DAVID AARON

Cairo Genizah Fragment

9th to 10th Century A.D.

Medieval Judaica

Ink on Vellum

H: 27 x W: 30 cm

A fragment of one of the earliest surviving Hebrew Bible manuscripts, dating to the ninth-tenth century. This piece is from the Cairo Genizah, the cache of manuscripts from the Ben Ezra Synagogue, Cairo, Egypt – the most important cache of early Medieval Jewish manuscripts ever discovered.

The text is written in black ink on vellum, in large, fine Eastern Hebrew square script, and is not vocalised. The vellum is inscribed on both sides with part of 3 columns of 17 lines, blind-ruled, with the story of Cain and Abel, Genesis 4:1-23. The script is extremely close to that of B.L.Or.445, the earliest Pentateuch in the British Library, attributed to the ninth or tenth century. Even small fragments of this date are extremely scarce.

The leaf rivals in date, or even predates, the earliest Hebrew biblical codices of the ninth or tenth century, such as the surviving parts of the Aleppo Codex (c. 920, Jerusalem, Shrine of the Book), the Damascus Pentateuch (c. 1000, Jerusalem, Hebrew University), the St. Petersburg Codex (dated 1008/1009, National Library of Russia, MS.B19a), and the London Codex (c. tenth century, British Library, Or.4445).

Literature:

D. S. Sassoon, Ohel David, Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the Sassoon Library (1932), I, pp. 27-28, no. 566 (a).

Seventy-six Important Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts from the library of the late David Solomon Sassoon, Sotheby's, London, 21 July 1994, Lot 1 (1).

The History of Western Script: Important Antiquities and Manuscripts from the Schøyen Collection, Christie's, London, 10 July 2019, Lot 409.