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DISCOVERIES

Collection of ancient Jewish Manuscripts Found in Afghanistan Fox Cave

Israel's National Library has acquired 1,000-year-old Jewish documents discovered in Afghanistan. The collection of 29 pages includes writings by Saadia Gaon, and has been compared in significance to the 19th-century discovery of the Cairo Genizah. The rare documents were discovered by villagers near the Iran-Uzbekistan border in a cave believed to be the home of a family of foxes. The manuscripts include religious writings, as well as letters and civil contracts written in Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic and Persian, and in a variety of alphabets. The key manuscript acquired by the library is a page from Saadia Gaon's commentary on the Bible. The document is a 10th-century commentary on Isaiah 34, written in Judeo-Arabic.



Although the exact number of manuscripts in the Afghan Genizah is not known, it rumored to be in the hundreds – tiny in comparison to the 200,000 of the Cairo cache, which is

spread among dealers in Switzerland, England and other nations, Haaretz said. Historians have drawn parallels between the growth of the Jewish communities in the region to the Silk Road. “Along the way, Jewish trading stations were established for Jewish traders, and over time they became Jewish communities. There is documentary evidence of Jews from Baghdad and Aleppo, of Karaite Jews and Jews from Persia, all of whom settled in the same region,” Haaretz quoted Ben-Shammai as saying. The pages will be scanned and uploaded to the National Library’s website in the near future.

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