

Beyond the Leningrad Codex: Samuel b. Jacob in the Cairo Genizah

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Samuel b. Jacob is a scribe of the early 11th century whose name is not as familiar to most Bible scholars as that of his greatest creation, the earliest complete copy of the Hebrew Bible, Russian National Library (RNL) Evr. I B19a, the famous Codex Leningrad of the Firkovich Collection.¹ Samuel b. Jacob's name is etched, emblazoned even, throughout the illuminated carpet pages of the volume, but these conspicuous examples of the medieval artisan's trade are reproduced far less often than the main work itself – the biblical text. The consonants, vowels and accents of RNL Evr. I B19a form the base text for the most widely used of scholarly editions – Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica* (BHK, in its third edition), the German Bible Society's *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), Dotan's *Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia* (BHL), the new *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* (BHQ) and increasingly vital online tools such as the Westminster Leningrad Codex (WLC) – but the name of its scribe is probably unknown to most who use these editions.² From the pristine pages of BHS, BHK, BHL, BHQ or the XML of the WLC it is impossible to get the flavour of the sheer high quality of the original manuscript; it is only when you look at the careful layout of the parchment leaves or the embellishment of the micrography on the carpet pages that you can really appreciate the standard of workmanship of the scribe Samuel b. Jacob. It is fitting, therefore, that such a sumptuous volume should be from a scholarly perspective also the most important codex of the Hebrew Bible that we possess. It is a masterpiece of the medieval Masoretic art.

Comparatively little is known about this valuable codex's production however. The name of its scribe is rarely quoted alongside the text he produced,

¹ I am grateful to my colleagues in the Genizah Research Unit, particularly Dr Kim Phillips and Dr Samuel Blapp, for stimulating conversations around the conclusions reached in this paper, as well as for the feedback I received from a number of seminar and conference participants at home and abroad following my presentations on aspects of the texts featured here. The Leningrad Codex itself can now be viewed easily online on the National Library of Israel's Ktiv digital library, in stately black and white digitised microfilm form, with restrictive conditions: <http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLIS/en/ManuScript/>, item 151623, accessed 13 December 2017.

² One of many tools now to be found on the internet for biblical scholars, the Westminster Leningrad Codex reproduces the bare text, vowels and accents of B19a in useful XML. It is found at <http://tanach.us/Tanach.xml>; accessed 12 December 2017.

its exact date is uncertain, and even its place of composition often misreported. Little thought has generally been given to who produced such a masterpiece, for whom and why. This is a gap that can be filled, relatively easily, by reading the colophons of the book. Yet, they are rarely reproduced alongside the text, or, when they are published, interest tends to focus on the gold-illuminated carpet page colophons, rather than the highly informative and lengthy plain colophon of the manuscript.³

As I shall show in this paper, other documentary sources can shine a light on the context of the book's production and the background of its talented scribe, but the first page to turn to for anyone who has an interest in the book, its production and its ownership is folio 1 r. of RNL Evr. I B19a, the plain ownership colophon, composed and written by Samuel b. Jacob.

The colophon on f. 1 r. is lengthy, taking up most of the page; it is longer, for instance, than the Moses b. Asher colophon in the Cairo Codex of the Prophets.⁴ Its purpose is principally to indicate the ownership of the volume, as well as to record who copied it, where and when. It also serves as a long encomium on the owner and an opportunity for the scribe to show off his mastery of poetic Hebrew prose. It is worth reading in full not just for the details it preserves, but also for the quality of Samuel's original writing; he was a skilled and versatile scribe.⁵

The plain colophon

RNL Evr. I B19a, Codex Leningrad, folio 1 r.

1. זה המחזור מקרא שלם נכתב ונגמר בנקודות ובמוסרות ומוגה יפה במדינת מצרים :::
2. ונשלם בחדש סיון שלשנת ארבעת אלפים ושבע מאות ושבעים שנה לבריאת עולם
3. והיא שנת אלף וארבע מאות וארבעים וארבעה לגלות המלך יהויכין והיא שנת אלף
4. ושלוש מאות ותשע עשרה שנה למלכות יונים שהיא למנין {שטרות} ולפסקת הנבואה
5. והיא שנת תשע מאות וארבעים לחרבן בית שני. והיא שנת שלוש מאות ותשעים
6. ותשע למלכות קרן זעירה: מה שזכה מבורך בן יוסף בן נתנאל
7. הידוע בן יזאדא הכהן ועשה אתו לעצמו להגות בו מעמלו ומיגיע כפיו ומיזיעת אפו
8. יהי רצון מלפני יהוה שיחזיק אותו בתורתו ויאמץ אותו במצותיו ויחכמו בדקדוק

³ An exception is Freedman et al., 1998, which reproduces every page of the codex in glorious detail. If you don't already own a copy, however, then you need to be rich to acquire one.

⁴ Though this includes several lines added to the original ownership colophon by a subsequent owner of RNL Evr. I B19a, as seen below.

⁵ A complete edition of the colophon, transcribed and translated into French, can be found in Beit-Arié, Sirat and Glatzer, 1997, pp. 115–116. For the edition given here, I relied on digital images and the facsimile volume, and my readings differ occasionally from those of Beit-Arié, Sirat and Glatzer.

9. דתו ויאיר עיניו בתעודתו ויזכה לבנין ביתו וינחילו יוצרו שני חיי עולמים חיי העולם
10. הוזה וחיי העולם הבא ויגן ברחמיו הרבים עליו ויפרש עליו ועל זרעו סכת שלום:
11. ויזכה אתו להגות בתורתו תמיד ויזכה לקים כל התורה מקרא ודקדוקי מקרא: ויקים
12. לא ימוש מפיד ומפי זרעך ומפי זרעך אמר יהוה מעתה ועד עולם: ויזכה
13. לזרע חי וקים ונכון בתורה ובמצות ובמעשים טובים ולחיים ארכים שאין בהם חטא ועון
14. וינחילו יוצרו חן וחסד והון ועשר וכבוד ועטרת תורה ותפארת תושיה ויזכה להוד [...]]
15. ולהדרה ולעזה ולעזוזה וינצל מכל עברה וצרה וזעם וחרון אף ומכל נזק ים ויבשה ויראה זרע
16. ויאריך ימים כאב המון הזקן אשר בא בימים ויצליח מאד בכל מעשים מכשרים כיחיד אשר
17. מצא מאה שערים ופדות והצליח כפץ איה השה בניאומים ועשר וכבוד כחזו[ז]ה סלם מצב
18. במורא ממקומים וכן וחסד והוד כמבית האסורים יצא למשול בעמים ונסי נסים כשנעשו
19. למוציאם בן בכור מבין ענמים: וברית עולם כנחשבה לו צדקה לדורות עולם וגודל שמע
20. כשעמדו לו שמש וירח ביום מימים: וטוב עם יהוה ועם אנשים כנענה בהקריבו טלה תמים:
21. ובינת דבר כמנגן בשירות בנעימים: וחכמה ושכל כנחכם מכל חכמים: וישועה גדולה
22. כעל פי דברו זרמו גשמים: וינצל מכל צרה וצוקה כאמר לא זה הדרך לגדודי ארמים:
23. אמן כן יהי רצון מצור עולמים ושלום רב מבורך זה יועצם ויותמם ויורם ויוחטם ויונעם
24. לעולם אמן ואמן באלהי אמן ומלך עולם: ס:

Addition to the colophon in a later hand⁶

25. קנה זה המצחף כ'ג'ק'מ'ור' אדוננו מצליח הכהן ראש ישיבת גאון יעקב יברכהו אלהינו וישמרהו
26. בר כ'ג'ק'מ'ור' אדוננו שלמה הכהן ראש ישיבת גאון יעקב זלחה"ה נין הגאונים בממונו לנפשו ומאת
27. כ'ג'ק' המשכיל החכם והנבון יוסף הנודע בן כוגך בחדש תמוז שנת אתמ'ו לשטרות האלהים יזכהו להגות
28. בו הוא ובניו וזרעם כל ימיהם לקיים לא ימוש מפיד וג'

⁶ This purchase and ownership note was added to the colophon in the same style as the original when Maṣliāḥ Ga'on, head of the Palestinian Academy in the 12th century, purchased the codex. Subsequent owners of codices often write their own colophons, but Maṣliāḥ added himself to the chain of ownership in the original colophon, probably because of the significance and obvious value of the book. For more on this purchase, and the previous ownership by Ibn Kuchek, see Outhwaite, 2017.

