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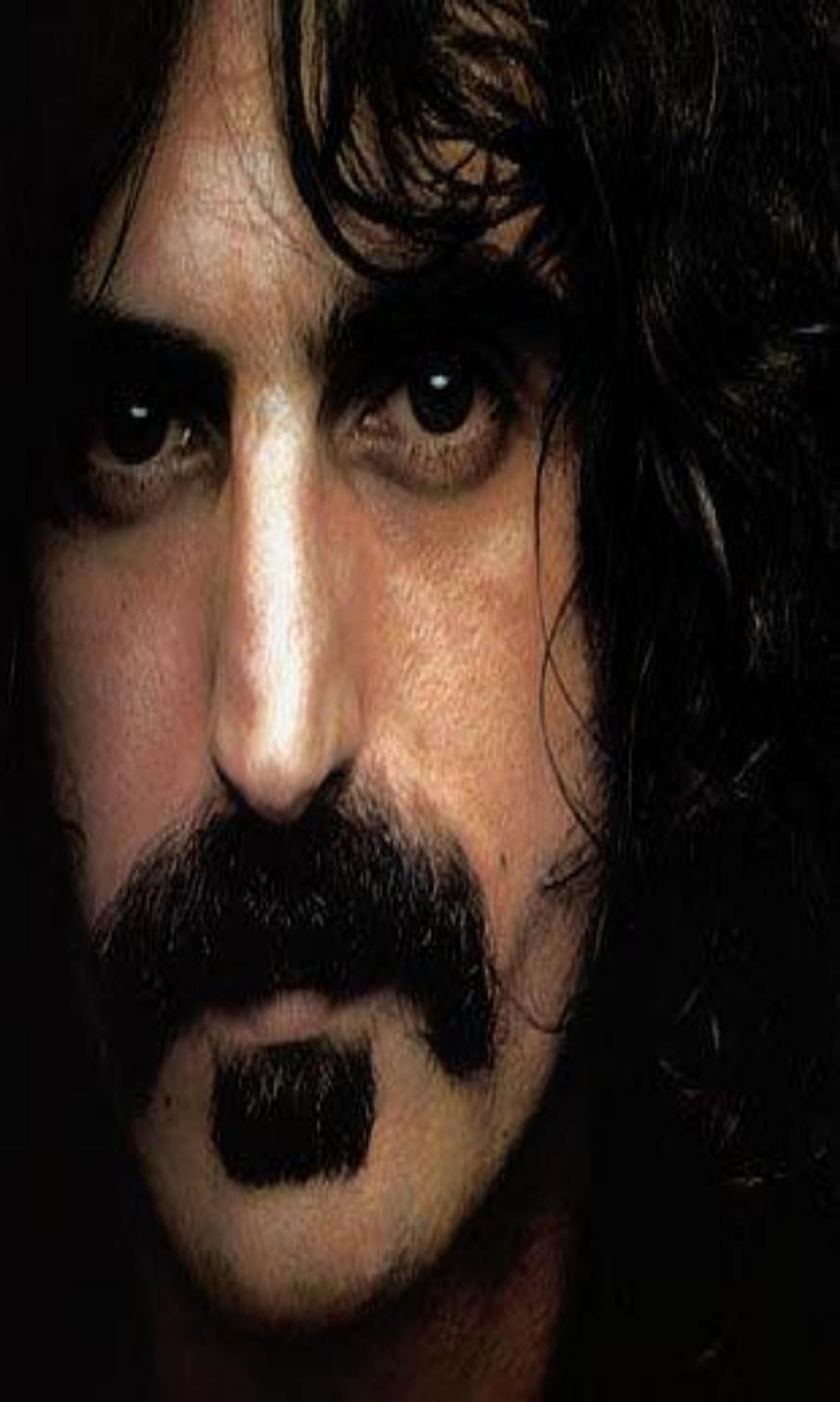
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"The illusion of freedom will continue as long as it's profitable to continue the illusion. At the point where the illusion becomes too expensive to maintain, they will just take down the scenery, they will pull back the curtains, they will move the tables and chairs out of the way and you will see the brick wall at the back of the theater."

