

PROCEEDINGS

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WITH

Communications

MADE TO THE SOCIETY.

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1898—1900.

Monday, November 14, 1898.

Professor RIDGEWAY, President, in the Chair.

Mrs GIBSON made the following communication:

ON TWO HEBREW DOCUMENTS OF THE 11TH AND
12TH CENTURIES.

THE two pieces of written Hebrew paper which I have the honour to exhibit to-night came from Cairo, and there is hardly any doubt that they have lain for centuries in the lumber room of the Synagogue, the "Genizah," which Dr Schechter cleared out last year with so much tact and zeal. Dr Schechter got the whole of its contents as a present

from the Grand Rabbi, and he had them tied up in sacks on the spot for transportation to Cambridge. Before as well as during this operation their bulk had a tendency to diminish, so that Mrs Lewis and I were able to buy a portmanteau full, piecemeal, from various Cairo dealers. We have no doubt whatever that these, as well as the similar fragments we had purchased in the same quarter the two previous years, including the first identified leaf of Ecclesiasticus, had come from this Genizah without the cognizance of the Grand Rabbi. Dr Schechter has got much older vellum leaves than these two; possibly he or we have got older bits of paper, but these two, so far as I know, have the supreme value of being dated.

The date of the larger one is A.D. 1038. We read this in the last four lines, and in two different forms. The first is:

ארבעה אלפים שבע מאות תשעים ושמונה אלצירה

that is, 4798 years since the Creation. To turn this into Anno Domini, you have first to take off the thousands, and then add 240. This makes 1038.

The second date is given as an explanation of the first:

היא שנה אלף שלש מאות ארבעים ותשעה למנין שטרות

that is 1349 from the Contract = Seleucid era. We must subtract 311 from this figure, and we then get again 1038. In the last line we have the words **בפסטאט מצרים**, Fostat of Egypt. Also immediately before the first date we have **עשרין ואחד יום בחדש אלול** the 21st day of the month of Elul, nearly corresponding to September.

The document itself is not without interest. A great part of it has baffled even Dr Schechter's ingenuity to decipher. Not only is the penmanship crabbed, but the language is a mongrel of Hebrew and Arabic.

It is a deed executed by a young woman named Zacchæa, the daughter of Isaac son of Ephraim, niece of Shalmoh the Elder, son of Musappir. She had deposited 80 gold pieces with the Elder Japhet, son of Habôsher (the flesh), son of Al-Mufulful (the Peppery), against the time when a husband should fall to her lot. The husband had fallen to her lot, but

she had lost the receipt. Japhet evidently was an honest man, for he paid her the 80 gold pieces, and this is the deed which she executes, declaring that no document which may hereafter purport to come from her against Japhet is to be held as of any value, as anything better than a כחרש הנשבר a broken potsherd, even if it is sanctioned by a Court of law. This deed is binding on herself and on her heirs after her.

The smaller document, which is even more mutilated, reads thus: "In the presence of us witnesses signed under this bill on.....of the month Tammuz (nearly corresponding to July) in the year 1460 אלפא וארבעה מאה ושתין שנין = 1460 from the Contract era (by subtracting 311, we get A.D. 1149) in Fostat, situate on the river Nile, under the authority of Master Samuel the prince ונניר, may his name last for ever! have we the undersigned bought from the Sheikh.....Master Tamim the youth or the bachelor, the Elder, for ever, the properties.....and a receipt from the Sheikh Ibn el Fursu, Son of the Oven (perhaps a baker)... Master Joshua the bachelor, son of Shalmoh the Elder" (we had a Shalmoh the Elder in the first document). The other words I have been able to make out are "gold," "at the full moon," "in the land of Anher the little, the distant and the near," "at the price," "the whole of the house and the place," "between the merchant." Some of the words are misspelt, and I have obtained them by transliterating the Hebrew letters into Arabic.

The art of paper-making was learned by the Arabs from the Chinese, who are known to have practised it in the second century of our era. I am informed by Professor Giles that the first substance the Chinese used for the purpose was old fishing-nets, then flax, and afterwards mulberry bark as well as bamboo. I have learnt from another source, "Notes on Chinese Literature" by A. Wylie, that anciently Chinese documents were mostly written on bamboo tablets. When close-wove silk came into use it was called paper; but the cumbrous character of the tablets and the expense of the

¹ 1 Sam. ix. 16; Daniel ix. 25.

silk rendered both unfit for general use, and it was Tsa'é Lûn who invented the manufacture of paper from the inner bark of trees, ends of hemp, old rags and fishing nets. In A.D. 105 he laid his project before the Emperor, who commended his ability and from that time it came into general use under the name of Marquis Tsa'é's paper.

