

<b>Institution: University of Manchester</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 33 (Theology and Religious Studies)</b>
<b>Title of case study:</b> The Rylands Cairo Genizah Project: Conserving, Presenting and Interpreting a Cultural Asset
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>The Rylands Cairo Genizah Project has had impact through its <b>conservation, presentation, and interpretation</b> of an internationally important archive of manuscripts which illuminate all aspects of the history, and the religious, social, and commercial life of the Jews in the Levant from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This collection is of deep interest to the <b>Jewish community</b> in the UK and abroad, and forms part of the cultural capital of this country, where the vast bulk of it is now housed. The project has also had an impact on <b>heritage experts</b>, by developing methods which have been applied to recording and disseminating other cultural assets.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The impact is based on research carried out in Manchester, but involving a network of researchers in Cambridge, Oxford, Princeton, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv, from 2003 to the present, and funded by Jewish charitable foundations (Safra and Friedberg), Jewish private donors, the AHRC, and the British Academy (to a total of £530,000).</p> <p><b>Personnel:</b> PI: Prof. Philip <b>Alexander</b> FBA (Manchester, 2003-2010; Emeritus from 2011); CA: Dr Stella <b>Butler</b> (Head of Special Collections, Manchester, 2000-2011; since 2011 University Librarian, Leeds); Postdoctoral Researchers: Dr Renate <b>Smithuis</b> (Assistant Librarian 2003-2006; Research Associate 2006-2009; from 2009 Lecturer in Medieval Jewish Studies, Manchester); Rabbi Dr Judah <b>Abel</b> (Research Associate, Manchester, 2005-2009). Others with a significant input include: Prof. Gideon Bohak (Tel Aviv); Dr Ezra Chwat (Jerusalem); Prof. Mark Cohen (Princeton); and Dr Sagit Butbul (Bar Ilan University).</p> <p>The <b>aim of the Project</b> was to make accessible to both the scholarly world and the general public the Cairo Genizah manuscripts held in the Rylands Library Manchester. This was <b>achieved by:</b> (1) conserving manuscripts; (2) digitizing them and uploading images of them on to a publicly accessible database hosted on the University of Manchester Library website; (3) providing the images with catalogue records searchable in English under various heads; (4) promoting <i>scholarly</i> understanding through academic publication and workshops, which brought leading experts to Manchester to study specific aspects of the collection, and to clarify its character and relationship to other Genizah collections; (5) promoting <i>public</i> understanding of the collection through popular lectures, press releases, newsletters, newspaper articles, radio interviews, a website and a blog.</p> <p><b>Some significant research outcomes:</b> (1) The Rylands Genizah has gone from being one of the least to being one of the most accessible of the major Genizah collections (3.1). (2) The extent of the collection is now known to be greater than previously estimated (15,000 mss as against 11,000) (3.1; 3.2). (3) Clarifying the nature and content of the collection has highlighted its importance in hitherto unsuspected areas, e.g. the history of the Arabic language in the early modern period. (4) A method of digitizing, uploading and displaying, with catalogue records, manuscripts of this type, has been devised and demonstrated – a method that remains at the forefront of its field (e.g. in its thematically searchable records, and in its work-in-progress mode of cataloguing) (3.3: Introduction). (5) Numerous significant individual finds include: (a) A Dybbuk Exorcism – the only known description of an actual, historical exorcism of this type, giving the names of the parties (3.3: Bohak/Smithuis). (b) A new version of the important medieval Jewish anti-Christian polemic, <i>Qissat Mujadilat al-Usquf</i> (3.3: Alexander/Butbul). (c) A better text of the synagogue poem <i>Ve-hayah oyeb mitgabber</i> (3.3). (d) An autograph fragment of Maimonides' philosophical <i>magnum opus</i>, <i>The Guide of the Perplexed</i> (3.4) (e) A new fragment of the Aramaic Levi Document – an important text for the study of Christian origins (3.5). (f) The only known Arabic text applying the lost original version of the Astronomical Tables of al-Khwarizmi, who is credited with the invention of algebra (3.6).</p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

