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SHABBAT SHALOM!

THE SISTINE'S JEWISH 'CODE' DECIPHERED AS CAIRO GENIZA IS DIGITALLY STITCHED AND THE OLDEST(?) TORAH UNCOVERED; RUSSIAN JEWISH WAR VETS REMEMBER

Contents:

(Please Note: articles may have been shortened in the interest of space. Click link for the complete article – Ed.)

[My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel:](#) Ari Shavit, *Spiegel & Grau*, 2013—There will be no utopia here. Israel will never be the ideal nation it set out to be, nor will it be Europe-away-from-Europe. There will be no London here, no Paris, no Vienna. But what has evolved in this land is not to be dismissed. A series of great revolts has created here a truly free society that is alive and kicking and fascinating.

[Religious Jewish Guide To Sistine Chapel Decodes Michaelangelo's 'Jewish Symbols':](#) *National Post*, May 26, 2013—The first religious Jew to be authorized by the Vatican to act as a docent in Catholic museums, bestselling author Roy Doliner's life seems like it could be taken directly from a Dan Brown novel. Labeled by the Italian media as "Rome's Jewish Robert Langdon," Mr. Doliner conducts tours of the Sistine chapel for the high-profile politicians, ambassadors and celebrities.

[Italy Prof. Says Has Found World's Oldest Torah:](#) *Reuters*, May 29, 2013—An Italian professor said on Wednesday he has identified what he believes is the world's oldest complete scroll of the Torah, containing the full text of the first five books of Hebrew scripture.

[Israeli Scientists Match Cairo Geniza Fragments:](#) Jeremy Sharon, *Jerusalem Post*, May 30, 2013—A team of computer scientists and programmers in Jerusalem, working in collaboration with Tel Aviv University, says it has achieved a breakthrough in piecing together the disparate fragments of the Cairo Geniza.

[Russian Jewish Veterans of World War II Swell with Pride:](#) Sue Fishkoff, *JTA*, Apr. 27, 2013—May 9 marks the 60th anniversary of V-Day, the date in 1945 when Nazi Germany capitulated. Nowhere has it been as resolutely commemorated each year as in the former Soviet Union, which lost a staggering 25 million citizens during what is still called the Great Patriotic War.

On Topic Links

[The Sistine Secrets: Michelangelo's Forbidden Messages in the Heart of the Vatican:](#) R. Benjamin Blech, *Orthodox Union*, May 1, 2012 (YouTube video)

[BDS Movement Suffers Defeat in SEC Divestment Battle:](#) Nitsana Darshan-Leitner, *Jewish Press*, May 30th, 2013

MY PROMISED LAND: THE TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY OF ISRAEL

Ari Shavit
Spiegel & Grau, 2013

There will be no utopia here. Israel will never be the ideal nation it set out to be, nor will it be Europe-away-from-Europe. There will be no London here, no Paris, no Vienna. But what has evolved in this land is not to be dismissed. A series of great revolts has created here a truly free society that is alive and kicking and fascinating. This free society is creative and passionate and frenzied. It gives the ones living here a unique quality of life. Warmth, directness, openness. Yes, we are orphans. We have no king and no

father. We have no coherent identity and no continuous past. In a sense, we have no civic culture. Our grace is the semibarbaric grace of the wild ones. It is the youthful grace of the inbound and the uncouth. We respect no past and no future and no authority. We are irreverent. We are deeply anarchic. And yet, because we are all alone in this world, we stick together. Because we are orphans, we are brothers in arms, brothers in fate.

There was hope for peace, but there will be no peace here, not soon. There was hope for quiet, but there will be no quiet here. The foundations of the home we founded are somewhat shaky, and repeating earthquakes rattle it. So what we really have in this land is an ongoing adventure. An odyssey. The Jewish state does not resemble any other nation. What this nation has to offer is not security or well being or peace of mind. What it has to offer is the intensity of life on the edge. The adrenaline rush of living dangerously, living lustfully, living to the extreme. If a Vesuvius-like volcano were to erupt tonight and end our Pompeii, this is what it will petrify: a living people. People that have come from death and were surrounded by death but who nevertheless put up a spectacular spectacle of life. People who danced the dance of life to the very end.

