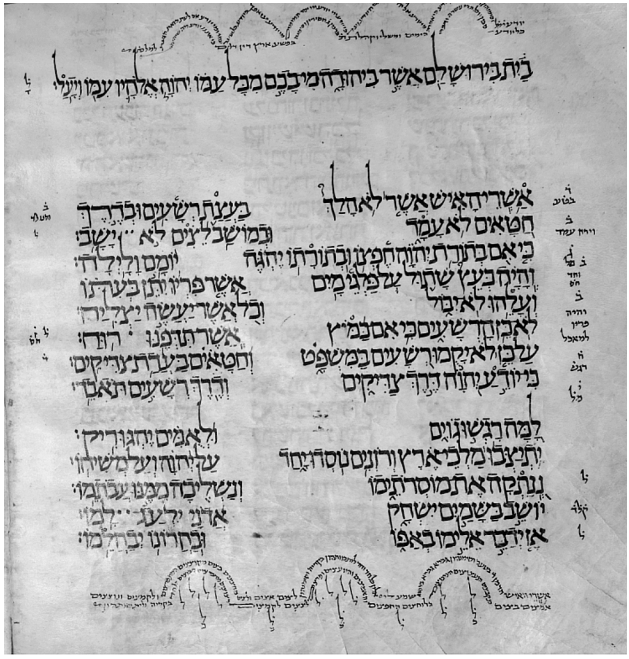


Figure 2. ZBAM, Psalms 1.

The original manuscript was most likely bound in the twentieth century (1930s?) in a reddish-brown thick paper cover with no inscription. The binding was intended to facilitate reading and prevent the hundreds of loose pages of unmarked biblical text from getting mixed. A white blank flyleaf was attached to the cover. White paper stickers were added to reinforce the cover and the loose pages. On the penultimate page, not only is the number of verses in the Writings (8064) indicated, but so is the quantity of the verses in Torah and Prophets. The entry on the quantity of verses in the three subdivisions of the Tanakh allows us to surmise that the first two parts, whose fate is unknown, were copied by the same scribe.[30]

30. A copy of part of the Torah that was copied by Zechariah Ben ʿAnan in 1021 rests in the Firkovich Collection, National Library of Russia, Saint Petersburg, MS EVR II B 8. A sole reference to Zechariah Ben ʿAnan, the scribe, can be found in a Geniza legal document written in Judeo-Arabic and dated to the eleventh century, Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter Genizah Collection, T-S 10J4.8. According to the online description, this fragment deals with a "legal document concerning the remainder of the inheritance of Abraham ha-Levi the teacher b. Joseph b. ʿAnan which had been deposited by the Bet Din with ʿAli b. Ephraim b. ʿAli al-Tinnisi. Mentions Judah b. Mesullam b. Zechariah the scribe b. ʿAnan and Galiyya bat Zechariah the scribe b. ʿAnan."

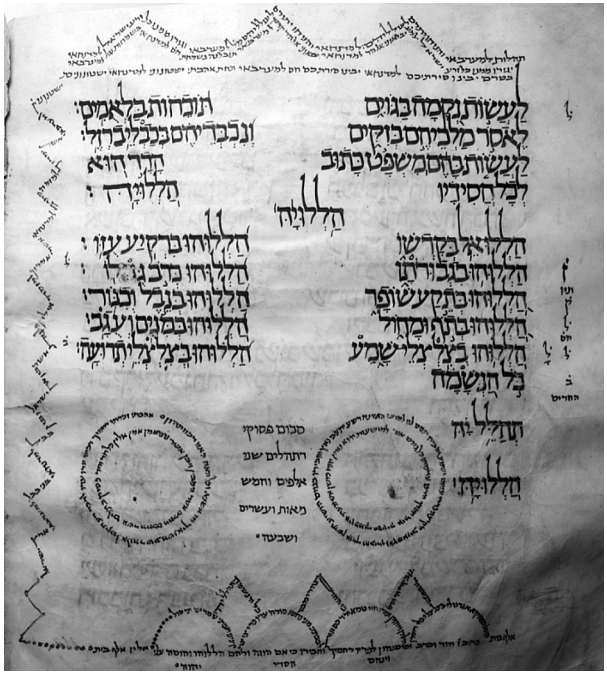


Figure 3. ZBAM, Psalm 150.

