

## Mourning a Mentor

Professor Moshe Gil was the “Rabbi Akiva” of our days, and like Akiva he started his academic studies late in life. From that moment he never ceased researching, innovating and standing his ground before those who opposed his new ideas. He was a beacon of light to many students and left behind an impressive legacy. The page is too short to mention all of his important contributions in the many areas of his research, including the history of the Jews in ancient Palestine, Jewish history in

the Arab Peninsula prior to and after the rise of Islam, and – his main focus – Jewish and Muslim societies in the east, during the early Middle Ages, in light of the Genizah documents and Arab and Christian sources.

It is difficult for me to digest his departure. He left behind a desk full of new research, as despite his advanced age and health problems, he continued working tirelessly. I was his first research student, and he chose me and paved the way for me with help and support. He kept me

on track by making me cross every t and dot every i, with no compromises, no short cuts, verifying every finding, while at the same time adhering to a high academic standard and precise Hebrew language. I have been truly blessed to have such a great scholar as my mentor, and say, with a sad smile, that “the song of his life was cut short”.

**Elinoar Baretet**  
*Achva Academic College*

## Cohen on Gil

My memories of Moshe Gil begin with his warm reception of me and my family in Kibbutz Reshafim on my earliest sabbatical in Israel. Chatting about his life in Israel and his relatively late entrance into the university and a life of scholarship, he told us: “I spent the first part of my adult life building the State, then I decided to build myself.” Moshe did both exceptionally well. It was a pleasure to have known him a colleague and friend.

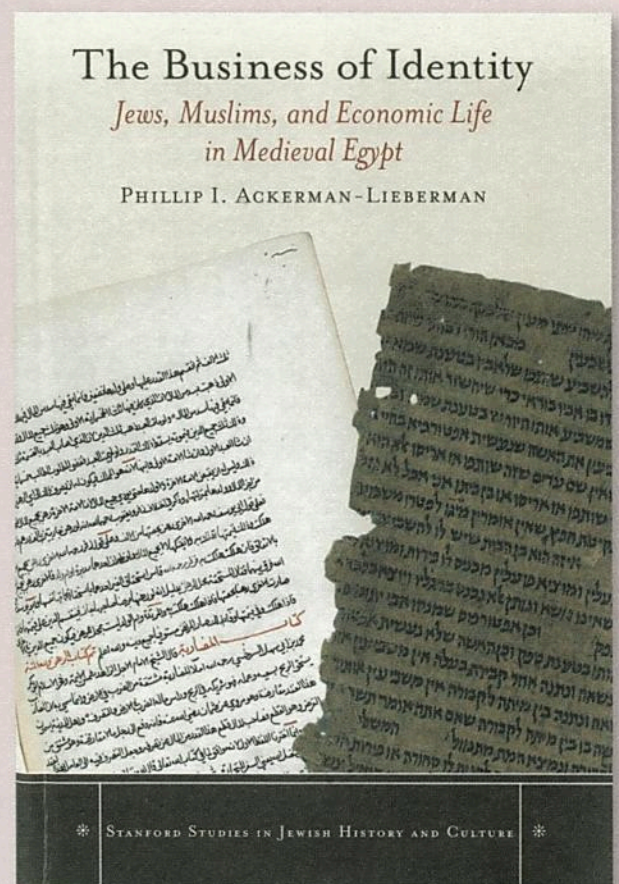
**Prof. Mark R. Cohen**  
*Princeton University*

## The Business of Identity in Medieval Egypt

Phillip Lieberman’s new book, a reworking of his 2007 PhD thesis, ‘A partnership culture’, is the culmination of a long interest in the legal documents relating to the activities of Genizah merchants and what they can tell us about the medieval world in which they were written – or, rather, what we can sensibly extrapolate from them about the historical context. Phillip concentrates on partnership deeds, which are one of the most frequently occurring documents in the Genizah Collection, and examines in detail how Jewish mercantile practice differed from that of contemporary Muslim traders, most notably in the way that the different sets of partners handled the sharing of profit and loss. Building on this, he questions one of the central assumptions of

S. D. Goitein, that the Genizah is typical of the medieval world in which it was written, i.e., of the wider Islamic milieu, and instead proposes an alternative model for using Genizah documents to provide a ‘window’ on that world. This is an important, opinionated book. It is not for the casual reader, but it examines interesting historical material and presents some highly stimulating argument. The first chapter, in particular, in which Phillip assesses the work of scholars who have trodden this path before him (‘the Princeton School’, Goitein, Udovitch and others), includes much that could be seen as critical of previous scholarship, but the rigour with which he approaches his subject can only be admired.

**Ben Outhwaite**  
*Genizah Research Unit*



The Lauffer Family Charitable Trust has generously contributed towards the cost of producing this newsletter in memory of the late David Lauffer, an enthusiastic student of history and supporter of the Genizah Research Unit.