29. חצר מנשה הכהן ביר' יעקב נ"ע חלפון הלוי ביר' מנשה נ"ע חצר דלך לוי
הלוי בר יפת הלוי נ"ע

1. This codex⁷ of the complete Bible was written, furnished with vocalisation and *masora*,⁸ and carefully checked⁹ in Fustāt.¹⁰
2. And it was completed in the month of Sivan of the year four thousand and seven hundred and seventy of Creation,
3. and which is the year one thousand and four hundred and forty-four of the Exile of King Jehoiachin, and which is the year one thousand
4. and three hundred and nineteen of the Kingdom of the Greeks, which is the reckoning of {documents}¹¹ and of the Ceasing of Prophecy,
5. and which is the year nine hundred and forty of the Destruction of the Second Temple, and which is the year three hundred and ninety-
6. nine of the Kingdom of the Little Horn.¹² This has been rightfully acquired¹³ by Mevoraḳ ben Joseph ben Netan'el

⁷ The word translated as 'codex' is Hebrew מחזור, which has come to mean a prayer-book for the festivals in Modern Hebrew. In its earliest usage, however, it appears to have the sense of 'book, codex' in general, as opposed to *sefer*, which is 'scroll'. On the earliest uses of מחזור in this sense, see Glatzer, 1989, pp. 260–263. It can be found in a number of biblical colophons, including the Moses b. Asher colophon in the Cairo Codex of the Prophets: אני משה בן אשר 'I, Moses b. Asher, have written this codex of scripture'. Others prefer the loanword *miṣḥaf* (מצחק, Arabic مصحف, *maṣḥaf* or *muṣḥaf*) for the same meaning. Indeed, Samuel himself uses מצחק in the carpet page on f. 474 r. of Leningrad, כתבתי ונקדתי ומס' זה המצחק, 'I have written, vocalised and provided the *masora* of this codex' (abbreviating ומסרת' to keep a straight left-hand margin).

⁸ Samuel uses the plural, which he spells with a ך after the initial ך, perhaps reflecting the back pronunciation of the *qames*. It is an unusual spelling that I cannot find replicated elsewhere. I hesitate to suggest it is an error this early in the colophon.

⁹ This is the *huf'al* participle of נגה, 'to check, revise', and refers to authoritative Bibles, those copied or corrected against a certain textual tradition. Yeivin, 1980, p. 138 describes מוגה as "any sort of carefully corrected text". The idea of 'checked' implying 'checked and corrected' texts is present already in the Talmud, e.g. BT Ketubbot 19b מוגה מוגה 'a Torah scroll that has not been checked', which may only be kept for thirty days without having any corrections made. The most accurate translation would perhaps be 'copy-edited' or 'proof-read', but it sounds too anachronistic in the context of 11th century Fustāt.

¹⁰ Some other translations of the opening of the colophon read 'Cairo' – e.g. Lebedev in Freedman et al., 1998, p. xxii; Würthwein, 2014, p. 254 – but Samuel is definitely referring to Fustāt. The phrase occurs, for instance, in a divorce deed, CUL T-S 8.154, in which a man from Alexandria (*No Amon*) divorces his wife from Fustāt (*Medinat Miṣrayim*) in Taṭay in 1052. Stern, 2017, p. 199 suggests that RNL Evr. I B19a was written "probably in the land of Israel", but that is at odds with Samuel's statement in the colophon.

¹¹ The word שטרות 'documents' has been erased in the text, perhaps deliberately.

¹² This is the Hijra, the Islamic era, and the term 'little horn' is a belittling epithet for Islam derived from Daniel 7:8, "I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn".

¹³ The verb זכה has a range of meanings, and is usually used in the sense of 'to be worthy of' in blessings and other pieces of laudatory prose (as often, for instance, in this colophon). But it may also have the technical sense of rightful ownership or possession – e.g. Mišna Bava Meši'a 1:3, ואמר אני זכתי בה זכה בה, 'He said "I have acquired it", then he has acquired it' – which is probably also the case here in this ownership colophon. Beit-Arié, Sirat and Glatzer, 1997,

7. who is known as Ibn Yazdād ha-Kohen, and he had it made for himself,¹⁴ to study it, out of [the proceeds of] his own labour, the toil of his hands and the sweat of his brow.
8. May it be the will of the LORD¹⁵ to encourage him through His Torah, to strengthen him through His commandments and to make him wise through the fine points of
9. His law. And may He give light to his eyes through His testimony. And may he award him with the [re]building of His house. And may his Creator bestow upon him the life of two worlds: the life of this world,
10. and the life of the world to come. May He protect¹⁶ him with His abundant mercy and may He spread over him and over his offspring a Booth of Peace.
11. And may He grant him to always study His Torah, and may He grant the fulfilling of the Torah, scripture and fine points of scripture.¹⁷ May He establish
12. “they shall not depart from your mouth, or from the mouth of your children, or from your children’s children, said the LORD, from now and forever” [Isaiah 59:21]. And may he enjoy
13. offspring living, enduring and secure in Torah and in the commandments and in good deeds, and long¹⁸ life without sin or transgression.

p. 115 translate it as ‘a eu le mérite de faire’, taking ועשה (line 7) as subordinate to זכה. The same coordinate phrase occurs in the ownership colophon of the Cairo Codex of the Prophets, מה שזכה יעבץ בן שלמה נה נפש ועשה אותו – which is owned by Ya‘beš b. Solomon – his rest be easy – and he made it ...’.

¹⁴ Literally, of course, ‘he made it for himself’, but the sense is that he commissioned it, rather than bought or acquired it otherwise. Exactly the same phrase occurs in the Ya‘beš b. Solomon colophon of the Cairo Codex of the Prophets, lines 2–4, ועשה אותו לעצמו להגות בו מעמלו ומיגיע, כפיו ומזיעת אפו. Note that the Cairo colophon uses the expected עה (ז), ‘sweat’, appropriated from Genesis 3:19, whereas Samuel’s מזיעת is, at best, a hybrid form from זיע, Ezekiel 44:18, and זעה.

¹⁵ Samuel uses the full form of the divine name, which is unusual for a piece of non-biblical prose. The Cairo Codex of the Prophets ownership colophon uses an abbreviated form in the phrase לזהות ביועם ל’ to behold the beauty of the L[ord]’ (Psalms 27:4), as does the colophon of RNL Evr. II B17, אל י[ה]שב לי יי עון, ‘let the L[ord] not impute me blame’ (a reworking of Psalms 32:2), which is dated 929 CE.

¹⁶ The vocalisation on ויגן appears to be original, added by Samuel when he wrote it and highlighting a difficult form that occurs only three times in the Bible (in Isaiah 31:5 and twice in Zechariah). Sporadic vocalisation in otherwise unvocalised Medieval Hebrew texts often occurs on obscure biblical forms or ambiguous words; see Outhwaite, 2000, pp. 6–7.

