

PREFACE

The Geniza documents provide most authentic documentation on the Jewish pious foundations, by far exceeding in richness any similar sources on this widespread human activity. Through a language of details, of legal formulae and bookkeeping, the essence of a great institution that is much more impressive and far-reaching than the details themselves emerges. This is an institution firmly based in ancient Jewish tradition which became, after the Arab conquest, the equivalent of the Muslim *waqf*. Historical roots and external influences are here interwoven.

The legal and administrative documents and the commercial letters of the Geniza are invaluable materials for the study of social history. The study of history in our generation concentrates upon the exploration of the cultural, social, and economic aspects of human life in the past, rather than on biographies of rulers and personalities, or on plain political events. Consequently, modern historical research has in these documents a vast treasury. It is with a full appreciation of these possibilities that Professor Goitein conceived his general project of Geniza research. As of this writing, two of the three volumes of his *Mediterranean Society* have appeared, and he is preparing further major works in this field. The present work, too, has been made possible by his help, for which I am most grateful. He kindly put at my disposal much of the "raw material", such as photostats and copies, unpublished volumes under preparation, notes, card indexes, and rare books. This work relies in many points on his extensive and valuable investigations; in the first place, on his surveys of most of the documents included in this corpus, as found in the second volume of his *Mediterranean Society*, as well as on his researches on the Jewish pious foundations.

My special gratitude is extended to the trustees and staffs of the libraries where the Geniza collections are found: The University Library, Cambridge; the Department of Oriental Printed Books, Bodleian Library, Oxford; the Department of Oriental Printed Books and Manuscripts, the British Library, London; the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York; the Dropsie University, Philadelphia; the John Rylands Library, Manchester; the Westminster College, Cambridge. All of them have given me every possible help, and granted me permission to publish the documents in their custody. Except for the

document of the David Kaufmann Collection in Budapest (no. 77), of which only a photostat was available to me, all documents were read in the original. Thanks are also due to Professor A. Scheiber, for granting me permission to publish the said document. A great deal of additional Geniza material was inspected by me at the Institute for Photostats of Hebrew Manuscripts at the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem; I am grateful to the staff for their helpfulness.

My friend and colleague, Dr. Mordechai A. Friedman, has read the Introduction to this book and I am grateful to him for his valuable suggestions. Thanks are also due to Mrs. Nessa Wolfson of the University of Pennsylvania, and Miss Naomi Handelman of Tel Aviv University for their efforts to improve the English of this work.

In conclusion, I should thank Professor S. Simonsohn, who as director of the Diaspora Research Institute took a keen interest in this study and helped this book to come to publication.