## 3. References to the research (AOR- Available on request)

## Key Publications:

- 3.1 Website: Image Collection and Catalogue of the Rylands Cairo Genizah Collection. Over 26,000 images and catalogue records, plus interpretative website. URL: <http://www.rylandsgenizah.org>
- 3.2 Website: Princeton University Geniza Project Website. Transcriptions and translations, with notes, of documentary Rylands Genizah texts, including live weblinks to the Rylands database. URL: <http://www.princeton.edu/~geniza/>
- 3.3 Volume of interpretative articles: R. **Smithuis** and P.S. **Alexander** (eds), *From Cairo to Manchester: Studies in the Rylands Genizah Fragments* (Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement 31; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Includes the following Manchester contributions: R. **Smithuis**, "Short Introduction to the Genizah Collection in the John Rylands Library" (pp. 1-32); P. **Alexander** and R. **Smithuis**, "Notes on Artefactual Aspects of the Rylands Genizah" (pp. 33-60); E. Lev and R. **Smithuis**, "A Preliminary Catalogue of the Medical and Para-Medical Manuscripts in the Rylands Genizah Collection together with the Partial Edition of Two Medical Fragments (A 589 and B 3239)" (pp. 157-97); G. Bohak and R. **Smithuis**, "Four Amulets and an Exorcism from the Rylands Genizah Collection" (pp. 213-32); P. **Alexander** and S. Butbul, "Rylands Gaster Heb. 1623/3 and the *Qissat Mujadilat al-Usquf*" (pp. 249-89). (AOR)
- 3.4 Journal article: B. Outhwaite and F. Niessen, "A Newly-Discovered Autograph Fragment of Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed from the Cairo Genizah", *Journal of Jewish Studies* 57/2 (2006), pp. 287–97. (AOR)
- 3.5 Journal article: G. Bohak, "A New Genizah Fragment of the Aramaic Levi Document", *Tarbiz* 79 (2011), pp. 373-83 (in Hebrew). (AOR)
- 3.6 Journal article: Bernard R. Goldstein, "A Table of New Moons from 1501 to 1577 in a Hebrew Fragment Preserved in the John Rylands Library", *Aleph: Historical Studies in Science and Judaism* 13/1 (2013), pp. 11-26. URL: [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/aleph\\_historical\\_studies\\_in\\_science\\_and\\_judaism/v013/13.1.golds tein.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/aleph_historical_studies_in_science_and_judaism/v013/13.1.golds tein.html)

## Evidence of the quality of the research.

- (1) Financial support for the research from the British Academy (Visiting Fellowship for Dr. Sagit Butbul, Sept. 2009–Jan. 2010) and the AHRC ("The John Rylands Cairo Genizah Project", 01/09/2006–31/12/2009), totalling £376K. The latter signed off its part of the project as "outstanding".
- (2) The PI, **Alexander**, has a well-established international reputation for high quality collaborative research as seen *inter alia* in his appointment to the international team set up by the Israel Antiquities Authority to publish the Dead Sea Scrolls, and in his holding of major research grants totalling £1.3M and his election as a Fellow of the British Academy (2005).
- (3) The publication of finds from the Rylands Genizah, resulting from the project, in major, peer reviewed academic journals and with major academic publishers (see above).
- (4) Testimonials from leading Genizah scholars as to the quality and importance of the database for their own research. See under 5B below.

## 4. Details of the impact

## Context:

The Cairo Genizah manuscripts were found in a storeroom (Genizah) in Cairo's Ben Ezra Synagogue in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They include new texts which revolutionize our understanding of the history of Judaism. The Jewish community now regards the Genizah manuscripts as a precious part of its cultural patrimony; Jewish Foundations such as Safra and Friedberg have invested in making them accessible. The Genizah manuscripts also constitute a significant element of the cultural assets with which the UK finds itself entrusted.

### Pathways to Impact and Impact:

- (1) **Conservation.** *Pathways to impact:* The Rylands Genizah manuscripts are in a physically poor condition. The Project conserved them: (a) *materially:* manuscripts were cleaned, flattened and encased in melinex by the conservation unit at the Rylands Library; and (b) *digitally:* digitization reduced the need physically to handle them. *Impact:* Without this conservation work substantial parts of the collection would have been lost, and a significant cultural asset would have been diminished and degraded.
- (2) **Presentation.** *Pathways to impact:* Presentation was achieved primarily by posting high-resolution digital images on the University of Manchester Library website (5.1). Selected images are also available on the Princeton Geniza website (5.1), and, since 2013, the whole Rylands collection has been uploaded into the Friedberg Genizah Project (5.1) database which is not part of any HEI and is concerned with the assembly on one server for public use of this major cultural asset. *Impact:* This high international exposure has opened up the collection to journalists, writers, documentary makers, school-teachers, and the educated public for their own purposes (5.2)
- (3) **Interpretation.** *Pathways to impact:* Interpretation is achieved in three ways: (a) By searchable English catalogue records attached to each image identifying its content – thus allowing users to discover texts relevant to any topic. (b) By a popular website, explaining the nature and importance of the Genizah in general, and the Rylands Genizah in particular. (c) By publications and lectures. *Impact:* The Project's scholarly workshops always included well-attended public lectures (5.3). In addition the Project published a newsletter and a blog, and the University issued press releases. These have been responded to in press and radio reports (both in the UK and abroad), and by invitations from a variety of public bodies, to address popular audiences (5.7).
- (4) **Capacity building.** *Pathways to impact:* The Project has built capacity to conserve and disseminate other culturally significant artefacts. *Impact:* (a) The in-house conservation work has enhanced the capacity of the Rylands conservation unit to conserve other delicate artefacts. (b) The Project's personnel and state-of-the-art equipment laid the foundations for a permanent photographic unit within the Rylands Library, which is now digitizing other culturally significant artefacts (further below). (c) As one of the first in the field of digitizing Genizah manuscripts, the Project's adoption of rigorous standards of metadata (based on the Dublin Core) has provided a model for other libraries to follow (e.g. Bodleian and University Library Cambridge) (5.4 and 5.5).