¹⁷ The term מקרא often implies the “study of scripture” and the phrase דקדוקי המקרא has the sense of “the fine points of scripture as established by detailed investigation” in early grammatical or Masoretic works; see Khan, 2000, pp. 14–15, 17–19.

¹⁸ Samuel employs a number of defective forms, such as אר(י)כים (line 13), א(ו)תו (lines 7, 11) and קי(י)ם (line 13), suggestive of a deliberately biblicising style to his prose here.

14. And may his Creator award him grace, kindness, wealth, riches, honour, and a crown of Torah and a diadem of success. And may he be granted the glory of the [...],¹⁹
15. its majesty, its strength and its might. May he be saved from all fury, hostility, indignation and wrath, and from all harm by sea and dry land. May he see offspring
16. and may He lengthen his days like the “Father of Many”,²⁰ who was old and stricken in age,²¹ and grant him great success in all proper deeds, like the only one²² who
17. found “one hundred measures”,²³ and redemption and success, like the one who spoke²⁴ the words “where is the sheep?”,²⁵ and wealth and honour like the one who had a vision of a ladder set up²⁶
18. in the most dreadful²⁷ of places, and grace and kindness and splendour like the one who came out of the prison to rule over people,²⁸ and miraculous miracles like those that were performed
19. for those who brought out the firstborn son from among the Ananites.²⁹ And an everlasting covenant like the one who was reckoned for righteousness for eternal generations,³⁰ and greatness of reputation
20. like the one³¹ for whom the sun and moon stood still on one particular day. And eminence with the LORD and with men, like the one³² who was answered when he sacrificed a whole lamb.

¹⁹ Beit-Arié, Sirat and Glatzer, 1997, p. 115 read ויזכה להודו and translate it as ‘qu’il ait le mérite de sa grâce’, but unless it is a highly elongated ה at the end of the line, another word should follow להודו.

²⁰ The patriarch Abraham, from Genesis 17:5.

²¹ Genesis 24:1.

²² Isaac, from Genesis 22:2.

²³ Isaac, from Genesis 26:12.

²⁴ Samuel b. Jacob vocalises כָּפַץ because of the unusual form and syntax. It is commonplace in classical Hebrew *piyyuṭ*, however, reflecting a *paytan*-like use of the preposition כ- with a finite verb, together with the apocopation of a final-*he* verb (פצה > פץ in fact) in the 3rd person masculine singular suffix conjugation. This particular verb, פץ, is very common in Hebrew poetry of the Byzantine period; see Rand, 2006, pp. 136–138, 422–427. Another example of *paytan*-like language is גִּיאוּמִים, a plural of גִּאֹם, where the *yod* perhaps reflects a pronunciation *niyūmīm*, with a glide replacing the glottal stop. The extensive use of biblical allusion in this colophon is also typical of poetic language. It suggests that Samuel was probably quite familiar with *piyyuṭ* and, as a professional scribe, he may well have copied poetry or liturgy as well as Bible codices in order to make ends meet.

²⁵ Isaac, from Genesis 22:7.

²⁶ Jacob, from Genesis 28:12.

²⁷ Beit-Arié, Sirat and Glatzer, 1997, p. 115 reconstruct א[במור]מ מקומים ‘dans le plus redoutable des lieux’. The allusion is to Genesis 28:17, מה נורא המקום הזה ‘how dreadful is this place?’. I think the reading במורא is visible, but it could conceivably be בנורא.

²⁸ Joseph, alluding to Ecclesiastes 4:14.

²⁹ Through synecdoche, the Egyptians; Genesis 10:13 and 1 Chronicles 1:11.

³⁰ Phineas, from Psalms 106:31, though Samuel has צדקה for the Psalmist’s צדקה.

³¹ Joshua, from Joshua 10:12–13.

³² Samuel, from 1 Samuel 7:9.

21. And the understanding of matters like the player³³ of songs in delight. And wisdom and understanding like the one who was wiser than all wise men.³⁴ And a great salvation
22. like the one on whose word the rains poured down.³⁵ And may he be saved from all distress and anguish, like the one³⁶ who said “This is not the way” to the bands of Aramaeans.³⁷
23. Amen. So may it be the will of the Rock of Ages. Great peace. This Mevoraḳ – may he be made strong and upright, be raised up, calm and pleasant.
24. For ever, amen and amen, by the God of Truth and the Eternal King :o:³⁸

Only lines 1 to 24 are the original ownership colophon of the codex. A further note of ownership was added when the book changed hands in the 12th century.

25. The honourable, great, holy, our master and our teacher our lord Maṣliaḥ ha-Kohen Head of the Academy of the Pride of Jacob purchased this book – may our God bless him and protect him –
26. son of the honourable, great, holy, our master and our teacher our lord Solomon ha-Kohen Head of the Academy of the Pride of Jacob – may his memory be for a blessing for the life of the next world³⁹ – descendant of *ge'onim*, with his own money for himself from
27. the honourable, great, holy, the wise and distinguished teacher Joseph who is known as Ibn Kuchek, in the month of Tammuz, the year 1446 of Documents. May God allow him to study
28. it, he, his children and their offspring, all their days to fulfil [the commandment] “they shall not depart from your mouth, etc.”.⁴⁰
29. Attending, Manasseh ha-Kohen son of the scholar Jacob – his rest be in Eden. Ḥalfon ha-Levi son of the scholar Manasseh – his rest be in Eden. Attending it, Levi ha-Levi son of Japheth ha-Levi – his rest be in Eden.⁴¹

The original colophon is in the hand of Samuel b. Jacob himself. This is clear from a comparison of the handwriting with the rest of the manuscript, and can

³³ David, from 1 Samuel 18:10 and elsewhere.

³⁴ Solomon, alluding to 1 Kings 3:12.

³⁵ Elijah, from 1 Kings 18:41–45.

³⁶ Elisha, from 2 Kings 6:19.

³⁷ 2 Kings 6:23.

³⁸ Samuel's siglum :o: marks the end of the original colophon.

³⁹ An abbreviation of זכרונו לברכה להיי העולם הבא.

⁴⁰ Isaiah 59:21.

⁴¹ These three are witnesses to the sale, and all had links to Maṣliaḥ Ga'on and the Palestinian Yešiva.

also be seen from the use at the end of the colophon of his distinctive textual marker :o: (see figure 1), which he uses to delimit Masoretic sections throughout the *masora magna* of the book (and which also occurs in the illuminated carpet pages). Different copyists of the medieval Masoretic Bible use different sigla, such as simple circles or more elaborate combinations of circle and lines, but Samuel's is rare enough – though not unique to him – that we can with confidence take this as his own work here too. Indeed, there is no reason to doubt it.

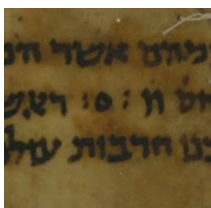


Figure 1. Samuel b. Jacob's distinctive siglum is used to divide Masoretic notes in another codex of the Torah that he copied, which now exists as scattered leaves in the Cairo Genizah (detail of CUL T-S A3.35 verso)⁴²

From the colophon, we can see that Samuel was working in Fustāṭ at this stage of his life. In using מדינת מצרים *medinat miṣrayim* instead of 'Fustāṭ' – פסטאט or מצר (Arabic, *miṣr*) – Samuel is endeavouring to use only Hebrew vocabulary in his colophon. This is a feature typical of Hebrew high prose style of this era, which tends to avoid using foreign terms or toponyms if vocabulary from the Bible can be used instead.⁴³ Fustāṭ was, since the Fāṭimid founding of Cairo, no longer the capital of Islamic Egypt. It remained, however, the administrative centre for decades after Cairo's emergence. For the Jews, it was the social, economic and cultural centre of Egypt.⁴⁴ Consequently, a scribe could expect to find commissions for scribal work in Fustāṭ from among the elite of the city, its community leaders and merchant princes.