I walk into the very same bar I walked into some weeks ago. Once again I sit by the bar and sip my single malt. I see the ancient port through the windows, and I watch people sitting in restaurants and walking into galleries and wandering about the pier. Bottom line, I think, Zionism was about regenerating Jewish vitality. The Israel tale is the tale of vitality against all odds. So the duality is mind-boggling. We are the most prosaic and prickly people one can imagine. We cannot stand Puritanism or sentimentality. We do not trust high words or lofty concepts. And yet we take part daily in a phenomenal historical vision. We participate in an event far greater than ourselves. We are a ragtag cast in an epic motion picture whose plot we do not understand and cannot grasp. The script writer went mad. The director ran away. The producer went bankrupt. But we are still here, on this biblical set. The camera is still rolling. And as the camera pans out and pulls up, it sees us converging on this shore. Clinging to this shore. Living on this shore. Come what may. *[Excerpted from My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel, Avi Shavit, Spiegel & Grau, 2013 – Ed.]*
Ari Shavit is a leading Israeli journalist and a columnist for Haaretz.

[Top of Page](#)

RELIGIOUS JEWISH GUIDE TO SISTINE CHAPEL DECODES MICHAELANGELO'S 'JEWISH SYMBOLS'

Jen Gerson

[National Post](#), May 26, 2013

The first religious Jew to be authorized by the Vatican to act as a docent in Catholic museums, bestselling author Roy Doliner's life seems like it could be taken directly from a Dan Brown novel. Labelled by the Italian media as "Rome's Jewish Robert Langdon," Mr. Doliner conducts tours of the Sistine chapel for the high-profile politicians, ambassadors and celebrities. A playwright and the author of four books, the most recent of which *The Sistine Secrets: Michelangelo's Forbidden Messages in the Heart of the Vatican*, is slated to become a Discovery Channel documentary.

His findings caused a stir in the church: he said he found signs in the works of Michelangelo that suggest the famous Renaissance painter had studied Jewish wisdom literature — such as the Kabbalah — and hid symbols in his paintings. The *Post* spoke with Mr. Doliner during his recent visit to Calgary where he lectured on behalf of Congregation House of Jacob-Mikveh Israel, the city's oldest Jewish organization.

Q: Can you tell me why they call you "Rome's Jewish Robert Langdon"?

A: The Italian media, they love nicknames and because whenever there's a mystery in the art history world, when there's an artwork that they've not been able to figure out who made it or what it's really saying, I get called in.

Q: Why do you get called in?

A: Because of the book I wrote. Sistine Secrets sounds like a Dan Brown novel except this is all true. It's all documented, it's all accepted. It was my dumb luck to decode the Sistine chapel.

Q: How did you stumble upon that particular mystery?

A: My friends in the Vatican — and thank goodness I have a lot of friends in the Vatican — tell me I'm the first religious Jew to spend enormous amounts of time in the Sistine Chapel. And what was being said by the authorized Vatican guides and the authorized Vatican guidebooks didn't jibe with what Michelangelo was painting on the ceiling.

And I started to notice Jewish stuff and I thought it was just my imagination. I was enormously skeptical. It took years and years of research. I found out Michelangelo was a devout Christian his entire life, but at the age of 13, he was introduced to a private tutor that taught him Jewish wisdom literature and he went nuts over it and kept on quoting it visually.

Q: Can you give me an example of the kind of Jewish stuff you were noticing in the Sistine Chapel?

A: Well, here's one thing. What's the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden?

Q: Isn't there some debate over whether it's a pomegranate or an apple?

A: That's right, and the standard tradition. However, in the original Jewish tradition, in the Talmud, they figure out it's a fig tree. God always gives us the solution to a problem hidden inside the problem itself so when Adam and Eve figured out they were stark naked, the solution to the problem is a fig leaf. According to Talmudic logic, if the fig leaf was nearby, guess what else would need to be nearby. In almost all of Western art, it's the apple tree and the forbidden apple. Yet you go to the Sistine chapel and all the fruits connected with the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden are figs. Every single panel on the ceiling, there's not a single Christian figure, not a single Christian symbol. It's all Jewish stuff.