Frank Zappa



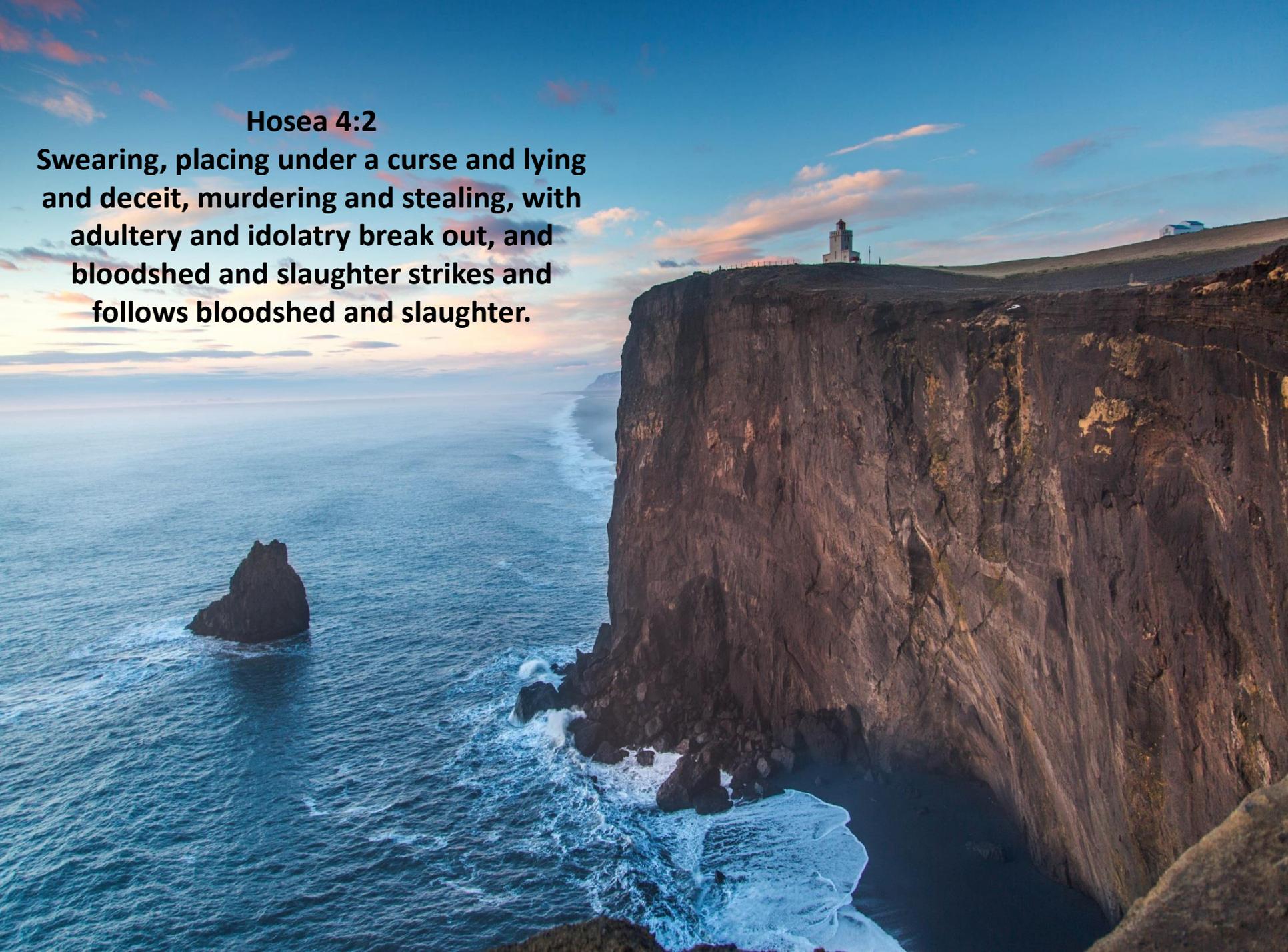
Hosea 4:1

Hear and heed the discourse, speech, promise and word of Yahuah, O children of Yashra'al, for Yahuah has a dispute, contention and indictment against and with the inhabitants of the land. There is not truthfulness, trustworthiness, fidelity or loyalty, benevolence, mercy or goodness, there is no understanding, discernment, or knowledge of Yahuah in the land.