Samuel gives the month of completion of his work as the Jewish month of Sivan (May–June), and then – to lend it more weight and significance – the year according to five different systems of reckoning, not all Jewish. They are: 4770 of the Creation (לבריאת עולם), which equates to 1010 CE; 1444 of the Exile of King Jehoiachin (לגלות המלך יהויכין), which is in the range 1006–1014 CE;⁴⁵ 1319 of the Seleucid Era (למלכות יונים שהיא למנין שטרות), which equates

⁴² Image reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

⁴³ As Golb, 1965, pp. 269–270 describes it, “The Jews probably began using Biblical Hebrew names for Egyptian cities during this period of nationalistic reorientation [i.e. after the revolt of the 2nd century CE] ... This practice of giving Hebrew names to Egyptian cities was evidently kept up after the arrival of Islam and through the beginning of the Fatimid period.” On the avoidance of loanwords in Hebrew of this period, see Outhwaite, 2000, pp. 98–99.

⁴⁴ Bareket, 2017, pp. 88–89.

⁴⁵ The exile took place in 597 BCE; see Freedman, 1992, s.v. Jehoiachin. Rabbinic sources date it to 430 BCE, but it can be dated further back in 437/8 BCE in medieval documents (Olszowy-

to 1008 CE; 940 of the Destruction of the Second Temple (להרבן בית שני), which is in the range 1008–1010 CE;⁴⁶ 399 of the Hijra (קרן זעירה), which is 1009 CE. Which to follow? The Jews in Egypt were more accustomed to using the Seleucid or Creation dates than others.⁴⁷ The Seleucid is probably reliable, as it is so commonly used. A date of 1008–1009 CE seems reasonable, as it comes closest to the Seleucid, Destruction and Hijra date ranges. We should not expect absolute calendrical exactitude in a pre-modern text, particularly when the writer was probably not a specialist in the discipline. Egregious errors of dating can be easily found in Genizah legal documents, such as a court record from Fustāt where the writer has recorded the date as 4994 of Creation (ד' אלפים ותשע מאות ותשעים וארבע), when he probably meant to write the year 4794 (ושבע מאות), that is, 1034 CE – an error of 200 years!⁴⁸

Most interesting is the fact that the colophon uses all five systems of dating, including the Exile of King Jehoiachin, which is a system used mainly in Karaite legal documents.⁴⁹ Samuel means to be comprehensive in his colophon, but in adding the reckoning according to the Jehoiachin exile, he is probably conforming to the affiliation of the owner of the Bible.

Mevoraḳ b. Joseph b. Netan 'el known as Ibn Yazdād ha-Kohen was the commissioning owner of RNL Evr. I B19a, as not only the plain colophon (f. 1 r.) but also a number of the carpet pages make richly clear (e.g., ff. 474 r., 475 v. and 478 v., among others).⁵⁰ The family was originally from Persia: the patronymic Ibn Yazdād is of Persian origin, meaning 'God has given', that is, 'God's gift'. An Ibn Yazdād, perhaps Mevoraḳ's father, appears in commercial correspondence from the Genizah early in the 11th century, whence it

Schlanger, 1998, pp. 162–163). It's an important event in Jewish chronology, because it helps to set the date for the destruction of the First Temple eleven years later.

⁴⁶ Although the destruction of the Second Temple took place in 70 CE, the calculations of the elapsed time differ in Jewish sources, with the result that the reckoning from the Destruction effectively covers a range of several years, 68–70 CE; see Friedman, 1980, vol. I, pp. 104–106.

⁴⁷ Goitein, 1967–1993, vol. I, p. 355. The Seleucid system of dating, 'the Era of Documents' or 'of the Greeks', was the preferred system of the Babylonian Jews and, given their cultural dominance, it became common in documents from the Genizah too; see Friedman, 1980, p. 106. The suggestion in Würthwein, 2014, p. 254 that the Hijra date "is probably the most reliable because the writer lived in an Islamic country" goes too far. Hijra dating, though found in Genizah texts (and, indeed, see the document discussed below), is used far less than the Jewish systems of Creation and the Seleucid Era.

⁴⁸ CUL T-S 8J6.8. The handwriting and language are clearly of the 11th century. The error was probably not strictly mathematical or calendrical, but scribal: anticipating the תשעים a few words later, he wrote תשע instead of שבע.

⁴⁹ And mainly, it seems, in Karaite deeds from Ramla; Olszowy-Schlanger, 1998, pp. 162–163.

⁵⁰ Although Samuel spells Ibn Yazdād's name יזדאד on most occasions, he does write it once אזדאד, in the central text on the carpet page f. 474 r. Medieval Jewish writers like variety, and will often switch between the Hebrew and Arabic versions of people's names in the same document, but given that Samuel spells it יזדאד everywhere else, it is probably an unfortunate error by the scribe, which is explainable perhaps by the unfamiliarity of the name.

seems he is based in Egypt and plays a role in Mediterranean trade, associating with the great merchant Joseph b. Jacob Ibn ‘Awkal.⁵¹

The owner Mevoraḳ was therefore himself probably a major merchant, and had accumulated both personal wealth and social status. Evidence of this, beyond his commissioning of an expensive codex, is that he was appointed around 1019 CE to oversee the two supervisors of an inheritance, ensuring the safeguarding of a substantial sum in trade goods for the minor son of a Jewish merchant.⁵² The Genizah has preserved a letter that Mevoraḳ, in his role as overseer, wrote to one of the deceased merchant’s business partners.⁵³ Further correspondence, written by the supervisors themselves, reveals Mevoraḳ’s name in Arabic to be Abū I-Ḥusayn al-Mubārak ibn Yūsuf ibn Yazdād.⁵⁴ S. D. Goitein believes that Mevoraḳ was a Karaite; E. Bareket, who also wrote about the case, suggests that there is not enough evidence to be sure.⁵⁵ A Karaite legal deed from 1004 CE, however, shows that Joseph Ibn Yazdād, Mevoraḳ’s father, also held a position of trust in Karaite society, as there he is named as one of three supervisors of a Persian Karaite merchant’s accumulated possessions.⁵⁶ This strongly suggests that the Ibn Yazdād family were themselves Persian Karaites, and it explains therefore Samuel b. Jacob’s use of the very rare reckoning from the Exile of King Jehoiachin in the ownership colophon.

Samuel’s expertise as a scribe of the Bible is evident on every page of RNL Evr. I B19a, from the careful layout to the micrographic conceits of the carpet pages.⁵⁷ We know from the several colophons that he copied the text and also added the vocalisation and the *masora*, performing alone a task often carried out by a scribe (*sofer*) and a punctuator (*naqdan*) working together.⁵⁸ Moreover, he appears to have produced, at the very least, the micrography on the

⁵¹ It could alternatively be our Mevoraḳ himself. He is mentioned in a letter sent from Tunisia to Ibn ‘Awkal in Fuṣṭāt around 1000 CE, “What disturbed me most was your failure to pay to Ibn Yazdād and Salāma, the son-in-law of Furayj, the sum that I asked you to pay them” (translation from Goitein, 1973, p. 31). Ibn ‘Awkal’s roots also lay in Persia.

⁵² A number of letters and legal documents from this case have been recovered in the Genizah. It eventually reached litigation in the Muslim and Jewish courts when the orphan came to his majority and purposefully sought to recover his father’s assets. See Bareket, 1998, pp. 124–136; Goitein, 1967–1993, vol. III, pp. 293–295.

