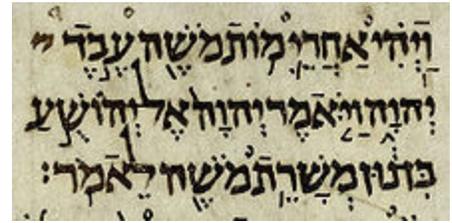


Aleppo Codex

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The **Aleppo Codex** (Hebrew: כֶּתֶר אֲרָם צֹבָא ***Keter Aram Tzova*** or **Crown of Aleppo**) is a medieval bound manuscript of the Hebrew Bible. The codex was written in the city of Tiberias, in what is currently northern Israel, in the 10th century C.E.,^[1] and was endorsed for its accuracy by Maimonides. Together with the Leningrad Codex, it contains the Ben-Asher masoretic tradition, but the Aleppo Codex lacks most of the Torah section and many other parts.



Closeup of Aleppo Codex, Joshua 1:1

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History

Overview

The Karaite Jewish community of Jerusalem purchased the codex about a hundred years after it was made.^{[2][3]} During the First Crusade, the synagogue was plundered and the codex was transferred to Egypt, whose Jews paid a high price for its ransom.^[1] It was preserved at the Karaite then Rabbanite synagogue in Old Cairo, where it was consulted by Maimonides, who described it as a text trusted by all Jewish scholars. It is rumoured that in 1375 one of Maimonides' descendants brought it to Aleppo, Syria, leading to its present name.^[1]

The Codex remained in Syria for five hundred years. In 1947, rioters enraged by

the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine burned down the synagogue where it was kept.^[1] The Codex disappeared, then reemerged in 1958, when it was smuggled into Israel by Syrian Jew Murad Faham, and presented to the president of the state, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi. Some time after arrival, it was found that parts of the codex had been lost. The Aleppo Codex was entrusted to the Ben-Zvi Institute and Hebrew University of Jerusalem. It is currently (2005) on display in the Israel Museum.

Ransom

The Karaite Jewish community of Jerusalem received the book from Israel ben Simha of Basra sometime between 1040 and 1050.^[5] It was cared for by the brothers Hizkiyahu and Joshya, Karaite religious leaders who eventually moved to Fustat in 1050. The codex, however, stayed in Jerusalem until the latter part of that century.^[5] After the Siege of Jerusalem (1099) during the First Crusade, the Crusaders held the codex and other holy works for ransom (along with Jewish survivors).^{[6][7]} The Aleppo Codex website cites two letters in the Cairo Geniza that describe how the inhabitants of Ashkelon borrowed money from Egypt to pay for the books.^[7] These Judeo-Arabic letters were discovered by noted Jewish historian Shelomo Dov Goitein in 1952.^[8] The *Letter of the Karaite elders of Ascalon*, the more descriptive of the two, states that the money borrowed from Alexandria was used to "buy back two hundred and thirty Bible codices, a hundred other volumes, and eight Torah Scrolls."^[9] The documents were transported to Egypt via a caravan led and funded by the prominent Alexandrian official Abu'l-Fadl Sahl b. Yūsha' b. Sha'yā, who was in Ascalon for his wedding in early 1100.^[10] Judeo-Arabic inscriptions on the first page of the Codex mention the book was then "transferred to the Jerusalemite synagogue in Fustat."^[6] The Aleppo codex website reveals how the book exchanged hands.



Photograph of missing page^[4]

[It was] transferred [...] according to the law of redemption from imprisonment [in which it had fallen] in Jerusalem, the Holy City, may it be rebuilt and reestablished, to the congregation in Egypt of Knisat Yerushalayim, may it be built and established in the life of Israel. Blessed be he who preserves it and cursed be he who steals it, and cursed be he who sells it, and cursed be he who pawns it. It may not be sold and it may not be defiled forever.^[7]

In Aleppo

The Aleppo community guarded the Codex zealously for some 600 years: it was kept, together with three other Biblical manuscripts, in a special cupboard (later, an iron safe) in a basement chapel of the Central Synagogue of Aleppo, supposed to have been the Cave of Elijah. It was regarded as the community's most sacred possession: Those in trouble would pray before it, and oaths were taken by it. The community received queries from Jews around the world, who asked that various textual details be checked, correspondence which is preserved in the responsa literature, and which allows for the reconstruction of certain details in the parts that are missing today. Most importantly, in the 1850s, Shalom Shachne Yellin sent his son in law, Moses Joshua Kimchi, to Aleppo, to copy information about the Codex; Kimchi sat for weeks, and copied thousands of details about the codex into the margins of a small handwritten Bible. The existence of this Bible was known to 20th-century scholars from the book *'Ammudé Shesh* by Shemuel Shelomo Boyarski, and then the actual Bible itself was discovered by Yosef Ofer in 1989.

