

Gary A. Rendsburg

**Upcoming Lecture**  
**January 2022**

Wednesday, January 12, 2022

Dear Friends:

First and foremost, we wish you all a healthy and prosperous 2022: may the new year be one of discovery, exploration, and new horizons – at least unto the extent possible, given the swirling omicron variant.

We had plans to be in England at this time, with a trip scheduled for December 27 – January 10, in order to attend the winter meeting of the Society for Old Testament Studies (SOTS), to be held in Nottingham, with time in London on either side, to visit museums and other sites.

Naturally, due to the health concerns, we cancelled our plans, and then the entire conference transitioned to an online affair – so that we write to you from our home in New Jersey.

England will always be there, and in fact we have two upcoming trips planned for later in 2022 (February and August), conditions permitting.

In the meantime, Gary delivered his conference presentation online, with the title “The Genesis of Genesis,” to c. 100 participants.

For those who wish to learn more about the Society, see here: <https://www.sots.ac.uk/>

For those who wish to access the program, see here:  
<https://www.sots.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Winter-Meeting-Programme-2022-online-2.pdf>

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## **Upcoming Public Lecture**

**Wednesday, January 19, 2022**

“The Year 1000: Jews along the Silk Road”

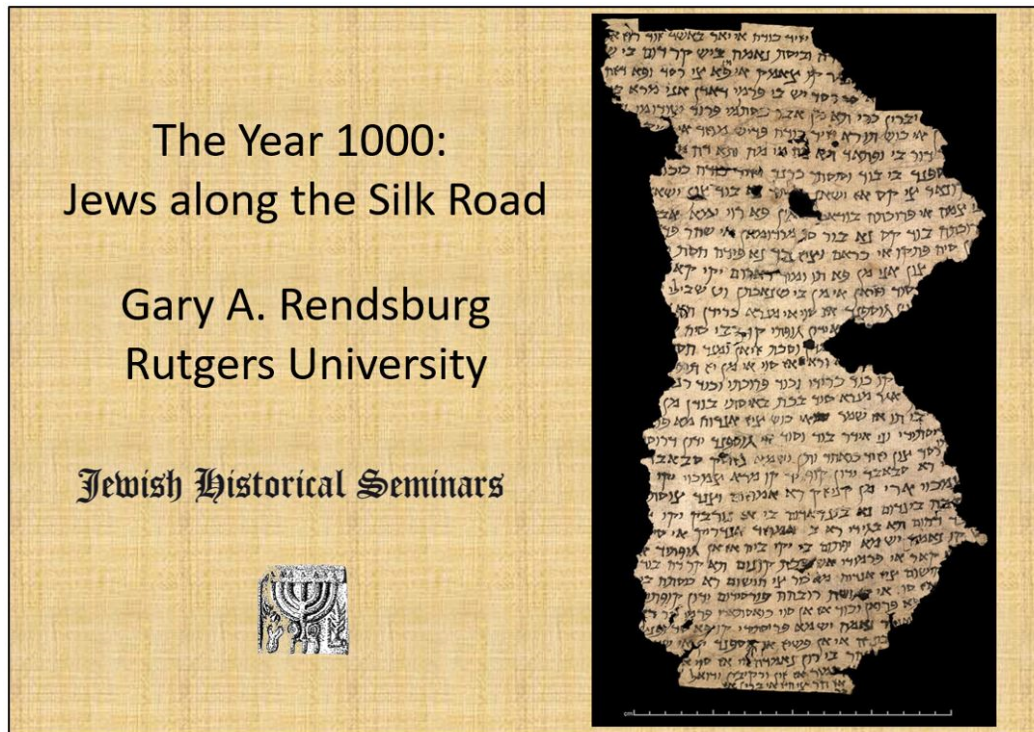
11:00 a.m. (EST)

Presented by Jewish Historical Seminars (Jerusalem) – via Zoom

<https://www.jewishhistoricalseminars.com/lectures>

In order to register, one first must pay \$12.00

via [PAYPAL.ME/JHSEMINARS](https://www.paypal.com/US/merchorder/jhseminars), and then email Debbie Zuberi at [JHS@JewishHistoricalSeminars.com](mailto:JHS@JewishHistoricalSeminars.com).