⁵³ CUL T-S 10J30.7.

⁵⁴ CUL T-S 16.27.

⁵⁵ Bareket, 1998, p. 125 n. 8.

⁵⁶ CUL T-S 16.171.

⁵⁷ Clearly inspired by Islamic book decoration, Samuel’s carpet pages are a remarkable artistic achievement. Stern, 2017, p. 84 has described them as “among the most complex in the history of the Jewish book”.

⁵⁸ He states this explicitly in the plain colophon, and the colophons on ff. 474 r. and 479 r. It is not unusual for a single scribe to produce the different text layers of a Masoretic Bible, e.g. RNL Evr. II B39, which was written, vocalised and provided with *masora* by Joseph b. Jacob the Maghribi, or RNL Evr. II B115, which was written and vocalised by one Moses b. Hillel.

carpet pages, and may well have added the gold illumination to them too.⁵⁹ It seems that this was a remarkable piece of solo entrepreneurship, producing single-handedly a luxury edition of the Hebrew Bible. Samuel's client, Mevorak, would have wanted his personal wealth to be reflected in the quality of the volume: the care taken in its copying, its size, its embellishment. There is no doubt it would have been a costly book to produce – in raw materials alone it would have taken at least 120 sheep for the 491 leaves.⁶⁰ There is no record in the colophons of how much the volume cost, but we are fortunate to have a record of Samuel's later scribal activity that shows how costly it might have been.

CUL T-S 10J5.15 is a legal document in Judaeo-Arabic from the Cairo Genizah on the terms of payment for copying books of the Hebrew Bible. It was edited in full by Elinoar Bareket in her 1995 book *Jewish Leadership in Fustat*, where she notes that it was an agreement with a scribe by the name of Samuel b. Jacob.⁶¹ The document is dated 1021 CE, and Samuel was to be paid twenty-five dinars by Salāma ibn Sa'īd ibn Ṣaḡīr for copying אלתמניה ואלכתיב 'eight books of the Prophets and the Writings', including all the vocalisation and *masora* (ונקטה ומאסרתהא). Not only was he to do all this on his own, but, showing the same entrepreneurship that produced Codex Leningrad, he would also bind and cover the book. It was to be copied in the same style as a Torah in the possession of Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥujayj, which Samuel had previously produced, and Ibrāhīm would receive two dinars from this agreement.

Agreement between Samuel b. Jacob and Salāma ibn Sa'īd ibn Ṣaḡīr
CUL T-S 10J5.15

1. בשם יי
2. יקול שמואל בן יעקוב אני ואקפת סלאמה בן סעיד בן צגיר עלי
3. נסך אלתמניה אספאר אלנבי ואלכתיב בכטהא ונקטהא ומאסרתהא
4. וכתב שרוט פי אול כל גזו ופי אכרה ותגלידהא ועמל זנפילהא

⁵⁹ The micrography is in a hand very similar to Samuel's and the sections, biblical verses and so on are often delimited by his : : siglum, or various elaborations of it. Furthermore, one can take הקקתי in the micrographic colophon on f. 477 r. as referring to the creation of the micrographic embellishments themselves: 'I Samuel have inscribed this for Mevorak – long may he live'.

⁶⁰ This is assuming that one complete sheepskin gives two bifolia of the quarto size used in RNL Evr. I B19a. There are 491 leaves in the book, arranged in quinions (quires of five bifolia, as is standard in eastern Jewish manuscripts), though the volume has been subject to later repair that has disordered some of the last leaves; see Beit-Arié, Sirat and Glatzer, 1997, p. 114.

⁶¹ Bareket, 1995, pp. 204–205, with a translation into Hebrew. She did not make the connection with the scribe of RNL Evr. I B19a, which is understandable since she is an historian, not a biblical scholar. It was Y. Ofer who first made the link with the scribe of the Leningrad Codex in his study of Samuel b. Jacob's copy of Sa'adya's *Tafsīr*, noting the fact in a footnote; see Ofer, 1999, p. 197 n. 23. I first discussed this document and its wider significance for the background of Codex Leningrad in Outhwaite, 2016.

5. להא ויכון דלך עלי אלנמודג אלדי ענד אבו אסחק אברהים [בן]
6. חגיג והי אלתורה אלדי נסכתהא לה לא זאיד ענהא ולא נאקץ
7. [כ]מא תקדם בה אלשרט ואלאגרה פי דלך עלי גמיע מא תקד[ם]
8. בה אלוצף כ'ה דינארא גיאדא ואזנה
9. קבצ'ת מן דלך דינארין ודלך עלי <יד> סידי אבו נצר סלאמה
10. בן סעיד בן צגיר איידה אללה והו אלמתולי לנסך הדה אלאגרה
11. לאבי אסחק אברהים בן חגיג איידה אללה
12. ודלך ללנצף מן שעבאן סנה אתני עשר וארבע מאיה

1. In the name of the LORD
2. Samuel b. Jacob says: “Behold, I hereby make an agreement with Salāma ibn Sa’īd ibn Ṣaḡīr concerning
3. a copy of the eight books of the Prophets and the Writings,⁶² with its script, its vowel points and its *masora*,⁶³
4. and the signs at the beginning and end of each section,⁶⁴ and its binding and the manufacture of the case⁶⁵
5. for it. And it should be according to the exemplar⁶⁶ that is in Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn
6. Ḥujayj’s possession – that is the Torah that I copied for him – nothing more and nothing less,

⁶² The Hebrew Bible is traditionally divided into the Torah (Genesis–Deuteronomy), the Prophets, and the Writings (the Hagiographa). The Prophets can be divided into the four books of the Former Prophets (Joshua–Kings) and the four books of the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve).

⁶³ This division of the three main tasks of the biblical copyist – the script, vowels and *masora* – is reflected in many of Samuel’s colophons, e.g. RNL Evr. I B19a f. 479 r., שמואל בן יעקב כתב, ונקד ומסר ‘Samuel b. Jacob wrote, vocalised and provided the *masora*’.

⁶⁴ Bareket, 1995, p. 204 understands these signs as denoting the open and closed sections of the text: תראה שהכוונה לסימון הפרשיות הסגורות והפתוחות, i.e., the *parašiyot petuhot* and *setumot*. The Arabic word is جزء ‘section, part’. While this could refer to the open and closed paragraphs (*parašiyot* or *pisqot*), perhaps it refers to the individual biblical books – i.e. the note of the total number of verses found after each book in Codex Leningrad. Or maybe it refers to the physical parts of the volume, the quires (though in Arabic this is usually *karārīs*). Quires receive signs at the beginning and end of each part, since this ensures the volume is bound in the correct order. Samuel b. Jacob marked his quires in RNL Evr. I B19a with a catchword at the end of each one and a quire number at the beginning: e.g. f. 10 v., the last page of the first quire, has the catchword מת, which anticipates the first word on f. 11 r., the first page of the volume’s second quire, which is numbered ב in the top margin. All the quires in the book are so marked. Given that the instructions in the agreement have already referred to the *masora*, which should probably include the *parašiyot* and other paratextual features, perhaps it seems logical that this separate instruction denotes something more to do with the manufacture, binding and completion of the volume, i.e. the correct ordering of the quires.

⁶⁵ Bareket, 1995, p. 204 cannot read the last word clearly and guesses ארפיליה, but it is to be read זנפילגה, Arabic *zanfalīja* (though here either with metathesis of the vowels, or *yod* denoting *‘imāla*), meaning a rigid case for a book, a slipcase; see Goitein, 1967–1993, vol. IV, pp. 387 n. 191, 463 n. 229.

