The Cairo Genizah never ceases to surprise its devotees. Among its many fragments, the vast majority are written in Judaeo-Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic, all of which were widely known and used by the Jews of Cairo and their brethren in the Islamic world from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. But there are also fragments in other languages, whose presence in the storeroom of a medieval synagogue is more puzzling. During my own efforts to systematically survey all Genizah fragments in the world in search of texts pertaining to magic, astrology, divination and alchemy, I ran into some eighty-five fragments written in Latin characters. Some of these I could identify as Spanish, others are written in Italian, but some of the fragments seemed to be written in medieval Latin scripts that I could not decipher. The breakthrough came last year, when I participated in a conference on the Qubbat al-Khazna, the “Genizah” of the Great Mosque in Damascus, which contained mostly Quranic manuscripts but also some fragments of Christian and Jewish texts. In that conference, several scholars discussed the Latin fragments found in the Damascus Genizah, and dating to the Crusader period, and it was then that I realized that some of the Latin fragments from the Cairo Genizah might belong in the same historical context. I then asked one of the participants, Dr. Serena Ammirati, to look at the Latin-script fragments from Cairo and see whether she could decipher their contents. She can already point to one successful identification, and quite an unexpected find, described by her as follows -

T-S Misc. 27.2c-e are three small scraps of parchment, written on both sides, bearing the same Latin script, and stemming from a single manuscript. The script is a Caroline minuscule, probably originating in North-East France in the eleventh or twelfth century.

All three fragments contain verses from a poem known as *Ilias Latina*, originally composed by Baebius Italicus in the age of Nero, in the mid-first century CE. This text, which is a Latin abbreviation (in ca. 1000 verses) of Homer’s *Iliad*, was extremely popular in the Middle Ages, especially in school.[1] Our fragments stem from the section that covers the fifth book of the *Iliad*, in which are
recounted the great battles that took place between the Trojan and the Greek heroes before the walls of Troy, including the famous scene where Diomedes wounds the goddess Aphrodite, who hurries back to Mount Olympus to cry to her mother, Dione. Fragments 2d and 2e belong to the same original leaf: on the hair side, they preserve the beginnings and endings of lines 423-424; on flesh side, of lines 442-444. Fragment 2c has the endings of lines 461-475 on the hair side, and the beginnings of lines 482-495 on the flesh side.

The text may be reconstructed as follows (the translation is by George Kennedy, [2] and the slight inconsistencies between text and translation are due to the variant readings in our manuscript, which I shall discuss in detail in a forthcoming publication) -

**T-S Misc.27.2.d (recto)**

**Fragments 2d + 2e (recto) hair side**

**vv. 423-434**

423. Et ni(si) cessiss(et) [dextra cecidisset eadem]
... and, had he not withdrawn, he would have fallen by that very hand.

With no less fury does Atreus’ second son attack the Teucri,

while others follow and scatter death by sword.

Against him, led by adverse fate, unlucky Odius comes.
whom he had laid low with a blow of his enormous lance

cleft his shoulders with its mighty shaft.

Then Idomeneus seeks Phaestus the Maionian,
rushing from the other side, and exulting at his death

sends the son of Strophius as well down to the Stygian shades.

Meriones cuts Phereclum down with brandished spear

and Meges kills Pedaeus. Then, bristling with enormous arms,

Eurypylus lays Hypsenor low with sword as he advanced ...
442. [In medias que acies animosi] more leo(nis)

443. Fert(ur) et [Astynoum magnum quoque Hypir]ona fundit:

444. Com(m)inus hunc gladio, iaculo feri]t emin(us) illu(m).

445. In(de) p(re)mit [Polyidon Abantaque cuspi] de forti

446. Et notu(m) [bello Xanthum uastumque Thoon]e.
... and take himself into the midst of fighting

like a raging lion, he cuts down Astynous and great Hypiron too,

the one nearby with sword, the other from afar with javelin.

Next he presses Polyidon and Abas with a strong spear

and Xanthus, great in war, and mighty Thoon.

After them in enmity he troubles Chromius and Echemmon

with his swift spear and sends them down to Tartarus as well.
You too, Pandarus, laid low by the hand of Tydeus’ son,
die miserably from a painful wound where the nose’s	right side is joined to the bottom of the brow.

His brains seep out, torn with fragments of his helm,

and Tyrides’ sword scatters his broken bones.

And now Aeneas and the Calydonian hero had come near, ...
461. [Bis seni quod uix iuuenes
tellure m]ọụẹṛṇṭ

462. [Sustulit et magno conamine
misi]t i(n) hoste(m).

463. [Ille ruit prostratus humi cum
fortibus ar]mis

464. [Quem Uenus aethereas
genetrix delap]sa p(er) auras
... one that twice six youth could scarce have moved from out the earth,

and with great effort hurled it at his foe.

Aeneas in his strong armor fell full length upon the ground

but Venus Genetrix slipped down along th’ ethereal breezes,
and took him up and hid his body in black mist.

This the mind of Diomede tolerated not and through the very clouds

he goes and runs at Venus, his weapons blazing,

and in madness, seeing no other object for his weapon on the field,

he wounds her celestial hand with his mortal spear.

Struck, the Cytherean rises from the earth and seeks the sky

where she bemoans the wound to her starry mother.

Trojan Apollo is the one who saves Dardanian Aeneas,

inflames his spirits, and brings him back again to war.

The battle lines heave on all sides and the sky grows dark

with dust and the ether resounds with outcries. ...
482. Šaṅ[ue manat humus, campi sudore madescunt]

483. Emicat [interea Ueneris pulcherrima proles]

484. Densaq(ue) [Graiorum premit agmina nudaque late]

485. Terga m[et gladio funestaque proelia miscet]
... The ground is steeped with blood, the plains are wet with sweat.

Meanwhile, Venus’ handsome son shines forth

and presses back the dense ranks of the Greeks and mows down

their bare backs with sword and scatters deadly battle.

The one hope of the Phrygians, Hector, bravest of them all,
As when a wolf sees flocks in open fields,
fears nor herder nor the crowd of fierce
dogs with him,
but rages in his hunger and ignores all else and runs
eagerly into the middle of the herd, so Hector
invades the Danaï and frightens them with his bloody sword.
The Greek lines weaken; the Phrygians push on more keenly
and raise their spirits. Victory doubles strength.
When he sees his comrades yielding in the deadly battle ...
outset, there are more Latin fragments in the Cairo Genizah, and they may provide more clues to this riddle, and many more unexpected surprises surely await in store.

**Footnotes**


[3] For their text, see the edition by S. Elitzur, *The Liturgical Poems of Rabbi Pinhas ha-Kohen*, Jerusalem, 2004, who uses these two fragments in her edition, but only describes them (p. 448) as written in “a typical Ashkenazi handwriting.”

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