ZBAM includes several decorative illustrations following the impressive tradition of Arabic calligraphy of the time.[31] In the masoretic text there are circular, triangular, and diamond shapes. Especially impressive illustrations are combined at the beginning of the book and at its end, for example, by the famous verses at the opening of the book of Psalms and at its ending (fig. 3).[32] At the end of Ezra, the masoretic text appears in calligraphy, creating arches. Noteworthy is the one-of-a-kind motif at the end of Job, where the last verses create a reverse triangular pattern, and, underneath it, the inscription in Hebrew פלגה אשר קמטו.[33] A colorful design is rendered on the Hebrew letter ס, incorporated at the side of the column

31. On the art in Hebrew manuscripts, Jewish calligraphy, and Arab calligraphy, see Katrin Kogman-Appel, *Jewish Book Art between Islam and Christianity: The Decoration of Hebrew Bibles in Medieval Spain* (Leiden, 2004).

32. ZBAM includes similar unique Masorah illustrations in Pss 40, 41, 43, 72–73, and 107. At the end of Ezra the Masora is presented in calligraphy creating arches, and an impressive Masorah illustration is displayed in 1 Chr 24 and at the ending of the book.

33. Similarly, the end of Proverbs was written in six rows, "the amount of verses of Proverbs nine hundred and fifteen [and the words:] פלגה לפני שבר נאון."

to indicate the partition into portions (*sedarim*) for reading the biblical text. In many cases the letter ס is written in large script and at other times it is decorated with flower shapes.[34] An impressive ornament indicates the "middle of the book." This marking also emphasizes the aforementioned difference in partitioning of the Hebrew Bible that was customary in ancient manuscripts as opposed to today: in Chronicles this location is marked in the middle of chapter 27, since in ZBAM all its sixty-six chapters appear as one book.[35]

Other prominent characteristics of ZBAM are the corrections of and additions to the biblical text after its completion. This is the case in 1 Chr 6.64: the column with the corrected text includes twenty rows, whereas the common structure of this book so far has eighteen rows. The added words are written in a much smaller letters and the corrected rows have many more words than the rest of the manuscript. The correction is done in square letters, similar to the original, but based on a comparison of the word "מִגְרָשֶׁיהָ" (pasturelands), which appears forty times in this chapter, it is apparent that it was not done by the scribe Zechariah Ben 'Anan. Another sign is the color of ink in the words that were added, which is significantly darker than the rest.[36]

The longest correction in the entire manuscript is made to Esth 9.13, where there are no fewer than seven corrected rows (fig. 4). It starts on the upper right column ("to the Jews who are in Shushan"), written in smaller letters than the size usually seen throughout ZBAM. In addition, uncharacteristically, the writing is not meticulous and does not keep within the lines, probably in order to compress a larger quantity of text in the limited space. Furthermore, a whole row was added at the bottom of the page in Esth 9.17—"and on the fourteenth day of the same they rested"—bringing the number of rows in the column to twenty-one as opposed to the nineteen rows in the center and left columns.[37] Another

34. For instance, the letter ס decorated in 1 Chr 6.34, 11.8, and 16.35.

35. A beautiful illustration marking the middle of the book in Ps 130; 1 Chr 27.25; Eccl 6.9; Prov 16.17.

36. I discerned another correction in 1 Chr 27, end of verse 1 and the entire verse 2. A comparison of the letters מ and ק (in the word "המחלוקת") and the letter ש in the correction and on previous lines reveals that the handwriting differs. In this case, too, the addition to the correction required adding a row in two columns. The words added to the text are

"[עשרים וארבעה] אלף על המחלוקת הראשונה"

The rest on the next page is written in two rows:

"לחדש הראשון, ישבעם בן צבדיאל ועל מחלקתו עשרים וארבעה אלף."

37. A minor correction appears in the addition of the word ששה in Esth 2.12. In Ezra 8 (end of verse 29 and beginning of verse 30) two lines were added to the third column with the wording "ושרי האבות לישראל בירושלם: הלשכות בית יהוה וקבלו הכהנים והלוים."



Figure 4. ZBAM, Esther 9.13.

unusual addition can be found at Neh 3.21–22. At the bottom of the left column, four rows were added, containing fifteen words.