⁶⁶ ‘Exemplar, pattern, model’, نمودج (نمودج), is a Persian loanword into Arabic, perhaps reflecting the eastern origins of this type of scribal practice, copying from model codices.

7. according to what is stipulated in this agreement. And the fee for this for all that is stipulated
8. in this specification is 25 dinars of full weight.
9. I have received from this two dinars, which came from the hand of my lord Abū Naṣr Salāma
10. ibn Saʿīd ibn Ṣaḡīr – God give him strength – who is directing the copying. This fee is
11. for Iṣḥāq Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥujayj – God give him strength.
12. And this is Mid-Šaʿbān, the year 412.⁶⁷

Like Mevoraḳ b. Joseph a decade or more before, Abū Naṣr Salāma ibn Saʿīd ibn Ṣaḡīr commissioned a copy of the Masoretic Bible, presumably for his own use. While we do not today possess a Bible with an ownership colophon for Salāma, Samuel copied at least one other partial copy of the Bible like this. The manuscript described by Richard Gottheil as number 27 in his famous 1905 article “Some Hebrew manuscripts in Cairo” is a copy of the Former Prophets with a colophon by Samuel b. Jacob. Gottheil 27 seems to have been written for a Yaḥyā b. Jacob.⁶⁸

Salāma ibn Saʿīd ibn Ṣaḡīr (Arabic, ‘little’), or Solomon b. Saʿadya in the Hebrew version of his name, was a leading financier and philanthropist in Fustāṭ in the first quarter of the 11th century.⁶⁹ He was a respected figure, serving as a trustee of orphans and as a fundraiser for the Jerusalem Yešiva.⁷⁰ Unlike Mevoraḳ, he was almost certainly a Rabbanite and not a Karaite, as his connections to the Jerusalem Academy suggest. Nevertheless, as a man of substance – in social, political and economic terms – he had a desire to possess a fine copy of the Bible, produced by one of Fustāṭ’s leading scribes.

The sum of money to be paid for producing this copy of the Prophets and Writings is considerable, 25 dinars. Goitein states that the average price of a complete codex of the Bible in the Classical Genizah Period was 20 dinars.⁷¹ He further estimates that an average monthly income might have been 2 dinars, and a yearly rent on a middle-class home, 5–6 dinars.⁷² Thus 25 dinars

⁶⁷ The night of 14/15 Šaʿbān, which equals November 1021 CE. As this is purely a financial agreement and in Judaeo-Arabic, the parties use the Hijra reckoning.

⁶⁸ For the colophon of Gottheil 27, see Gottheil, 1905, pp. 636–637. A further description of the manuscript is in Beit-Arié, Sirat and Glatzer, 1997, p. 118. This manuscript is now in private hands.

⁶⁹ CUL T-S 18J2.16 is a deed written in 1026 by Abraham the son of the Palestinian Gaʿon Solomon b. Judah appointing a guardian for an orphan. Salāma ibn Ṣaḡīr is named as overseer of the guardianship. Since the deed is in Hebrew, Salāma is introduced with the Hebrew version of his name: שלמה בר סעדיה הידוע בן צגיר ‘Solomon b. Saʿadya who is known as Ibn Ṣaḡīr’.

⁷⁰ Gil, 1992, pp. 254, 428, 602, 609. The Genizah has preserved documents referring to him from the period 1021–1026 CE, though he was possibly still active in the 1060s; see CUL T-S 10J20.13, edited in Gil, 1997, vol. IV, pp. 673–675.

⁷¹ Goitein, 1967–1993, vol. I, p. 259. This is perhaps at the more luxury end of the market; Gil, 1992, p. 234 suggests 12 to 13 dinars.

⁷² Goitein, 1967–1993, vol. I, p. 358, vol. IV, pp. 94–95.

for Samuel's partial copy of the Bible seems like a suitably high price for what presumably would have been a luxurious volume, like Leningrad.⁷³ Salāma ibn Sa'īd probably kept the Bible for himself, rather than dedicating it to a synagogue, as often occurred, since around 1110 CE we find, in a letter by Nathan ha-Kohen b. Mevorak from Ashqelon, that a widow, known as 'the daughter of Ibn Ṣaḡīr' (בנת בן צגיר), had a number of biblical codices in her possession, including a volume containing the Former Prophets and a volume containing the Latter Prophets and Writings.⁷⁴

In the agreement, Samuel testifies that he produced a Torah for Abū Ishāq Ibrahīm ibn Ḥujayj, and that this will be the model for the Prophets and Writings that he will produce for Salāma ibn Sa'īd. Perhaps Salāma had seen the copy produced for Ibrahīm and decided that he wanted one as magnificent for himself. Certainly Salāma and Ibrahīm knew each other, as both were major figures in Fustāt: Salāma was a money changer with links to the Palestinian Academy in Jerusalem and Abū Ishāq Ibrahīm ibn Ḥujayj, known usually by his Hebrew name Abraham ha-Kohen b. Haggai, was a *parnas* – an administrator of the public charity – for the Palestinian leadership in the town.⁷⁵ In this role he was known for helping newcomers, visitors and scholars, a fact that is celebrated in public acclamation of his name.⁷⁶ The agreement delivers two dinars of Samuel's fee into the hands of Abraham. Perhaps this was a fee for the use of the book, or maybe it was money that Samuel owed to Abraham and was thereby paying off.

It is quite possible that Samuel owed a debt to Abraham ha-Kohen b. Haggai, though maybe more moral than financial, since we find him seeking his help in a letter that was probably sent some years before.

CUL T-S 10J10.4 is a letter from Samuel b. Jacob to Abraham b. Haggai seeking his charitable support. This document was edited in full by the historian Mark Cohen in 2005, who stated that Samuel was writing to Abraham "supplicating his help and appealing to his reputation as a generous benefactor".⁷⁷ He inferred that the writer was a "recent arrival" and that his use of Hebrew suggested "that he hailed from a European country". Like Bareket,

⁷³ We know how magnificent RNL Evr. I B19a looks, but we can also see that Samuel put a similar effort into his separate books of the prophets. Gottheil 27 is described as "magnificently written in beautiful characters, three columns to the page, plentiful Masora" and it is embellished with "Bible verses in letters of heroic size and in golden rims" and "gold borders"; see Gottheil, 1905, pp. 636–637.

⁷⁴ Now damaged, they are sold for 12 dinars. Gil points to the possible connection between her ownership of the volumes and the deed T-S 10J5.15; see Gil, 1992, p. 234–235 and n. 8. The letter is CUL T-S 10J5.21, edited in Gil, 1983, vol. III, pp. 484–486.

⁷⁵ Gil, 1992, p. 613. A letter from the Palestinian Ga'on Solomon b. Judah is addressed to him in Hebrew and Arabic script, giving both the Hebrew and Arabic versions of his name side by side; Bodleian Libraries MS Heb. C.28.44, edited in Gil, 1983, vol. II, pp. 280–283.

⁷⁶ For instance, the letter edited by Mann, which tells Abraham that the congregation in the synagogue at Damascus blessed him over the Torah scrolls for his kindness to a traveller from Byzantium; see Mann, 1920–1922, vol. I, p. 104, vol. II, pp. 113–115.

⁷⁷ Cohen, 2005b, pp. 66–67.

Cohen did not recognise the name of Samuel b. Jacob as that of the scribe of Codex Leningrad. But the combination of 'Samuel b. Jacob' (in itself, not a common combination of names in the Genizah world) and 'Abraham b. Haggai', as found in the legal agreement, ensures that we are dealing with that very man here.