## Description:

In the year 2011, the most remarkable discovery occurred: a cache of Jewish documents hidden in a cave in Afghanistan, dated to c. 1000 C.E.! Included among the texts were both personal documents and a hitherto unknown commentary of Sa'adya Gaon on the book of Isaiah – all now in the collection of the National Library of Israel.

Two years later, the world's oldest siddur, from c. 900 C.E. with an early version of the Passover Haggadah, surfaced on the antiquities market, apparently smuggled out of Afghanistan as well – now in the collection of the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C.

These recent discoveries reignited interest in the remarkable history of medieval Jews along the Silk Road. Scholars quickly recalled other stray discoveries from decades and centuries past, including Jewish rock inscriptions in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and Jewish documents found at Dunhuang and at Dandan-Uiliq, both in western China.

These precious manuscripts bring to life the testimony of medieval Jewish and Muslim historians, who describe the work of Jewish traders along the Silk Road. The easternmost terminus of the Silk Road was Kaifeng, the traditional capital of China and home to a Jewish community established c. 1100 C.E.

The journey is a remarkable one and moreover serves to remind us that the student of Jewish history needs to retain the broadest geographical and chronological horizons.

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## **Video recordings of the 3-Part Series from this past December:**

“England as the Custodian of the Jewish Past” (December 2021)  
Sponsored by the Orange County (Calif.) Jewish Community Scholar  
Program (<https://occsp.net/>)

If you missed the 3-part series in December and now would like to watch the recordings, the links are here, with thanks to Arie Katz, director of OCCSP, for making these publicly available:

- The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (Dec 5, 2021) – [link](#)
- The Cairo Geniza, Discovery and Documents (Dec 12, 2021) – [link](#)
- The British Library and the John Rylands Library (Dec 19, 2021) – [link](#)

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## Recent Media Coverage:

Two minor pieces, but interesting reading nonetheless:

1. Gary's colleague Melonie Schmierer-Lee (Cambridge) was kind to interview him regarding his work on Johannes of Oppido = Obadiah the Proselyte for "Genizah Fragments," the blog of the Genizah Research Unit (Cambridge University Library) (Dec 1, 2021):

<https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/genizah-fragments/posts/qa-wednesday-monk-jew-1102-obadiah-proselyte-gary-rendsburg>

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# GENIZAH FRAGMENTS

Blog of the Genizah Research Unit, supported by the Littman Genizah Educational Programme

## Q&A Wednesday: From monk to Jew in 1102 – Obadiah the proselyte, with Gary Rendsburg

Authors: Melonie Schmierer-Lee and Gary Rendsburg  
Wed 1 Dec 2021

Gary, you've recently created a website dedicated to the life of Obadiah/Johannes of Oppido and his conversion to Judaism in the Middle Ages. How did you become interested in the manuscripts associated with Obadiah?

I actually do not recall the specific moment, but I can tell you that several lines converged: a) as I began to read more and more about medieval history, especially in the light of new research, including by my colleague Paolo Tartakoff, I realized that conversion from Judaism to Christianity and from Christianity to Judaism was more common than I (or perhaps anyone) had realized; b) my wife is a Jew-by-choice (the term 'convert' is less used nowadays, at least here in the U.S.), so that I became attracted to the subject generally, including wishing to learn more as a historian; c) we both love Gregorian chant, so when I learned that Obadiah had composed such music but within a Jewish context, I was especially interested to learn more; and d) Obadiah hailed from the small town of Oppido in southern Italy, which is just 30 km northeast of the town of Potenza, which he mentions in his description of his native land, and to which I have a personal connection: my maternal grandparents survived World War II there; they left Berlin in August 1939 and found refuge in southern Italy; until the U.S. Army arrived in September 1943.

In sum, I have personal connections both to the phenomenon of conversion and to the very place where Johannes was born and grew up. I also should add that my wife and I visited Oppido and Potenza in February 2019, along with other villages in the area mentioned by Obadiah – see our photos posted at the website dedicated to Obadiah.



T-S K5 41 (recto): a musical composition thought to be in Obadiah's hand.

