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Jews in Old Rus'

A Documentary History

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AN ARCHIVE IN MOTION

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J EWS IN O L D R U S '

A Documentary History



HARVARD SERIES IN UKRAINIAN STUDIES

Why a documentary history?



possible monographs?

A monograph offers one reconstruction.
A documentary collection leaves the evidence available
for the next one.

The evidence should outlive the reconstruction.

MY ARGUMENT

RIVAL ARGUMENTS

FUTURE ARGUMENTS

ONE HISTORY, TWO ARCHIVES

Slavic sources

Chronicles ·
hagiography · church
law

Hebrew sources

Khazaria · Byzantium ·
Italy · German lands ·
France · England ·
Spain

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THE ARCHIVE IS NOT WHERE THE HISTORY HAPPENED

WHERE IT HAPPENED

WHERE THE EVIDENCE SURVIVED



The surviving corpus is geographically displaced by design, accident, and loss.

ONE MAN. ONE DEBT. ONE TRAVELLING LETTER.

T-S 12.122 · CAIRO GENIZAH

Jacob b. Ḥanukka

stood surety for his brother.

His brother was killed.

Jacob was imprisoned.

The community paid part of the debt.

The letter asked distant Jews for the rest.

A local act of charity became a witness to communal life.

DEBT LEDGER

60 + **40**

paid locally

still owed

Rus' ?



Fustat



Cambridge

Associated with Kyiv and usually dated to the tenth century – both points remain debated. Names and final signs are debated too.

WHAT ONE PAGE CONTAINS

HEBREW RHYMES AND PROSE

Byzantine Hebrew hand

COMMUNAL ACTION

parnas · signatures · debt
debt relief

DISPUTED SIGNS

language and function
uncertain

POSSIBLE SLAVIC NAMES NAMES

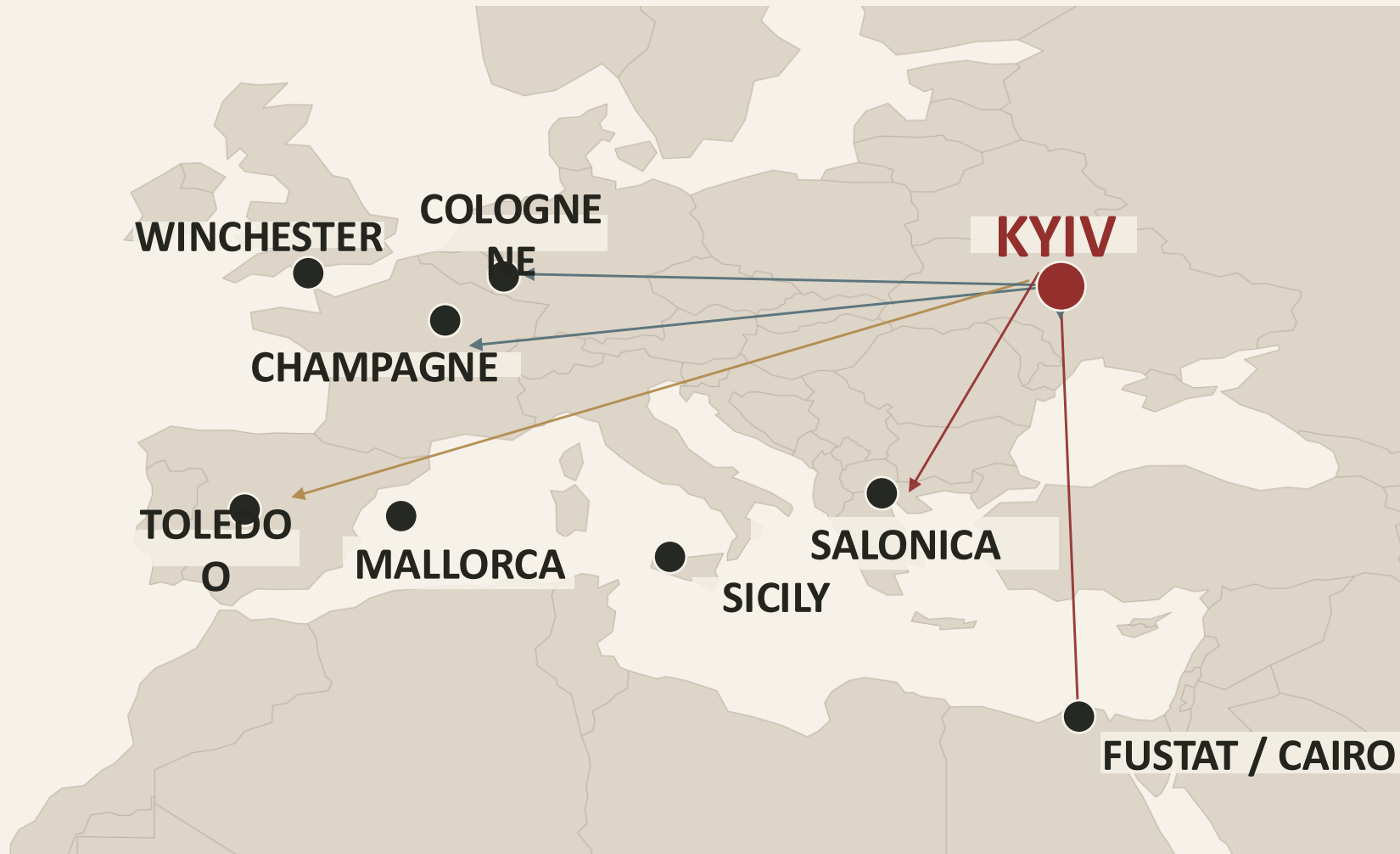
Gostyata · perhaps Sirota ·
Sirota · Kupin