The technique for adding corrections often consisted of scratching the surface and rewriting the biblical text (as at Ezra 8.10).[38] In other cases, the corrections were made by a "patch," with the missing words written on it, added to the parchment (as at Ps 15). In a few cases, additional letters or words were added alongside the Masorah. In Chr 2.26, the letters "ה נ כ" are vocalized, and the word "עד" was added in the same spot, at the end of verse 8. The difference in the ink color indicates that on those instances the additions were made at a later stage. One exceptional difference can be found in the appearance of a word that does not exist in the Tanakh of our time. Ps 56, end of verse 9, appears in ZBAM as "You keep count of my wanderings; put my tears into your flask, into your record; God." The word "God" (אלהים) stands out as a clear addition, creating an additional row to the parchment.

The colophon on the cover of ZBAM has only partially survived, but the legible parts enable the identification of the owner's genealogy (fig. 5). The writing style, language, and terminology of the three dedications

38. This technique was discerned through research on ancient Hebrew manuscripts.

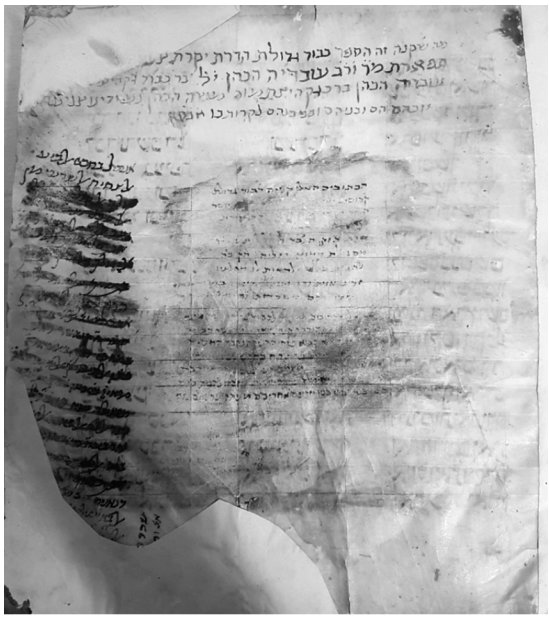


Figure 5. ZBAM, Colophon.

that are identifiable all show that they were written by different people and at different periods of time. At the top of the flyleaf there is Hebrew text giving the valuable data of the identity of the first owner, Ovadiah Ha-Cohen Ben Moshe Ha-Cohen, as well as a series of abbreviations that are quite customary in dedications on ancient Hebrew manuscripts:

מה שקנה זה הספר כבוד גדולת[,] הדרת[,] יקרת[39] תפארת מ''ר ור''ה עובדיה הכהן י''ל בר כבוד ג[דולת] ה[דרת] . . . עובדיה הכהן ב''ר כנקהיצתמוה [,][40] משה הכהן נ''ע ידיע צניעו[תו]. . . יזכהם הם ובניהם ובני בניהם לקרות בו אנ''ס [אמן, נצח סלע].[41]

On the main part and at the bottom portion of this colophon are fifteen lines in Hebrew, their ink now faded, that cannot be read with the naked eye, except for the words "הכתובים האלה קניה [קניה?] כבוד גדולת קדושת." On

39. The word יקרת is missing in the Gottheil transcript. Gottheil, "Some Hebrew Manuscripts in Cairo," 628.

40. The word כנקהיצתמוה is a composite of the following abbreviations: כנקה (כבוד גדולת קדושת השם), יצ (ישמרה צורו), and תמוה (תורה מצוות ועבודת השם).

41. The words אנ''ס, [תו]צניעו, and יקרת are missing from Gottheil's description. Gottheil, "Some Hebrew Manuscripts in Cairo," 628.

the left side of the page, written in Judeo-Arabic, is information on a later transaction concerning the manuscript: "Transferred upon a valid [and] legitimate purchase from the ownership of Mr. [. . .]" (*intaqal bihukum al-bi'a al-ṣaḥiḥ, al-ṣhar'i min mulk al-ṣayyid . . .*).[42] The rest of the caption is illegible and the bottom part of the page is torn and glued together with white adhesive paper.