However, the community limited direct observation of the manuscript by outsiders, especially by scholars in modern times. Paul E. Kahle, when revising the text of the *Biblia Hebraica* in the 1920s, tried and failed to obtain a photographic copy. This forced him to use the *Leningrad Codex* instead for the third edition, which appeared in 1937.

The only modern scholar allowed to compare it with a standard printed Hebrew Bible and take notes on the differences was Umberto Cassuto, who examined it in 1943.^[11] This secrecy made it impossible to confirm the authenticity of the Codex, and indeed Cassuto doubted that it was Maimonides' codex, though he agreed that it was 10th-century.

During the 1947 Anti-Jewish riots in Aleppo, the community's ancient synagogue was burned and the Codex was damaged, so that no more than 294 of the original (estimated) 487 pages survived.^{[12][13]} Each page is parchment, 33 cm high by 26.5 cm wide (13 inches x 10.43 inches).^[14] In particular, only the last few pages of the Torah are extant.^[15]

The missing leaves are a subject of fierce controversy. The Jews of Aleppo claim that they were burned. However, scholarly analysis has shown no evidence of fire having reached the codex itself (the dark marks on the pages are due to fungus). Some scholars instead accuse members of the Jewish community of having torn off the missing leaves and keeping them privately hidden. Two "missing" leaves have turned up, one in 1982 and the other in 2007, leaving open the possibility that even more may have survived the riots in 1947.^[16] In particular, the 2012 book, *The Aleppo Codex* by Matti Friedman, calls attention to the fact that eyewitnesses in Aleppo who saw the Codex shortly after the fire consistently reported that it was complete or nearly complete, and then there is no account of it for more than a decade, until after it arrived in Israel and was put in the Ben-Zvi Institute, at which point it was as currently described; his book suggests a number of possibilities for the loss of the pages.^[17]

The community of Damascus possessed a counterpart of the Aleppo Codex, known as the "Damascus Keter", also written in Israel in the 10th century, which is now kept at the National Library of Israel and numbered ms. Heb 5702. It is available online here [1] (<http://www.wdl.org/en/item/11364/>). (This should not be confused with another Damascus Keter, of medieval Spanish origin.)

In Israel

The Israeli writer Amnon Shamosh wrote an account of how it was brought to Israel in his *Ha-Keter: Sippuro shel Keter Aram Soba (The Crown: The Story of the Aleppo Codex)*, published in 1987. The codex was entrusted to the Ben-Zvi Institute and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Attempts to recover its missing parts continue to this day.^[18]



Exterior view of the Shrine of the Book

In January 1958, the Aleppo Codex was smuggled out of Syria and sent to Jerusalem to be placed in the care of the chief rabbi of the Aleppo Jews. But by the influence of then President of Israel, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, it was secretly taken by the government. In the late 1980s, the codex was placed in the Shrine of the Book at the Israel Museum.^{[16][16]} This finally gave scholars the chance to examine it and consider the claims that it is indeed the manuscript referred to by Maimonides. The work of Moshe Goshen-Gottstein on the few surviving pages of the Torah seems to have confirmed these claims beyond reasonable doubt. Goshen-Gottstein suggested (in the introduction to his facsimile reprint of the codex) that not only was it the oldest known masoretic Bible in a single volume, it was the first time ever that a complete *Tanakh* had been produced by one or two people as a unified entity in a consistent style.

Later, after the university denied him access to the codex, Mordechai Breuer began his own reconstruction of the Masoretic text on the basis of other well-known ancient manuscripts. His results matched the Aleppo Codex almost exactly. Thus today, Breuer's version is used authoritatively for the reconstruction of the missing portions of the Aleppo Codex. The *Jerusalem Crown* (כתר ירושלים, "Jerusalem Crown"), printed in Jerusalem in 2000, is a modern version of the Tanakh based on the Aleppo Codex and the work of Breuer: It uses a newly designed typeface based on the calligraphy of the Codex and is based on its page layout.