Q: Can you tell me about a few more examples you found?

A: For instance, in the last judgement over the altar, right in the inner circle of saintly souls surrounding Jesus and Mary in paradise [Michelangelo] sneaks in two Orthodox Jews. That's blasphemy in the 1500s, and the Vatican didn't know they were there until the book came out.

Q: But you're not asserting that Michelangelo was Jewish?

A: No, no, he was a devout Christian his entire life. What he's putting into his art works — and we know this because he put it in his private letters — was that as a religious Christian, he was extremely angry at the scandals and abuses of power he was seeing every day in the Vatican.

Q: Why did he pick Jewish symbolism to express this anger, and why didn't he get caught?

A: Back then, he had three different papal censors looking after his every move, spying on him, but he locked out that staff and brought in five childhood friends from Florence. On the day he finished the painting, he destroyed the special scaffolding he built to paint the ceiling so nobody else could get back up there to closely inspect it unless they wanted to render the chapel unusable for several years. His engineering skills saved the ceiling. Meanwhile, the censors had figured out all the hidden codes the other artists were using, whether they were birds, flowers, gestures or positions. References to Greco-Roman myth, for instances, they knew that inside and out. One thing they didn't know was the deep end of the pool, Jewish wisdom literature, the Talmud, parables and, of course, the Kabbalah. It was like a message in a bottle waiting 500 years.

Q: How did the Vatican react when the book came out?

A: At first they were in high dudgeon. There were some holdouts when it came out, but now they are thrilled with the message; Michelangelo was looking for inter-religious brotherhood and that's what we say in the book. He was making a bridge, he was bridging the Christian faith and the Jewish faith. That

might sound cliché and banal in 2013, but we're talking about five centuries ago. That could get you burned alive in public.

[Top of Page](#)

ITALY PROF. SAYS HAS FOUND WORLD'S OLDEST TORAH

[Reuters](#), May 29, 2013

An Italian professor said on Wednesday [May 29] he has identified what he believes is the world's oldest complete scroll of the Torah, containing the full text of the first five books of Hebrew scripture. Mauro Perani, professor of Hebrew at the University of Bologna, said experts and carbon dating tests done in Italy and the United States dated the scroll as having been made between 1155 and 1225. The scroll, which has been in possession of the Bologna University Library for more than 100 years, had been previously thought to be from the 17th century. It had been labeled "scroll 2".

There are many fragments of the Torah that are older but not complete scrolls with all five books. "A Jew who was a librarian at the university examined the scroll in 1889 for a catalogue and wrote '17th century followed by a question mark,'" Perani said in a telephone interview. But in preparation for a new catalogue of the university's Judaica collection, Perani, 63, studied the scroll and suspected that the librarian had made too cursory an examination in 1889 and not recognised its antiquity.

"I realised that the style of the writing was older than the 17th century so I consulted with other experts," he said of the scroll, which measures 36 metres by 64 cm (39 yards by 25 inches). He said the scroll showed many graphical features and scribal devices that were no longer used by copyists of Hebrew scripts in the 17th century. The scroll is made up of 58 sections of soft sheep leather each sewn together, most of them with three columns of script.

After the experts he consulted agreed that the scroll was probably several centuries older than previously believed, Perani had fragments of it subjected to carbon-14 dating tests. The tests, at the University of Salento in southern Italy and the Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory at the University of Illinois, dated the scroll as from the second half of the 12th century to the first quarter of the 13th century. The Torah, also known as the Hebrew Pentateuch, consists of the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

The complete version of the Torah that was previously considered the oldest was from the late 13th century, Perani said. He said that before the scroll came into possession of the University of Bologna in the 18th or 19th century it had been in the custody of the Dominican convent in the city that is home to the world's oldest university. Perani said it was not clear where the Torah had been copied but most likely it was not in Italy. It was probably made by a copyist trained in the oriental tradition and likely done in the Middle East.