The last page of the biblical text consists of two columns containing the last verses of Ezra and Nehemiah. The third column then forms the beginning of an appendix. It contains precious information written in the first person by the scribe who copied the manuscript, including the exact date he completed the laborious assignment:

I Zechariah
the scribe Ben 'Anan
the teacher[43] from the land
in the west rest in the garden of
Eden [,] I wrote
and vocalized with the help of
God these Writings [הכתובים]
for the distinguished Yitzhak
[למרי יצחק הפרח הטוב]
son of Efraim
Ha-Cohen
Successfully completed [סופא טבא]
in the year four
thousand and seven
hundred eighty
eight from
the creation

ZBAM was completed in 1028 according to the Gregorian calendar. In the following column, embedded in the adjacent illustrated calligraphy, the scribe named the exact date on which he had finished his work: "The eighth day in the month of Tamuz." It is worth noting that, almost nine hundred years later, someone calculated the age of the manuscript in pencil at the bottom of the colophon. In Arabic numbers the year 4788

42. Gottheil indicated the name of the owner: "It was bought in a legal way from the property of S[a'id] Da'ud." "Some Hebrew Manuscripts in Cairo," 629.

43. Gottheil observes that Ben Asher was called "the Great Teacher." "Some Hebrew Manuscripts in Cairo," 628, n. 1.



Figure 6. ZBAM, illustration with the names of the scribe and owners.

(1028) is subtracted from 5687 (1927; apparently the date of the calculation) for a difference of 899 years.

On the next page there is an illustration in the shape of an arch, consisting of biblical verses, sixteen straight rows at its center, written in unvocalized letters, providing supplementary details on the manuscript, its scribe, and its owner (fig. 6).[44] Above it, on both sides of the main body of text, two columns are added. At the top of the right column: "I have written to remove all sin and to follow a pure road in the spirit of God and soul." At the top of the left column: "Finished with the help of God [in] the month of Tamuz[,] on the eighth day[,] with blessings [*be-ʾiman tov*,] Amen."[45]

On the first row of the arch illustration, the scribe, Zechariah, reveals

44. The inspiration for some of this text seems to come from the morning blessings that precede the Shaharit prayer. Gottheil mistakenly indicated the location of this piece as "down the right-hand side." "Some Hebrew Manuscripts in Cairo," 628.

45. The words *ʾiman tov* are not mentioned in Gottheil's account. Additionally, the text in this column appears at the top of the illustration and not at the bottom as mentioned in his entry.

that he is affiliated with the Tiberian tradition of copiers of the Hebrew Bible and Masorah ("and he [belongs] to the people of Tiberias Ma'aziah only").[46] This description alone does not allow us to determine where ZBAM was copied. We also do not know the circumstances under which the Karaite community in Cairo gained possession of the manuscript and held on to it, together with dozens of other ancient manuscripts, for hundreds of years at the Dar Simḥah synagogue. Further down in the illustration it is written that ZBAM was ordered by "Yitzhak Ha-Cohen Ben Marna Efraim Ha-Cohen [,] who invested his utmost efforts and paid with the money he had earned from his toil and work [,] God will be his help [,] and will watch over him [,] and will keep him safe from harm [,] and will save him from his enemies." This entry reflects the fact that in Jewish society of the Middle Ages, the copying of a book was a private initiative.[47] Writing a full Bible took many years, and its price and value were determined on the basis of the quality of the material used (the animal hide, the technique by which it was processed, and the quality of ink used), and of course the reputation of the scribe who copied and vocalized the text and Masorah, and also that of the illustrator. All salaries were paid by the client. A manuscript written by a prestigious scribe, as in the case of Zechariah Ben 'Anan, was extremely valuable and its owner held on to it until he passed it on as an heirloom.[48]

The frame around this magnificent illustration consists of phrases and blessings from the Hebrew Bible, among them: "Blessed shall you be in

46. As Dotan noted, "מעויה" (Ma'aziah) was the ancient name for Tiberias, which "was used up to the tenth century." On the chronicle of this name, see Aron Dotan, *Sefer dikduke ha-te'amim le-Rabbi Aharon Ben Moshe Ben Asher* (Jerusalem, 1967), 2:149. About the Tiberian Masorah and its characteristics, see Israel Yeivin, *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah* (Ann Arbor, 1980).