Documentary filmmaker, Avi Dabach, great grandson of Chacham Ezra Dabach (one of the last caretakers of the Codex when it was still in Syria), announced in December 2015 an upcoming film tracing the history of the Codex and possibly determining the fate of the missing pages.^[19]

Authoritative text

The consonants in the codex were copied by the scribe Shlomo ben Buya'a in Israel circa 920. The text was then verified, vocalized, and provided with Masoretic notes by Aaron ben Moses ben Asher, the last and most prominent member of the ben Asher dynasty of grammarians from Tiberias, rivals to the ben Naphtali school. The tradition of ben Asher has become the one accepted for the Hebrew Bible.^[20] The ben Asher vocalization is late and in many respects artificial, compared to other traditions and tendencies reaching back closer to the period of spoken Biblical Hebrew.^[21]

The *Leningrad Codex*, which dates to approximately the same time as the Aleppo codex, has been claimed by Paul E. Kahle to be a product of the ben Asher scriptorium. However, its colophon says only that it was corrected from manuscripts written by ben Asher; there is no evidence that ben Asher himself ever saw it. However, the same holds true for the Aleppo Codex, which was apparently not vocalized by ben Asher himself, although a later colophon, which was added to the manuscript after his death, attributes the vocalization to him.^[22]

The Aleppo Codex was the manuscript used by Maimonides when he set down the exact rules for writing scrolls of the Torah, *Hilkhot Sefer Torah* ("the Laws of the Torah Scroll") in his *Mishneh Torah*.^[7] This halachic ruling gave the Aleppo Codex the seal of supreme textual authority, albeit only with regard to the type of space preceding sections (*petuhot* and *setumot*) and for the manner of the writing of the songs in the Pentateuch.^[22] "The codex which we used in these works is the codex known in Egypt, which includes 24 books, which was in Jerusalem," he wrote. David ben Solomon ibn Abi Zimra testifies to this being the same codex that was later transferred to Aleppo.

Contents

When the Aleppo Codex was complete (until 1947), it followed the Tiberian textual tradition in the order of its books, similar to the *Leningrad Codex*, and which also matches the later tradition of Sephardi biblical manuscripts. The Torah and the Nevi'im appear in the same order found in most printed Hebrew Bibles, but the order for the books for Ketuvim differs markedly. In the Aleppo Codex, the order of the Ketuvim is Books of Chronicles, Psalms, Book of Job, Book of Proverbs, Book of Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Book of Lamentations, Book of Esther, Book of Daniel, and Book of Ezra and Book of Nehemiah.

The current text is missing all of the Pentateuch to the Book of Deuteronomy 28.17; II Kings 14.21–18.13; Book of Jeremiah 29.9–31.33; 32.2–4, 9–11, 21–24; Book of Amos 8.12–Book of Micah 5.1; So 3.20–Za 9.17; II Chronicles 26.19–35.7; Book of Psalms 15.1–25.2 (MT enumeration); Song of Songs 3.11 to the end; all of

Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, and Ezra-Nehemiah.^[21]

Modern editions

Several complete or partial editions of the Tanakh based on the Aleppo Codex have been published over the past three decades in Israel, some of them under the academic auspices of Israeli universities. These editions incorporate reconstructions of the missing parts of the codex based on the methodology of Mordechai Breuer or similar systems, and by taking into account all available historical testimony about the contents of the codex.

Complete Tanakh: These are complete editions of the Tanakh, usually in one volume (but sometimes also sold in three volumes). They do *not* include the masoretic notes of the Aleppo Codex.

1. Mossad Harav Kook edition, Mordechai Breuer, ed. Torah (1977); Nebi'im (1979); Ketubim (1982); full Tanakh in one volume 1989. This was the first edition to include a reconstruction of the letters, vowels, and cantillation marks in the missing parts of the Aleppo codex.
2. Horev publishers, Jerusalem, 1996–98. Mordechai Breuer, ed. This was the first edition to incorporate newly discovered information on the parashah divisions of the Aleppo Codex for Nebi'im and Ketubim. The text of the Horev Tanakh has been reprinted in several forms with various commentaries by the same publisher.^[23]
3. *Jerusalem Crown: The Bible of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem*, 2000. Edited according to the method of Mordechai Breuer under the supervision of Yosef Ofer, with additional proofreading and refinements since the Horev edition.^[23]
4. Jerusalem Simanim Institute, Feldheim Publishers, 2004 (published in one-volume and three-volume editions).^{[23][24]}

Complete online Tanakh:

- Mechon Mamre provides an online edition of the Tanakh based upon the Aleppo Codex and related Tiberian manuscripts. Its reconstruction of the missing text is based on the methods of Mordechai Breuer. The text is offered in four formats: (a) Masoretic letter-text, (b) "full" letter-text (unrelated to masoretic spelling), (c) masoretic text with vowels (niqqud), and (d) masoretic text with vowels and cantillation signs. See external links below.
- **"Miqra according to the Mesorah"** is an experimental, digital version of the Tanakh based on the Aleppo Codex with full documentation of the editorial policy and its implementation (English-language abstract).