Professor Karabaçek of Vienna, in his preface to the Catalogue of the Archduke Rainer's collection of Oriental MSS., relates that a great battle took place between the Arabs, who were allied to the Turks, and the Chinese in A.D. 751 at a place which he describes as "im fernen Transoxanien," that is, beyond the Oxus, on the eastern boundary of the empire, by which he means the empire of the Arabs. This statement has been confirmed from Chinese sources by the researches of Friedrich Hirth, who found in the annals of Táng-shu, that the general Kao-Hsien-fa, a Korean by birth, suffered a severe defeat at the hands of the Arabs in July, 751, at a place called Kang-li, a town in the territory of the Tharez river. I am sorry to say that I have been unable to identify the spot.

Professor Giles has kindly enquired into the subject, and has found that in A.D. 751, a Korean by birth named Kao-Hsien-chih, who was a general in the Chinese army, led his forces to Tashkend. The King of Tashkend at once submitted, and was put to death. His son fled to the Ta-shih Arabs, and with their aid attacked Kao, but was defeated. The place is given in the History as Hāng-lo-ssu, a city; but on looking into the biography of Kao-Hsien-chih, Professor Giles found the place called Ta-lo-ssu. Though Kao is said by Arab historians to have been defeated, and by one Chinese authority to have been victorious, we need not doubt that he is one and the same man. It appears to me that Kang-li and Hāng-lo-ssu are sufficiently alike to justify our accepting them as the same name, if we may judge from the analogy of Arabic names with the strong guttural *h*. Such words as Khan, Khartoum, for example, are pronounced by some as Han, Hartoum, while others give them a hard *k*. We have a familiar example of the same thing in the New Testament name Kleophas or Alpheus, in the latter of which the guttural

has been dropped; both of them being from the Aramaic **ܚܠܦܝ**
= Halfai.

According to Karabaçek, a number of Chinese were taken prisoners at the battle, amongst them some paper-makers, who were obliged by their captors to set up a factory at Samarcand. The Arabs proved themselves apt pupils. Forty years afterwards, in A.D. 794 or 795, a second factory was established by Haroun al Raschid at Bagdad. Others soon followed in Persia, Egypt, North Africa, Spain, and in particular at Brombadsch (Hierapolis), in Northern Syria, from whose name, by a slight change of letters, the material came to be called Bambycin. We know how *m* and *b* are frequently confused with each other by the modern Greeks, and an erroneous idea got abroad that the silkworm, **βόμβυξ**, had something to do with the matter. The Arabs first used new cotton, but as the result was not very satisfactory, they next tried new flax; flax in the form of rags coming in at a later time. A doctor of Bagdad, named Abd-el-lateef, who visited Egypt in A.D. 1200, found paper so common in Cairo, that a particular kind was used in the bazaars, to wrap groceries in, which was made of mummy-cloth, after the said mummy-cloth had been used to supplement the clothing of the inhabitants. You will observe that our specimens are prior to this time.

We get our word "ream" and the Germans their "Riess," French "rame," from the Arabic word **رزمة**, a bundle. The Arabs understood how to give their paper a brown or yellow tint by using saffron or the sap of the sycamore. Violet and red were got from aloe-sap mixed with gum secreted by insects on the cocoa-tree. The use of red paper was a high privilege of exalted persons. Green was also got from aloes. Indigo gave them blue, which they used for paper to roll up medicines in and to write death-sentences upon.

I enquired at the British Museum for the oldest Oriental MS. there, and I saw the only one for which an earlier date is claimed, an Arabic codex in much better preservation than these are; it seems to be of the previous century, A.D. 960.

CONTENTS

OF PROCEEDINGS, No. XLI.

VOL. X. (NEW SERIES, VOL. IV.) No. I.

	PAGE
Two Hebrew Documents of the 11th and 12th Centuries. By Mrs GIBSON	1
On the Structure of Paper. By Professor MARSHALL WARD	6
Lecture by R. C. BOSANQUET, M.A.	9
A Denarius of the Empress Plotina. By the Rev. J. G. CLARK	9
Exhibition of coins and rubbings. By the Rev. W. G. SEARLE, M.A.	10
Communication by Professor HUGHES	10
Lecture by Mr A. FORBES SIEVEKING, F.S.A.	11
The Vatican Library of Sixtus IV. By J. W. CLARK, M.A., Registry of the University. (With Plates I—IV.)	11
Ruins and Remains at Mitla, Mexico. By Mr WILLIAM CORNER	62
Astbury the Potter, and Voyez the Modeller. By J. W. L. GLAISHER, D.Sc., President.	64
Annual Report for 1898—9	66
The Icknield Way. By Mr W. H. BULLOCK-HALL	69
Lecture by J. W. CLARK, M.A., Registry of the University	82
Paper by Dr JAMES	82
Lecture by Dr A. C. HADDON	83
The Soros at Marathon and Bartlow Hills. By Professor HUGHES	83
Annual Report for 1899—1900	84
Exhibition of objects by Colonel HURRELL, M.A., J. E. FOSTER, M.A., and Mr BALDREY	86
List of Presents	87
Summary of Accounts 1898, 1899	95
List of Officers and Council 1899—1900 and 1900—1901	97