47. In the Cairo Geniza researchers have found remnants of thousands of books and manuscripts on a wide range of subjects. All are testimony to the high rate of literacy among Egyptian Jews in the Middle Ages. Beit-Arié estimated that during the six hundred years prior to the invention of the mechanical printing press in Europe, approximately one hundred thousand Hebrew manuscripts and books had been produced. According to him, the remains of approximately thirty thousand books were found in the Cairo Geniza, of which only a few dozen survived. Malachi Beit-Arié, "Mi mefaḥed me-kodikologiyah?," *Igeret* 26 (2004): 7, accessed July 18, 2019, https://www.academy.ac.il/SystemFiles/21248.pdf.

48. Some of the Jewish manuscripts from this period were endowments marked "Sacred to God" ["קדש ליהוה"] and "Not to be Sold" ["לא ימכר"]; and on the colophon severe warnings were made against selling or expropriating them from the possession of the community. These warnings can be viewed as an expression of the view that a biblical text was a living organism, which, if damaged, would in turn harm the person who committed the act.

your comings and blessed shall you be in your goings" (Deut 28.6 [JPS]); "The Lord will put to rout before you the enemies who attack you; they will march out against you by a signle road, but flee from you by many roads" (Deut 28.7); "May God give you of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth, abundance of new grain and wine" (Gen 27.28); "The Lord bless you and protect you! The Lord deal kindly and graciously with you! The Lord bestow His favor upon you and grant you peace!" (Num 6.24–26); "To Life! Greetings to you and to your household and to all that is yours!" (1 Sam 25.6); "The precepts of the Lord are just, rejoicing the heart; the instruction of the Lord is lucid, making the eyes light up" (Ps 19.9).[49]

ZBAM ends with a nine-page appendix. At the beginning, there is an entry on the quantity of verses in the three parts: Torah, Prophets, and Writings, and an index-like marking of the Masorah. The following eight pages include clarifications on the masoretic text in the books of Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, and Ezra (which includes Nehemiah). The final section concludes with a separate page depicting the essence and precise method of Tiberian vocalization.[50]

THE FUTURE OF THE EGYPTIAN JEWISH PAST

As I write these words in October 2019, only two Jewish women still live in Cairo, the remnants of a glorious, diverse, and ancient community. A dozen synagogues, cemeteries, school buildings, and valuable Judaica items still exist in the Egyptian capital. In terms of Egyptian law, the Jewish community is the legitimate owner of these assets, notwithstanding the minuscule number of Jews remaining in the country. Moreover, the Egyptian authorities are undergoing a significant positive attitudinal shift toward the heritage of the Jewish community and its assets. This shift echoes a revisionist trend in public and cultural discourse that has developed in Egypt in recent years, according to which the Jewish community is seen as an inherent part of Egyptian society and its history. The opinions and arguments that arise in this context are inseparable from

49. The Hebrew wording of the next sentence is "יפתח לך את אוצרו הטוב מן השמים לתת מטר ארצך בעתו ולברך את כל מעשה ידיך והלויה גוים רבים ואתה לא תלוה." The two words marked by me in italics are different from the wording that appears in the Bible today: "יִפְתַּח יְהוָה לְךָ אֶת אוֹצָרוֹ הַטּוֹב אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם, לָתֵת מְטַר אַרְצְךָ בְּעִתּוֹ, וּלְבָרֵךְ, אֵת כָּל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶךָ; וְהִלְוִיתָ גּוֹיִם רַבִּים, וְאַתָּה לֹא תִלְוֶה" (Deut 28.12).

50. For an unknown reason, Gottheil notes that "at the end of the volume are six leaves of Masoretic notes of the usual kind." Gottheil, "Some Hebrew Manuscripts in Cairo," 629.

the ongoing debates about the history of modern Egypt and its evolving cultural identity as a result of the country's diminishing minority groups. Although not universally shared, this new perspective is an alternative to the widespread tendency to see Jews exclusively in terms of the Arab-Israeli conflict and treat their Egyptian history in ahistorical ways.

Against this backdrop, the rediscovery of ZBAM provides an opportunity to discuss what might be called "the future of the Jewish past" in Egypt. It allows us to examine the broad and deep meanings of the preservation of Jewish heritage in the space in which it was created. The principal assumption on which this examination should rest is that, because Jews were an integral part of local society and culture for many centuries, the responsibility for preserving Jewish heritage and assets rests foremost with the local Jewish community and the Egyptian society and government, and not with Israel or international Jewish groups who might make claim upon them. In fact, this view is plainly expressed in the intensive activity of the current leadership of the Jewish community in Cairo and is receiving increasing, and encouraging, support within Egypt.