THE DOCUMENT DOES NOT KNOW WHICH DEPARTMENT IT BELONGS TO

AN ARCHIVE IN MOTION

SCHEMATIC LOCATIONS OF SURVIVING EVIDENCE



EARLY ARROWS POINT OUTWARD

circulation of people,
learning, commodities,
and texts across
several worlds

TRADE

STUDY

PILGRIMAGE

MIGRATION

**This complicates every
every simple origin
story**

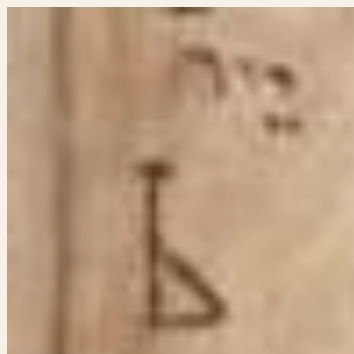
A CYRILLIC ALPHABET IN HEBREW DRESS

13th-century
ENGLAND

SLAVIC
PRONUNCIATION

YSAAC DE RUSSIE
1180–82

Names of the letters
written in Hebrew characters



MS. Bodl. Or.3 Fol.73v

© Bodleian Library 2002
1cm 1 2 3 4 5

A scrap once treated as an anomaly becomes
evidence for cultural mediation

**Possible Jewish mediation in the transmission of Cyrillic
literacy**

WHEN DISCIPLINES SPEAK TO ONE ANOTHER.

NO DISCIPLINE FAILED. EACH SUCCEEDED TOO NARROWLY.



"COMPOSED IN RUS' " : 1124

HEBREW NOTICE

1124 "when he wrote this book
in Rus'"

בעת שחבר הספר הזה ברושיאה

The "Russiano Book" · Hebrew
commentary on the Pentateuch

preserved through later copies: *1154 > *1162 > **1378**

RUS', SAME GENERATION

1116–18 major redactions of the
Tale of Bygone Years

c.1117 Monomakh's
Instruction to His Children

1124 great fire of Kyiv;
Jews named among those
affected

The date places a Hebrew book
inside the same moment in which
Rus' written culture was becoming
legible

A second archive of the same historical moment.

WHAT THE COLLECTION MAKES POSSIBLE

FOUR SOURCE LANGUAGES

HEBREW

CHURCH SLAVONIC

LATIN

ARABIC

ONE EDITORIAL APPARATUS

ORIGINAL TEXT

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

**COMMENTARY &
CROSS-REFERENCES**

INDEXES, MAPS, ETC.

BETTER QUESTIONS

COMMUNITY

What institutions existed?

LANGUAGE

What did Jews speak and write?

MOVEMENT

Where did people and texts travel?

ETC.

Each tradition became, in part, the accidental archive of the other.

The gaps remain real. The evidence is now harder to ignore.

FINISHED ENOUGH TO BEGIN

A documentary history earns its
its place by making disagreement
disagreement better informed

Thank you!

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