NOTES ON THE LIBRARY OF THE ANNENBERG RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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Several years ago Mr. Sigmund Harrison, a Philadelphia collector of antiquities, presented Dropsie College with a number of Hebraica and Judaica manuscript fragments. Among these items was a divorce document (get) dated 5 Tevet 1060 of the Seleucid Era, i.e., 748/9 CE. A photograph of the get appeared in the Encyclopedia Judaica (1972) 6:124, where it is described as of Karaite origin.

Whether Karaite or Rabbanite, the authenticity of this early document has been called into question. Malachi Beit-Arié has claimed that on paleographic grounds the get is a forgery (as reported by M. Friedman, Jewish Marriage in Palestine [Tel Aviv and New York, 1980] 1:115, n. 28). Friedman himself is of the opinion that it is authentic, but Simon Hopkins is not so sure: "Caution seems advisable in accepting this early date" ("The Oldest Dated Document in the Genizah?" Studies in Judaism and Islam Presented to Shelomo Dov Goitein, ed. S. Morag et al. [Jerusalem, 1981], p. 98 and last note). C. Sirat has likewise expressed skepticism about the document's authenticity (La Ketouba de Cologne: Un Contrat de marriage juif à Antinoopolis [Obladen, Germany, 1986], pp. 28–29, n. 21). In addition, M. Glatzer recently provided a new argument—orthography—for the claim of forgery. He maintains that the form מָצַא with alef points to an ashkenazic provenance centuries later than the purported date in the get ("Ittur Soferim [Sefer ha-Ittur] of R. Isaac b. Abba Mari [Jerusalem, 1985] 1:154, n. 10).

Due to the potential importance of the item on the one hand, and the expressed skepticism about its authenticity on the other, the Annenberg Research Institute submitted the document to a carbon-14 analysis. The new techniques of this process, using accelerator mass spectrometry, utilize only minute samplings of material.

To assure a greater degree of certainty in the procedure, samples were submitted to two separate laboratories, one at Oxford University (Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of
Art/Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit), and one at the University of Arizona (Department of Physics).

Oxford gave the get a two-sigma (i.e., a 95.4% confidence level) age range of 1660–1950 CE; Arizona’s two-sigma age range was 1688–1955 CE. It is quite clear that the sample is of relatively recent age; the get is a forgery.