

100

One Hundred Years
of Discovery
and Research



Celebrating the Genizah Centennial

In early 1897 several crates full of tattered medieval manuscripts and fragments, 140,000 in all, arrived at the Cambridge University Library, part of a cache of Jewish documents, discarded and preserved in the genizah (storeroom) of the old Ben-Ezra Synagogue in Cairo. Not limited to the worn-out prayerbooks and sacred texts usually found in such collections (due to the religious ban against destroying such works), the Cairo Genizah proved a treasure-trove of correspondence, court documents, religious scholarship, marriage and business contracts, liturgical poetry, children's books, public records, literary works and many other materials, through which the rich private and communal life of Jews in the medieval (1000-1300 C.E.) Near East comes to life. With the Bedouin invasion of North Africa (1057) and the Crusader invasion of Jerusalem (1099), other important collections of non-Egyptian books made their way to Cairo, then a major Jewish center.

The years 1996-97, marking the centennial of the initial burst of Genizah scholarship, have been celebrated with special exhibits, conferences and publications throughout the world. Surely, however, none can be as special as the May 1996 international conference organized by the Israeli Academic Center in Cairo, held in Cairo itself. Founded and funded by the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, the Cairo Center serves scholars in both the Israeli and Egyptian academic communities and seeks to promote understanding between them (see **The Forum**, Fall '97).



Special Issue
The Cairo Genizah:
One Hundred Years
of Discovery
and Research

جنيته القاهرة:
الكشف والأبحاث
في مائة عام

The Center's conference, **The Cairo Genizah: One Hundred Years of Discovery and Research**, was attended by prominent Israeli, Egyptian, European and American researchers in the field. Nine of the major presentations, including two in Arabic, were subsequently published in a special edition of the Center's Bulletin (July 1997). The presentations are lively, informative and written for a general audience. They are accompanied by many interesting photographs, engravings and prints from several sources, particularly the Taylor-Schechter Collection at the Cambridge University Library and the Israel Museum. Copies of this special 42-page issue can be obtained from the AFBRI, the Cairo Center or the Israel Academy.