Tags

polyphony SYRIAC POETRY Origin GET  
Hebrew Christian  
Bible  
Fatimid  
Arabic Moses  
Maimonides  
petition  
conservation  
Saadia Gaon  
Rabbi Ben-Shimon  
Karate  
Abraham  
Maimonides  
legal  
responsa



2. The Rutgers University School of Arts and Sciences online bulletin featured Gary's course, "Hieroglyphic Egyptian" here (Dec 6, 2021):

<https://sas.rutgers.edu/news-a-events/news/newsroom/student-news/3472-egyptian-language-course>

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## Rutgers Students Decipher the Hieroglyphics of Ancient Egypt

Written by John Chadwick | SAS Senior Writer

### Challenging new class offered for the first time at Rutgers-NB



After learning to read and write hieroglyphics, students in Gary Rendsburg's class are now tackling one of ancient Egypt's literary epics .

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**Special Study Tour:  
“England as the Custodian of the Jewish Past”  
(August 8-19, 2022)**



As announced in a previous email, we will lead a special study tour of Oxford, Cambridge, and London, with access to the Hebrew manuscript collections at the Bodleian Library (Oxford) and the Cambridge University Library (C.U.L.) in August 2022.

The tour is brought to you by Sababa Travel (Westfield, N.J.), with itinerary, pricing, and registration available here:

<https://traveljoy.com/bookings/9vCkvyWtCSaUqCxAswXLyyDr>

See here for the pdf file with all relevant information:

<https://jewishstudies.rutgers.edu/docman/rendsburg/902-england-as-the-custodian-of-the-jewish-past-august-2022-tour-itinerary>

And see here for the “flip-book” version:

<https://www.flipsnack.com/garyarendsburglectureseries/england-as-the-custodian-jewish-past-august-2022.html>

Per the prior email sent this past Monday, here is the Zoom link for the information session this coming Sunday, January 16, 2022, at 8:00 p.m. (EST):

**Join Zoom Meeting:**

<https://rutgers.zoom.us/j/95500121952?pwd=cDArOUFPMHF5cEJzVENNWkJkeVF5QT09>

Naturally, feel free to be in touch with us with any questions, and also feel free to share with family, friends, interested parties, et al.

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## GARY'S CORNER



Follow-up to the England tour announcement above:

**Did you know that H.R.H. Prince Augustus Frederick (1773–1843), the Duke of Sussex, the son of King George III, knew Hebrew, collected important Hebrew manuscripts, and fought for the civil rights of the Jews?**

That's right, it's a little-known fact, but a leading member of the royal family (in fact, the Duke was the favorite uncle of Princess Victoria, so much so that he walked her down the aisle when she married Prince Albert) was an accomplished Hebraist and an important contributor to Hebraic culture and Jewish life.

After the Duke's death in 1843, the majority of his private collection of books and manuscripts entered the British Museum. The crown jewel is the Duke of Sussex Bible, written in Catalonia, c. 1350, available here in digital format: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/duke-of-sussex-bible-add-ms-15252>.

All this and more during the course of our days together on the England tour!

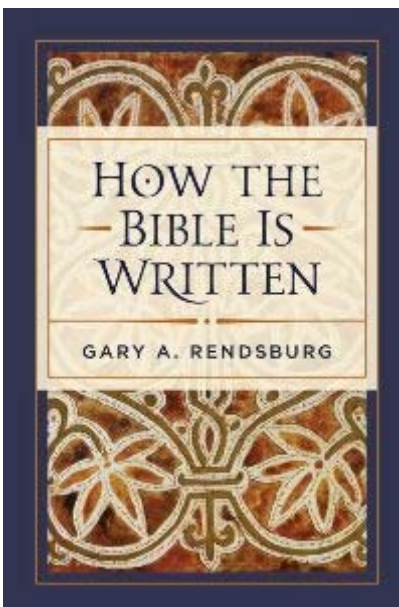
- Gary

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[Click here to contact Gary A. Rendsburg](#)

[Click here to contact Melissa A. Rendsburg, Managing Director](#)



**MOST RECENT BOOK**  
**(April 2019)**

How the Bible Is Written  
(Hendrickson)

**Gary A. Rendsburg Lecture Series**

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Department of Jewish Studies – Rutgers University

<https://jewishstudies.rutgers.edu/people/core-faculty/gary-a-rendsborg/>

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