The Cairo Geniza bears critical relevance. There is no doubt that the discovery of the Cairo genizot led to the rewriting of the history of Jewish and non-Jewish societies in the immense land between India in the east and Morocco in the west. Still, it is important to note that these genizot were safeguarded for hundreds of years in synagogues and cemeteries in Egypt, and they were removed from the possession of their owners irreversibly and in questionable circumstances. Like the removal of countless archaeological items throughout the Middle East and Africa, the emptying of the genizot in Cairo was carried out, and in a way enabled, under the patronage of colonial rule. Thus, Ella Shohat persuasively reframed the removal of the Cairo Geniza in relation to broader colonial seizure practices. Moreover, she claimed that the displacement of this one-of-a-kind corpus from the sphere where it had been created and preserved for millennia created an artificial historiographical rupture between the medieval Judeo-Arab heritage, clearly reflected in the Geniza's contents, and the modern Judeo-Arabic heritage.[51]

A legitimate question may arise regarding the future of manuscripts and Judaica in general if Jews no longer remain in Egypt. A possible answer may be gleaned from the status of, and the attitude toward, the remnants of other civilizations and peoples that flourished in Egypt in

51. Ella Shohat, "Taboo Memories, Diasporic Visions: Columbus, Palestine and Arab-Jews," in *Performing Hybridity*, ed. J. May and J. Fink (Minneapolis, 1999), 131–56.

ancient times, such as the Pharaonic and Hellenistic civilizations. Enormous efforts are invested in the preservation of temples, pyramids, and cultural artifacts considered an essential part of Egyptian history and culture. Similarly, figures such as Rabbi Moshe/Moussa Ben Maimon (Maimonides) and Sa'id al-Fayumi (Saadiah Gaon) are seen as exemplary figures by Egyptians.

Indeed, Magda Haroun's concrete and novel initiatives cohere with this stance of viewing Jewish heritage as an integral part of Egyptian culture, and they express a clear vision regarding the future of the Jewish past. Innovatively, she has redefined the objectives of the Drop of Milk Association (La Goutte de Lait). The association, established by the Jewish community in Cairo in 1917, operated as a school providing education to generations of Jewish students from needy families. The school building in downtown Cairo is still owned by the Jewish community. In 2014, Haroun thoughtfully modified the bylaw of this association to include safeguarding the heritage of Egyptian Jews. Dozens of Egyptian citizens, among them some with Jewish roots, have joined the Drop of Milk and take part in activities like rehabilitating synagogues and organizing special events during Rosh Hashanah, Hanukkah, and Passover. Members are not only highly committed to safeguarding the Jewish heritage; they see their commitment as an expression of a patriotic Egyptian stance. The heritage of the local Jewish community is recast as an Egyptian story of past and present times.

Yet another forward-looking plan of Magda Haroun and Samy Ibrahim is to establish the Jewish Heritage Library in Cairo. According to this plan, to which I have the honor of being a contributor, the institute will be located in the Drop of Milk school. The library will be the new home for thousands of books already collected from several synagogues. The Karaite corpus of manuscripts and rare books, including ZBAM, will be the crowning glory of the entire collection. The library will be open to all, Egyptians and foreigners, wishing to learn about the spiritual and intellectual heritage of Jews in the land of the pyramids. The library website will display high-resolution scans of the corpus and other documents.

The Zechariah Ben 'Anan manuscript and the corpus that was rediscovered in Cairo, which once belonged to the Karaite community, are now in the possession of the Jewish community in Cairo, who vehemently oppose transferring them out of Egypt. This firm stand reflects a radical inversion of the perception that guided both individuals and institutions dealing with the Cairo Geniza at the end of the nineteenth century. Symbolically, this conception acknowledges the stern warnings

that appear in several biblical manuscripts of the Karaite corpus against their sale and removal from their resting place. Thus, the outcome of the current debate over the fate of Jewish assets in Egypt is firmly entwined with past and present. In fact, it reflects the two sides of the very same coin.