HISTORICAL HEBREW MANUSCRIPTS

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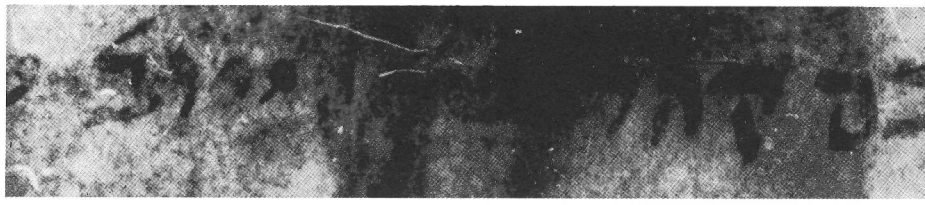
The Dead Sea Scrolls include relatively few documentary texts of historical character, notable exceptions being some ancient calendars as well as the Copper Scroll with its rich information on the hiding of the Temple treasures and of texts stemming from ancient Jerusalem libraries.[1] Virtually all of the other scrolls are hand copies of imaginative literary texts from which judgments and inferences of a historical character have to be laboriously squeezed out, sometimes as water from a rock. What is more, for all their

1. See my observations in *Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls?* (Scribner, 1995), chapter II and *passim*. The abiding public interest in the scrolls is indicated by the separate publication of the book in England and by its appearance in German and Dutch, as well as by publication of the work next year in Portuguese, Japanese, and French.



Detail of manuscript Cambridge, Taylor-Schechter Genizah fragment 12.122, identifying the senders of the letter as the "Community of Kiev" (the oldest extant documentary reference to this city)

vast importance, the scrolls constitute in their totality but a small proportion of the Hebrew manuscripts composed and/or copied before the age of printing. Leaving aside the thousands of literary texts composed and copied after the period of the scrolls until the fifteenth century, there are at least 25,000 autograph documentary leaves casting direct light on many aspects of the history of the Jews, as well as aspects of general history, now available to scholars. With the exception of the Bar Kokhbah texts (second century A.D.) and the Byzantine Hebrew papyri, almost all of these documents are from the Cairo Genizah and date mainly from the tenth through the thirteenth century. The vast majority of these documentary texts—now in Cambridge, Oxford, the British Museum, St. Petersburg, and elsewhere—all stem from the ancient "Synagogue of the Palestinians" of Fusṭāṭ-Miṣr (the so-called Old Cairo, just to the south of Cairo itself) and concern mostly events that transpired in Egypt and other Near and Middle Eastern countries, but some are from the far corners of medieval Europe.

These latter documents are among the most precious of the Genizah fragments, providing unusual glimpses into otherwise unrecorded aspects of history, often with implications for the Near Eastern history itself: witness for example the tenth-century document from Kiev, the only known autograph of the Khazarian Jews, which has, among other things, had the effect of authenticating the valuable correspondence of Hasdai ibn Shaprut (*major domo* in the court of the tenth-century Caliph ʿAbd al-Rahman III of Cordova) with King Joseph of the Khazars (see *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century*, by N. Golb and O. Pritsak [Cornell University Press, 1982], to appear next year in Russian translation). Genizah documents pertaining to the First and Second Crusades are also in the latter category.

Perhaps the most unusual Genizah text I have yet encountered is a long epistle on parchment describing the vicissitudes of a Jew of early eleventh-century Rouen. From Merovingian times until the late thirteenth century the Gallic city of Rothomagus was designated simply as Rothom or Rodom (before its permutation into Rouen), and it is this latter orthography (Hebrew רדום) that appears in the Genizah parchment. The importance of this reading led me, over many years, to search out this term in the oldest Hebrew manuscripts of French and Normannic origin, and in the wake of the discovery of more than twenty-five occurrences of the term in cultural, political and social contexts, to an investigation of the toponymy of Normandy and the consequent identification of more than eighty Streets of the Jews (Rues aux Juifs) in that region (for full particulars, see *The Jews of Medieval Normandy*, by N. Golb [Cambridge University Press, 1997]). On the basis of quite precise evidence, it is now clear that many if not most of these streets and bordering land-areas (in Latin: *Vicus Judaeorum*) originated in the period of Roman colonization of Gaul. The implications of this finding are explored in my forthcoming volume on the subject.