Partial editions:

- Hebrew University Bible Project (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel). Includes the

masoretic notes of the Aleppo Codex.

- Mikraot Gedolot Haketer, Bar-Ilan University (1992–present). A multi-volume critical edition of the Mikraot Gedolot, sixteen volumes published to date including Genesis (2 vols.), Exodus (2 vols.), Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua & Judges (1 vol.), Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Minor Prophets, Psalms (2 vols.), Five Megillot (1 vol.). Includes the masoretic notes of the Aleppo Codex and a new commentary on them. Differs from the Breuer reconstruction and presentation for some masoretic details.
- Torat Hayim, published by Mossad ha-Rav Kook (Torah, Proverbs, and Five Megillot).
- Chorev Mikraot Gedolot by Hotzaat Chorev (Torah only).

See also

- Damascus Pentateuch
- Leningrad Codex
- 4Q108
- Codex Cairensis
- List of Hebrew Bible manuscripts
- Parashah
- Dead Sea Scrolls

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14. Hayim Tawil & Bernard Schneider, *Crown of Aleppo* (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Soc., 2010) page 110; Izhak Ben-Zvi, "The Codex of Ben Asher", *Textus*, vol. 1 (1960) page 2, reprinted in Sid Z. Leiman, ed., *The Canon and Masorah of the Hebrew Bible, an Introductory Reader* (NY, Ktav Pubg. House, 1974) page 758.
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23. In this edition, the masoretic text and symbols were encoded and graphic layout was enabled by the computer program *Taj*, developed by Daniel Weissman.
24. "After consultation... with the greatest Torah scholars and grammarians, the biblical text in this edition was chosen to conform with the Aleppo Codex which as is well known was corrected by Ben-Asher... Where this manuscript is not extant we have relied on the Leningrad Codex... Similarly the open and closed sections that are missing in the Aleppo Codex have been completed according to the biblical list compiled by Rabbi Shalom Shachna Yelin that were published in the Jubilee volume for Rabbi Breuer... (translated from the Hebrew on p. 12 of the introduction).

External links and further reading

- The Aleppo Codex Website (<http://aleppocodex.org/>)
- Mechon Mamre (<http://www.mechon-mamre.org/>) - Electronic text of the Hebrew Bible based largely on the Aleppo Codex.
- Wikimedia Commons - full online digital images in several files.
- Seforim Online (<http://www.tanachonline.org/manuscripts/>) - two online digital images, each in a single large file (the same images are found at the Wikimedia Commons in several smaller files)
- The History and Authority of the Aleppo Codex (<http://www.jerusalem-crown.co.il/website/files/images/4-eng25.pdf>), by Yosef Ofer (pdf)
- Israel Museum shrine of the Book (<http://www.imj.org.il/eng/shrine/aleppo.html>)
- History of the Aleppo Codex (<http://www.bible-researcher.com/aleppo.html>)
- "Rival Owners, Sacred Text" (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303918204577448610210896018>) article in Wall Street Journal
- Segal, The Crown of Aleppo (https://www.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/Shokel/000203_Keter.html)
- (in Hebrew) Copies of the Aleppo Codex (<http://mikranet.cet.ac.il/pages/item.asp?item=3279>)
- Dina Kraft, From Maimonides to Brooklyn: The mystery of the Aleppo Codex (<http://www.jta.org/cgi-bin/iowa/news/article/2007120920071207aleppo.html>)
- Matti Friedman, *The Aleppo Codex: A True Story of Obsession, Faith, and the Pursuit of an Ancient Bible*, Algonquin Books (May 15, 2012), hardcover, 320 pages, ISBN 1616200405, ISBN 978-1616200404
 - "Author Blog: Codex vs. Kindle By Matti Friedman" (<http://blogs.forward.com/the-art-y-semite/159418/author-blog-codex-vs-kindle/>)

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