Hosea 4:2

Swearing, placing under a curse and lying and deceit, murdering and stealing, with adultery and idolatry break out, and bloodshed and slaughter strikes and follows bloodshed and slaughter.



...OLUTIONS
...ID ... REMARKABLE." —Booklist
"A GREAT BOOK." —JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER

The ALEPPO CODEX

A True Story of Obsession,
Faith, and the Pursuit of
an Ancient Bible



"A TREASURE BOX OF HISTORY, MYSTERY, CONSPIRACY, AND CONVOLUTIONS THAT WOULD DO ANY BIBLICAL THRILLER PROUD ... REMARKABLE." —Booklist, starred review

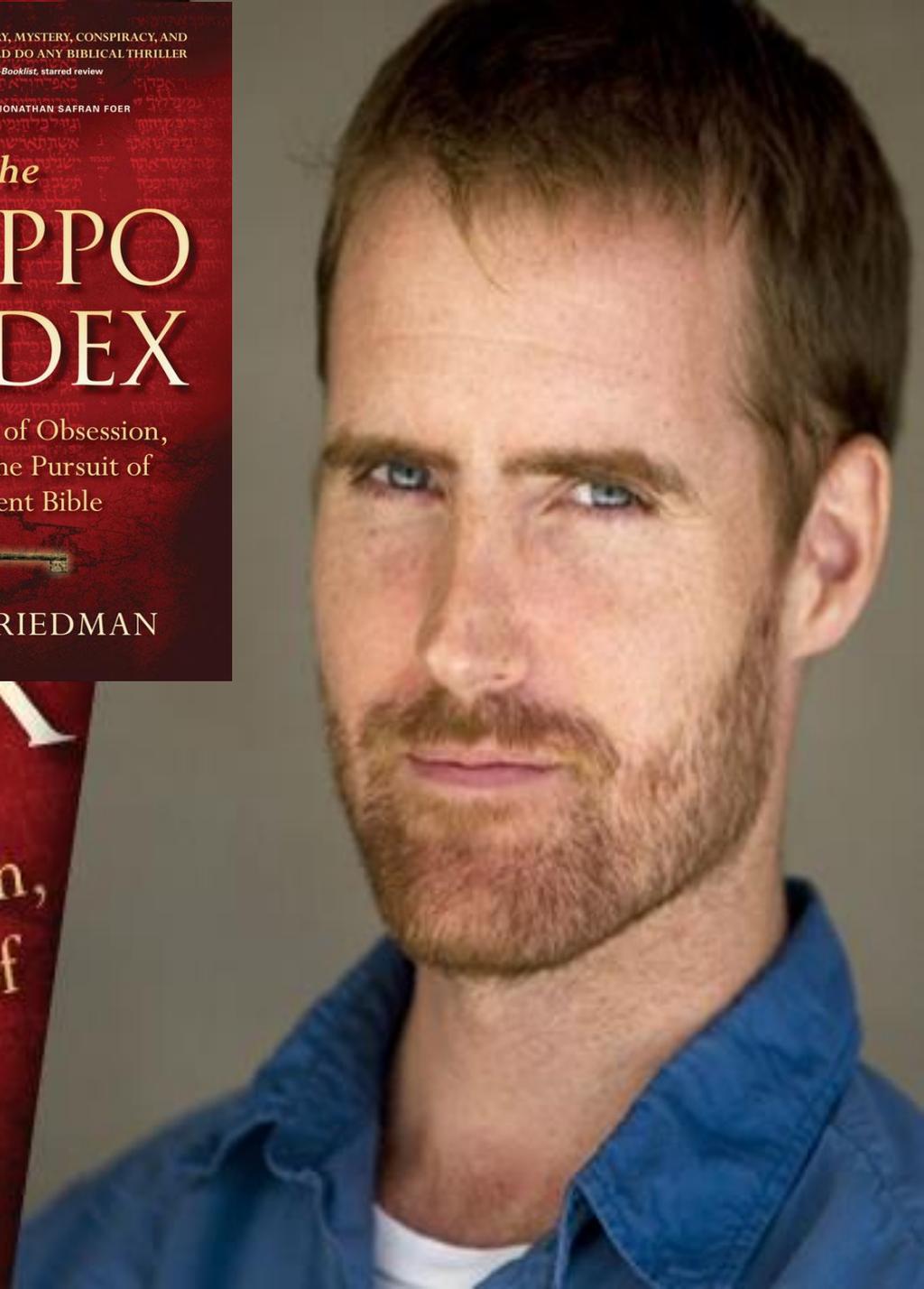
"A GREAT BOOK." —JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER

The ALEPPO CODEX

A True Story of Obsession,
Faith, and the Pursuit of
an Ancient Bible



MATTI FRIEDMAN





Travelogue of the Aleppo Codex, one of the most important ancient Biblical manuscripts.

A. Tiberias 930 A.D.

Written in 930 C.E. in the town of Tiberias by the Sea of Galilee, the Aleppo Codex has traveled widely since its creation by the Masoretes, named for the scholarly notations they made in the margins of the text (*masora*, literally “tradition”).

B. Jerusalem c. 1040 A.D.

The codex was purchased by a wealthy man named Israel Ben Simcha of Basra, who dedicated it to Karaite community of Jerusalem, where the Aleppo Codex was then moved.

C. Fustat 1099

In 1099, the conquering Crusaders seized the manuscript. They did not damage it, however, because they knew they could get a steep ransom price for it. We know of many ancient Biblical manuscripts that were ransomed from the Crusaders at this time. The Aleppo Codex was ransomed, probably by Egyptian Jews, who moved it to Fustat, near Cairo.

D. Aleppo 1400s

By the second half of the 15th century, the codex had somehow made it to Aleppo, Syria—the community that gave the codex its name. We know that in 1375, a descendant of Maimonides, Rabbi David Ben Yehoshua, left Egypt and traveled through Palestine to Syria, taking with him many ancient Biblical manuscripts and finally settling in Damascus and Aleppo—perhaps the Aleppo Codex was among them. It remained in Aleppo for about 600 years.

E. Jerusalem 1957

In 1957, more than ten years after it was nearly destroyed in a riot, remnants of the king of ancient Biblical manuscripts were smuggled out of Syria by way of Turkey and brought to Jerusalem, where they remain today.

וְיִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ פְּלֵא וְעַיִן
אֶל גְּבוּרַת אֲבוֹתָי שִׁיר
שְׁלוֹם לְסוֹדֵי הַמִּשְׁנָה
וְלִשְׁלוֹם אֲיוּקָן עַל פֶּסַח
הוֹדוּ עַל מַלְכֵיכֶם לְהַכּוֹת
אֶתְהוֹ אֶל סְעֵדָה בְּמִשְׁפֵּט
וּבְצַדִּיקָה מֵעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם
קִנְיַת יְהוָה יִצְבְּאוֹת לִי
תַעֲשֶׂה זֵאת

The Aleppo Codex, the oldest Hebrew Bible in existence today, is so named because it was housed for half a millennium in Aleppo, Syria. The codex, also known as the Crown of Aleppo, was written by scribes called Masoretes in Tiberias, Israel, around 930 C.E. [The Aleppo Codex](#) is considered to be the most authoritative copy of the Hebrew Bible. While [the Dead Sea Scrolls](#)—which are a thousand years older than the Aleppo Codex—contain books from the Hebrew Bible, the scrolls lack vowels (as was the tradition in ancient—and modern—Hebrew) as well as a discussion of different textual problems and their solutions. The Aleppo Codex features both vowel markings and marginal notations.