Letter from Samuel b. Jacob to Abraham b. Haggai
CUL T-S 10J10.4

1. בשם רחום
2. ויאחו צדיק דרכו וטהר יד' וגי
3. שלום שלום לאיש השלום מארץ השלום שלום שלום
4. [כ]לט פניו באדרתו ויגלום והנה חלמתי חלום הוא כב' כב'
5. גד' קד' מר' ור' אברהם הזקן היקר החכם והנבון [...]]
6. ירא שמים האוהב תורה ובעליה ומתנתו רחבה
7. בסתר [וב]גלוי לכל יברכו בכל מכל וכל בן כב' גד'
8. קד' מר' ור' חגי נ"בג אודיע לאדוני הזקן היקר כי אני
9. מן הזוכרים מעשיך ומתגעגיע בטובותיך ומעת
10. שהגעתי אל הנה מתאוה לראות את אדוני הזקן ובכל <עת>
11. מתפלל אני עליך ולא באתי אל הנה אלא מתוך [...]]
12. גדול וטובות אדוני הזקן מ[...]]
13. אליו כווסתו הנאה ומעת בא[...]]
14. מכלום אדם ואם יעש[...]]
15. בדבר שאתפרנס [...]]
16. אפילו פרוטה [...]]
17. מהקי' ב' ה' [...]]
18. לו אח[...]]

Margin

1. ויבשריהו במחילה וסליחה
2. [...]]ה כל מה שהוא עושה עמי
3. כקרבן כליל ע[ל] גבי המזבח ויזכה לחזות בנועם
4. ייי ולבקר בהיכלו ואילולי שאני יודיע ווסתו וחסדו וטובו
5. לא הטרחתי עליו ומנוחת אב[...]אין בידי דבר ואין לאל ידי
6. 'מציאך הקב"ה חן וחסד לפניו ולפני כל רואיך עקב שלום
7. תלמידו שמואל בריבי יעקב הרב
8. בריבי שמואל הרב נ"בג

1. In the merciful Name.

2. “The righteous will hold fast to their way, and the clean of hands”, etc.⁷⁸
3. Many greetings to the man of peace from the land of peace, many greetings.
4. [When he] wrapped his face in his cloak and rolled it up.⁷⁹ Now, I have had a dream:⁸⁰ it is the honourable,
5. great, holy, our master and teacher Abraham the precious elder, the wise and understanding [...]
6. fears Heaven, who loves Torah and its masters, and whose offering is generous
7. (whether) in secret (or) revealed to everyone. May He bless him in every way, son of the honourable, great,
8. holy, our master and teacher Haggai – his rest be in Eden. I inform my lord the precious elder that I
9. am one of those who recall your [good] deeds and I long for your welfare, and from the moment
10. that I arrived here I have desired to see my lord the elder and at every moment
11. I pray for you. And I only came here out of great [need?],
12. and the good [deeds] of my lord the elder [...]
13. to him according to his worthy custom. And from the time of [my arrival ...]
14. from any man. And if he should do [...]
15. with something with which I might sustain myself [...]
16. even a coin [...]
17. from the Holy One Blessed Be He [...]
18. to him [...]

Margin

1. and may He gladden him with a pardon and forgiveness [...]
2. [...] whatever he does with me
3. like a complete sacrifice upon the altar, and may he merit seeing the delightfulness
4. of the LORD and to visit his temple. And were it not that I know his customary behaviour, his kindness and his generosity

⁷⁸ A quotation from Job 17:9. There is a hole in the paper after דַּי, which makes it difficult to be certain of the reading, but it looks like Samuel abbreviated the end of the verse to וְגַי rather than writing יָדַיִם.

⁷⁹ This line merges 1 Kings 19:13, וַיִּלֶט פָּנָיו בְּאֲדָרְתוֹ ‘he wrapped his face in his mantle’, and 2 Kings 2:8, וַיִּקַּח אֵלִיהוּ אֶת־אֲדָרְתוֹ וַיִּגְלַם ‘and Elijah took his mantle and wrapped it together’, pivoting around the form אֲדָרְתוֹ ‘his mantle’, which occurs in both. Cohen, 2005b, p. 66 instead takes וַיִּגְלַם as the verb גָּלַה, ‘[...] his face and reveal them’.

⁸⁰ Genesis 37:9.

5. then I would not have troubled him and the rest of [... And] I have nothing and I am helpless.
6. May the Holy One Blessed Be He let you find grace and kindness before Him and before all who see you. A reward of peace.⁸¹
7. His scholar⁸² Samuel son of the scholar Jacob ha-Rav
8. son of the scholar Samuel ha-Rav, his rest be in the garden of Eden.⁸³

This letter is asking for favour, charity or financial support. It is a common genre in the Genizah, where travellers, immigrants and the indigent were often forced to turn to local sources of funding. Samuel informs Abraham that he is a new arrival (in Fustāt, where Abraham was based), having arrived here not by choice but probably out of ‘great [need]’ (line 11), and he now needs further assistance. It evidently dates from the days before Samuel became a scribe capable of charging twenty-five dinars to produce a glorious copy of the Bible. Abraham b. Haggai was a natural figure to turn to.⁸⁴ He had a reputation for helping scholars of the Torah (i.e. pious men, line 6), perhaps in a role as a patron of the arts, and as noted above he was a *parnas*, one of several at the time, who supervised charitable collections and looked after the community’s charitable foundations.⁸⁵ In the previous document, the agreement, it is clear that Abraham was known to Samuel – or rather the other way around, as their differing social status demanded. This letter, where Samuel appears to know Abraham only by reputation, must predate the agreement of 1021 by many years, since in the meantime Samuel became acquainted with Abraham and copied a Pentateuch for him. By 1021, the relationship appears to be that of patron and client, and this letter is probably evidence of the first steps that Samuel took in securing the patronage of the wealthy Abraham.⁸⁶

⁸¹ The phrase *‘eqev šalom* is a *‘alāma*, a motto attached to correspondence, adopted from the Islamic practice. High-ranking individuals might have their own, or correspondents would use those of the leader of the time, or the recipient of the letter, to show loyalty.

⁸² The ‘his’ is a gesture of humility, rather than marking a previous relationship between the two. *Talmid* ‘disciple, scholar’ seems to change meaning over the Geonic period. Originally referring to as-yet-unordained scholars of the Academy (Mann, 1920–1922, vol. I, p. 54 n. 2), it comes more to denote a scholar who has acquired his learning outside of the academies, in the *midrašim* of eminent scholars; see Goitein, 1967–1993, vol. V, p. 266, “select few who attained a high degree of scholarship while studying with renowned masters far away from the seats of yeshivas”. We might call them ‘independent scholars’.

⁸³ Samuel’s father, Jacob, is still alive, but his grandfather, Samuel, is dead. Samuel was named after his paternal grandfather, as was the usual custom among the Jews of the Islamic world (Goitein, 1967–1993, vol. III, pp. 6–7). This is evidence that he was probably not from Europe.

⁸⁴ CUL T-S 13J23.9 is another request for help sent to Abraham, from a cantor called Ya ʿiš b. Sahl al-Nahrawānī, a Persian.

⁸⁵ Abraham’s brother Isaac, a community leader, served in a similar role. On the *parnasim* in general, see Gil, 1976, pp. 47–53; Cohen, 2005a, pp. 211–216.

⁸⁶ On the reading of ‘letters of appeal’ as requests for patronage, see Cohen, 2005a, pp. 174–188.

Though Samuel is in need at the time of writing this letter, because he has left his previous place of residence, he is not without a potential source of livelihood, as his appellation *talmid* ‘scholar’ suggests that he had enjoyed the benefit of an education at the feet of a sage or in a house of study. Certainly his later accomplishments strongly suggest a solid education in the Bible and *masora*, as well as a thorough knowledge of contemporary literary Hebrew. He is educated and only requires assistance to get on his feet in the new town, through the patronage of a wealthy and connected figure.