Perani has for two decades been head of the Italian Genizah project, which locates and catalogues fragments of Hebrew manuscripts in Italy. Genizah is the Hebrew word for the room in a synagogue where religious books or papers are stored. The Genizah project has found, photographed and catalogued some 13,000 fragments of Jewish compositions from various branches of Talmudic literature, Biblical commentary, Jewish thought, the Hebrew language and Jewish history. For his work in Jewish studies, Perani is due to be given an honorary degree from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem next month.

[Top of Page](#)

ISRAELI SCIENTISTS MATCH CAIRO GENIZA FRAGMENTS

Jeremy Sharon

[Jerusalem Post](#), May 30, 2013

A team of computer scientists and programmers in Jerusalem, working in collaboration with Tel Aviv University, says it has achieved a breakthrough in piecing together the disparate fragments of the Cairo

Geniza. Prof. Ya'acov Choueka, a Cairo-born chief computerization scientist, is leading a team of 15 programmers from the Friedberg Geniza Project, which is collaborating with Tel Aviv University to "solve the problem" of genizas, or Jewish archives, by scanning the contents of 67 geniza collections around the world.

His team has been able to make more matches between fragments in a matter of weeks than researchers have using traditional methods over the course of decades. For the past century, scholars have gleaned a wealth of information from the documents discovered in the Cairo Geniza, but research has been hampered by the fact that they were found in pieces and were subsequently split among dozens of collections. Scholars seeking to piece together the documents have been forced to travel to far flung locales and attempt to make the scraps of paper fit together by hand, a long and cumbersome process.

The Cairo Geniza was the archive of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Fustat, a suburb of Cairo until it was swallowed by the Egyptian capital's urban sprawl. The documents there were in large part carted off to England, and Cambridge owns some 60 percent of them. For over a thousand years, sacred texts were deposited in the storeroom, as well as documents attesting to the day-to-day life of medieval Jewish and Arab residents of the Middle East and North Africa. Included were many original manuscripts, variant texts of the Talmud and letters from ordinary people.

Following agreements with Cambridge University and other institutions, Choueka and his team scanned hundreds of thousands of fragments at high resolution, enabling his team to perform more than 4 billion comparisons. Using several large networked computer clusters at Tel Aviv University, his Jerusalem-based team was "reconstructing the original geniza," he said on Thursday.

Using several algorithms, his team aims to find all of the "joints," or matches between fragments, within two weeks. The results of the research were being posted online at *genizah.org* for public viewing by academics and laymen alike, revolutionizing the study of the geniza documents, he said. Physical attributes of the documents are measured by the computers, and fragments from the same pages, and even by the same author, can be paired together. The results of the research are to be presented at the 16th World Congress of Jewish Studies, to be held at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem from July 28 to August 1.

Not every institution has been cooperative, he said. According to Choueka, the University of Oxford has been unwilling to provide scans of its manuscripts that are incredibly important to his work. Talks with the university "did not come to a happy end," he said, adding that he did not know why. Oxford did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

[Top of Page](#)

RUSSIAN JEWISH VETERANS OF WORLD WAR II SWELL WITH PRIDE

Sue Fishkoff

JTA, Apr. 27, 2013

May 9 marks the 60th anniversary of V-Day, the date in 1945 when Nazi Germany capitulated. Nowhere has it been as resolutely commemorated each year as in the former Soviet Union, which lost a staggering 25 million citizens during what is still called the Great Patriotic War. Of approximately 11,000 World War II veterans still alive in the southern Russian capital of Rostov-on-Don today, 211 are Jewish.

Three of those Jewish soldiers marched in the great Victory Day parade in Moscow's Red Square on June 24, 1945. One was 90-year-old Leonid Abelich Klevitsky, a tall, white-haired man of erect bearing who heads the city's Jewish war veterans association. "It was the day before my 20th birthday," he told *JTA* in an interview conducted during last year's Victory Day celebration. "I'd been celebrating all night, and almost fell flat on my face in Red Square."

When Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, Klevitsky was a student in a prestigious military academy. He graduated in time to fight on the Ukrainian front and took part in the bombing of Berlin. "I never understood my Judaism," he says of his upbringing. "I had a Marxist-Leninist education in the

military academy. And only because I was Jewish, I got a 'D' instead of an 'A' because I corrected the teacher when he quoted Stalin wrong." After a 25-year career in the army, in 1967 Klevitsky retired, and he and his wife moved back to Rostov. He became head of the city's Jewish war veterans association when it was founded six years ago.

Rostov-on-Don lies just over the border from Ukraine, right in the path of the 1941 Nazi onslaught. Few of the city's 20,000 Jews fled the advancing German forces. Rostov's Jews were urbanized, and many had studied in German universities. Their diplomas didn't help them. On Aug. 11, 1942, the city's Jewish men were marched to a ravine outside the city and shot; the women, children and elderly were gassed in trucks, and their bodies buried in the same ravine, called Zmiyovskaya Balka, or the ravine of the snakes. Communists and Red Army soldiers also were killed and buried there, along with their families.

Altogether, some 27,000 bodies lie in the grass-covered ravine, which has become the site of annual memorial ceremonies. Some of Rostov's Jews, both men and women, escaped the massacre because they were serving in the Soviet Army. The biggest day of the year for these veterans is the festive luncheon the city's Jewish community hosts for them every May. Last year's event, held May 7 in Rostov's historic synagogue, drew more than 100 aging veterans, all wearing their medals with pride. "Everyone who can walk is here today," Klevitsky said.

One of those who could not attend was his own wife, bedridden for three years. "I love her so," he said. The couple was married 53 years earlier in a civil ceremony. Now that Rostov has a Chabad rabbi, Klevitsky and his wife want to have a Jewish ceremony. But the rabbi told them they'd have to go to the mikvah, or ritual bath, Klevitsky said, adding defiantly, "I won't go."

He was in a buoyant mood all afternoon, displaying his veteran's ID card to anyone who showed the least interest. The feast was a typical Russian affair, with lengthy speeches by the heads of every relevant organization, as well as the requisite appearance by the city's deputy mayor. The vodka and champagne flowed, toasts were made, and there was cheek-to-cheek dancing to 1940s-era tunes.

But the lavish spread stood in ironic contrast to these honoured war veterans' stark financial situation. Like elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, these men and women who laboured all their lives for the Soviet state, expecting to be taken care of in their old age, are now penniless, scraping by on meagre pensions, unable to pay for medical care, clothing or food.

According to figures from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which helps elderly Jews in the former Soviet Union through its Hesed welfare agencies, more than half of southern Russia's 66,000 Jews are older than 50. Twenty-five percent live below the poverty line. At the end of last year's Victory Day feast, some of those elderly poor were wrapping up cookies and bread rolls to take home to their empty cupboards...Ilya Gorensteyn, a local bigwig who made his money in construction, was one of them. "I donated the bottled water, a guy who owns a fish plant gave the fish, the owner of a vodka plant gave the vodka," he said, pointing down the line of business leaders seated at the head table. Gorensteyn said he knows of many other newly wealthy Jewish men in Rostov, but "unfortunately, not many of them are willing to give."

[Top of Page](#)

ON TOPIC

[The Sistine Secrets: Michelangelo's Forbidden Messages in the Heart of the Vatican](#): R. Benjamin Blech, *Orthodox Union*, May 1, 2012 (YouTube video) — Rabbi Benjamin Blech tells the fascinating story of how Michelangelo embedded messages of Judaism in his painting to encourage "fellow travelers" to challenge the repressive Roman Catholic Church of his time.

[BDS Movement Suffers Defeat in SEC Divestment Battle](#): Nitsana Darshan-Leitner, *Jewish Press*, May 30th, 2013 — Shurat HaDin sent a warning letter to TIAA-CREF last month informing its leadership that the boycott resolution was a violation of both federal and New York State law