### Reach and significance of impact:

The research addresses two main constituencies beyond academia:

- (1) **The Jewish Community.** Impact was first felt locally in the sizeable Jewish community of Manchester ('The Jews of Manchester regard themselves as very fortunate that the University is the custodian of an important repository of fragments which comprise the Rylands Cairo Genizah project', President, Zionist Central Council, Greater Manchester; [5.6]). The impact was delivered through public lectures at the Rylands Library, and through talks at communal educational events (e.g. Limmud; 'Making the material accessible supplements the work that has already been done by the Department in reaching out beyond the University in making available this great stock of material to the Jewish Community and beyond in numerous educational projects, lectures and forums', Trustee of the Manchester Great New and Central Synagogue; [5.6]). From there the impact rippled out nationally and internationally. The pattern is illustrated by the Dybbuk Exorcism: the report on the University Website was picked up by the local Jewish newspaper, the *Jewish Telegraph* (5.7). The national *Jewish Chronicle* picked it up from the *Telegraph*, and the *Jewish Daily Forward* (New York) and the mass-circulation Israeli papers, the *Jerusalem Post* and *Ha-Aretz*, picked it up from the *Chronicle*. The combined readership of these papers runs into many tens of thousands.

## Impact case study (REF3b)

- (2) **The Heritage Community.** Following a pilot project funded by JISC (2009-11) which established the need for a North West regional centre of excellence for heritage digitisation, the Rylands converted the Genizah Project photographic unit into a *Centre for Heritage Imaging and Collection Care* (CHICC) (2011; 5.8). This now serves on a commercial basis a wide range of clients from different sectors, including other universities, museums, libraries, historic houses and individuals (as of 12.07.2013, the estimated turnover for CHICC 2012/13 will be £34,600, with a further £25,000 invoiced; 5.9). CHICC has rapidly established itself as a leader in the field of heritage digitization, and its staff members are invited to advise and make presentations on the subject in both the UK and abroad. The Centre's blog has an international following.

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

All claims referenced in section 4.

- 5.1 Image websites: **Rylands:** <http://www.rylandsgenizah.org>.  
Also note: (1) Penn/Cambridge Genizah Fragments Project of the University of Pennsylvania Libraries. Live weblinks to Rylands database in the case of related fragments. <http://www.princeton.edu/~geniza/> (2) Friedberg Genizah Project. This has now (2013) uploaded all the Rylands images with references to the Rylands' metadata, as part of a project to re-assemble all the Cairo Genizah fragments in cyberspace for anyone to use and consult: [http://www.genizah.org/index\\_new.aspx](http://www.genizah.org/index_new.aspx).
- 5.2 Testimonials from Rylands database users: Researcher, the Academy of the Hebrew Language, Jerusalem, Israel.
- 5.3 Popular lectures on the Rylands Genizah by Charles Burnett, Stefan Reif, Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, and Philip Alexander. See <http://www.rylandsgenizah.org>.
- 5.4 Statement from the University Librarian and Keeper of the Brotherton Collection on Digital Services of Leeds University Library.
- 5.5 Statements from the Head of the Genizah Research Unit, Cambridge University Library and former Hebraica and Judaica Curator, Bodleian Library on the importance of the Rylands metadata.
- 5.6 Statements from Jewish Community Leaders: The President of Zionist Central Council, Greater Manchester; and Trustee of the Manchester Great New and Central Synagogue.
- 5.7 The case of the Dybbuk Exorcism: **Manchester University website:** "Text of Jewish exorcism discovered": <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/aboutus/news/display/?id=5324> (posted 16/12/2009). **Jerusalem Post:** "Be gone, you evil dybbuk": <http://www.jpost.com/Jewish-World/Be-gone-you-evil-dybbuk> (16/12/2009). **Jewish Daily Forward** (New York): "A Ghostly Trace of the Jewish Occult": <http://forward.com/articles/121177/a-ghostly-trace-of-the-jewish-occult> (25/12/2009). Example: The Dybbuk Exorcism was reported on the Manchester University and AHRC websites, in the Manchester University magazine, *UniLife*, the *Jewish Telegraph*, the *Jewish Chronicle*, the *Jerusalem Post* and *Ha-Aretz* (both Israel), and the *Jewish Daily Forward* (New York).
- 5.8 CHICC (Centre for Heritage Imaging and Collection Care): <http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/ourservices/servicesweprovide/chicc>
- 5.9 The JISC Report and statement on turnover of Genizah for CHICC.