Where might Samuel have come from? Cohen believes him to be European, since he wrote his letter to Abraham in Hebrew. But this proves nothing of his origins, only of his education. Indeed, the letter is well constructed and mixes biblical phraseology in a playful manner alongside the characteristic contemporary language of letters. Letters seeking favour from social superiors are often written in Hebrew; it reflected favourably on the education of the writer and the respect he held for the addressee. In the 10th and 11th centuries Hebrew was particularly in vogue as an idiom of communication, and many letters between officials, scholars and other people of status in the community are written in the Holy Language.⁸⁷

Other details of the letter suggest that Samuel was not from a European land: the use of the title *talmid* and the use of an *‘alāma* and an opening invocation; the fact he was named after his grandfather, which as mentioned earlier was common in the Islamic lands of the Genizah; and the layout of his letter, leaving a clear margin at the top and on the right-hand side, again very common in letters from the Genizah world.⁸⁸

The importance of this letter is not just that it shows that Samuel b. Jacob was probably not a native of Fustāt, but that it also throws light on his ancestry. We could certainly have guessed that his grandfather’s name was Samuel, but this confirms it. More importantly, however, it shows that both his father and grandfather had a title after their name, *ha-Rav*. The use of *rav* before people’s names is just a common courtesy, and it usually occurs in the form of the phrase *מרנא ורבנא* or *מורנו ורבנו*, or just abbreviated to *מ’ ור’* or similar, and is a polite appellation used for most anyone, ‘master and teacher’. When the noun *rav* follows the name, however, it appears to have been a specific title, bestowed originally by the Babylonian *Yešivot* on those who could function as a jurisconsult in the Maghrebi Jewish communities.⁸⁹ Šemarya b. Elḥanan,

⁸⁷ On the use of Hebrew, as opposed to Judaeo-Arabic, for communicative purposes in the classical Genizah period, see Outhwaite, 2013.

⁸⁸ Compare Byzantine Hebrew letters, for instance, which write across the full width of the page and do not imitate the *basmala* in their opening; see Outhwaite, 2009, p. 198.

⁸⁹ Bareket, 2017, p. 190, says: “According to Goitein, this title was only popular amongst the Maghrebi community and was not acceptable in Egypt. Hence, only figures from Maghrebi origin, such as Nehorai [=Nahray] ben Nissim, carried this title.” Cohen, 1980, p. 103 agrees: “Nahray functioned as professional jurisconsult to the Jewish community of Old Cairo [=Fustāt]. That is to say, like the Muslim mufti, he issued legal opinions, although not as a

head of the Jews in Egypt in the late 10th century, and the leading member of the Babylonian party in Fustāt, had the title הרב הראש 'the Great Rav' after his name. His origins are obscure, though he probably spent time in Babylon and North Africa before settling in Fustāt. Following him, a number of leading Maghrebi figures in Egypt have the appellation ha-Rav, including Nahray b. Nissim from Qayrawān, the merchant-scholar who led the Babylonians, and the great scholar Judah ha-Kohen b. Joseph, who was often simply known as Ha-Rav.⁹⁰

Given the connection of the title ha-Rav with the Maghreb and the Babylonian congregation, Samuel b. Jacob's roots probably therefore lay in North Africa, in the Babylonian sphere of influence.⁹¹ With both his father and grandfather styled ha-Rav, he came from a line of scholars who had also achieved prominence in their community. This would account for the high standard of educational attainment that Samuel had clearly acquired. His own appellation of *talmid* implies advanced study at a college or with a sage, as befits the child of such a line, but his lack of the title ha-Rav suggests that he was not so successful politically. Indeed, we should not expect him to be writing Bibles for a living had he been more successful in community affairs.⁹²

On top of giving us the single most important complete codex of the medieval Hebrew Bible, Samuel b. Jacob has left behind a considerable legacy of professional work and a growing number of documentary sources.⁹³ As a result, he is arguably the most important medieval Jewish scribe that we know of, though, until recently, we knew very little about the man himself or how he worked. From a close reading of the plain colophon in the Leningrad Codex

judge. Such authorities were styled 'the rav' (ha-rav), 'the master', a title peculiar to Jewish scholars from the Muslim west."

⁹⁰ Cohen, 1980, pp. 102–105.

⁹¹ Samuel's familiarity with the Babylonian *masora* is well attested in other copies of the Bible he produced such as Lm (Gottheil 14, now locked away in private hands) and the fragments that have been recently discovered in the Cambridge Genizah Collection; see Phillips, 2016, pp. 289–291.

⁹² Further evidence of his family's prominence can be found in another letter, CUL T-S 13J15.13, which is thanking a leading Karaite courtier, Abū Sa'd b. Sahl al-Tustarī. It is written and signed by one יעקב הרב בר' שמואל הרב בר' אברהם הרב, Jacob ha-Rav son of the scholar Samuel ha-Rav son of the scholar Abraham ha-Rav (who also uses the same *'alāma* as Samuel in his letter, עקב שלום). This is probably Samuel b. Jacob's father, and it supplies the name of his great-grandfather, Abraham, who also held the title Rav. The letter, which was perhaps never sent (as it leaves a blank space to fill in the recipient's Hebrew name), was originally edited by Scheiber, though he made no connection with Samuel b. Jacob the scribe; see Scheiber, 1969, pp. 215–218. There are other traces in the documentary record of Samuel b. Jacob and of his family, but they do not add much more to the story for now. For instance, his name appears as the scribe of a divorce settlement (CUL T-S 10J27.12) in 1009 CE, and the same Samuel b. Jacob witnessed a deed of indemnity (CUL T-S 24.11) in 1002 CE.

⁹³ His works of biblical copying include RNL Evr. I B19a, Gottheil 14 (Lm), Gottheil 27, a copy of the Bible with Sa'adya's *Tafsīr* and an innovative *masora* (mostly in the Russian National Library as RNL Evr. II C1, but with leaves in the Genizah as well), further leaves of Bibles in the Taylor-Schechter Collection of the Cairo Genizah, as well as further items in the Russian National Library.

and of the documentary sources in the Cairo Genizah presented above, we can now fill out some of the context in which he produced his work and begin to appreciate what sort of role he played. The documents suggest he came from a family affiliated with the Babylonian Academies, and that his immediate ancestors had accrued some prominence in communities of Maghrebi Jews (the title *ha-Rav*). He himself had a good education, which continued into adulthood with an intellectual apprenticeship of some kind, probably in North Africa, though not necessarily so (the title *talmid*). His Medieval Hebrew idiom is accomplished and imaginative. If he was not a writer of *piyyuṭ* himself, then he was probably very familiar with the genre. He sought, and obtained, the patronage of a leading member of the Rabbanite Palestinian community in Egypt, but he accepted commissions from members of the Maghrebi (specifically, Persian-Maghrebi) Karaite community. Clearly, his services were sought after from across the religio-political spectrum in Egypt – Babylonian and Palestinian, Karaite and Rabbanite. And he achieved enough reputation in his field that he could charge a considerable sum for the production of a beautiful model codex of the Bible, of the kind that would have been an ostentatious, tangible sign of its owner’s piety, good taste and wealth. And this is an important point to make. The Fuṣṭāṭ community, and other communities like it, produced and cultivated professional scribes of the calibre of Samuel b. Jacob, but they would not have existed without a class of wealthy, pious and scholarly individuals, who could extend patronage to them and commission the works of art that they laboured over.

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