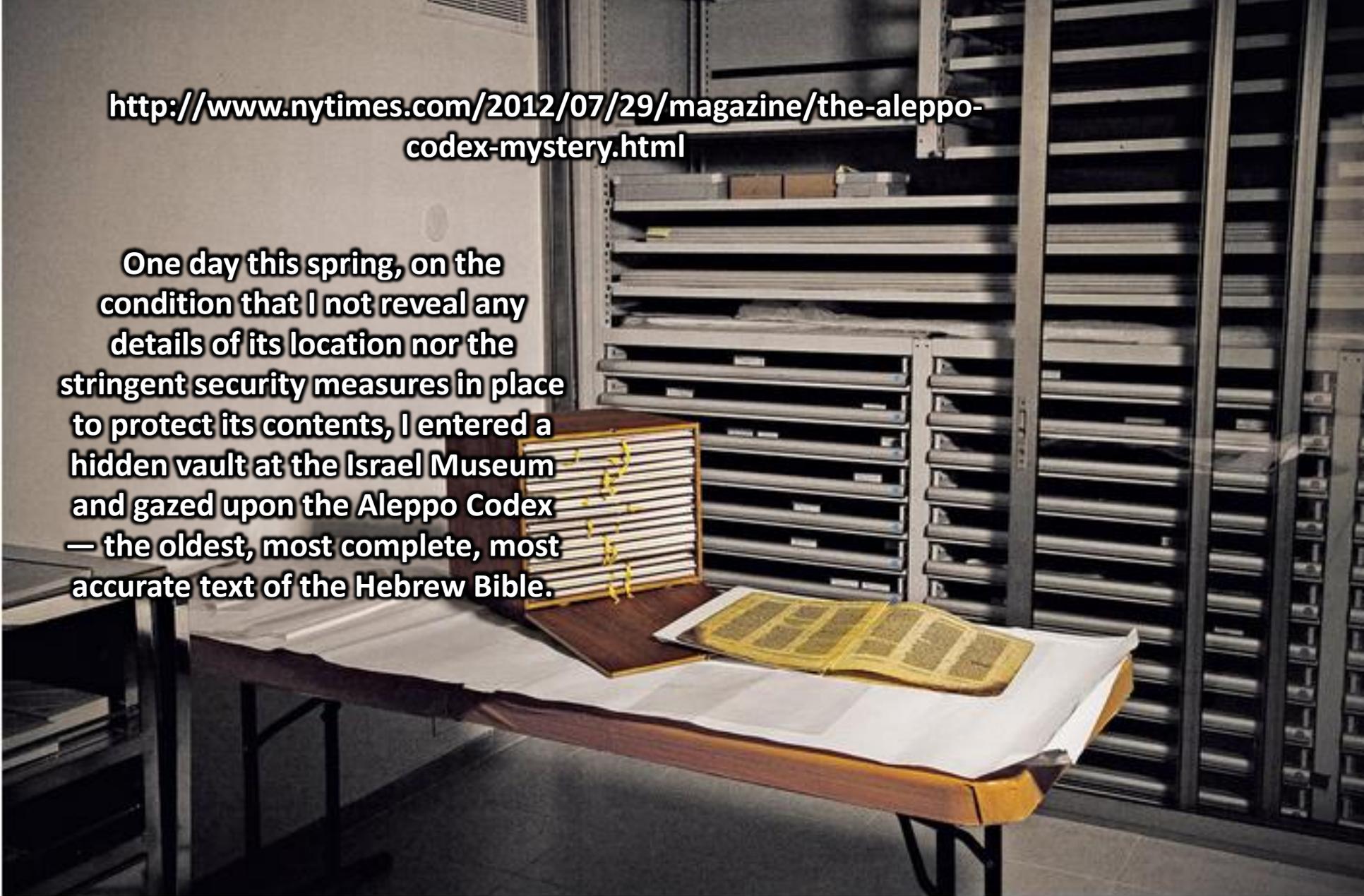
ALEPPO, SYRIA – CURRENT TIMES

Appearing in Aleppo, Syria, sometime in the second half of the 15th century, the Aleppo Codex was preserved nearly intact in a synagogue for centuries—until the 20th century. After the 1947 United Nations vote to partition Palestine and create independent Arab and Jewish states, riots broke out in Aleppo, and parts of the Aleppo Codex were destroyed. What remained of the codex was smuggled out of Aleppo and brought to Israel in 1957. The Aleppo Codex is now kept at the Shrine of the Book wing at the Israel Museum.

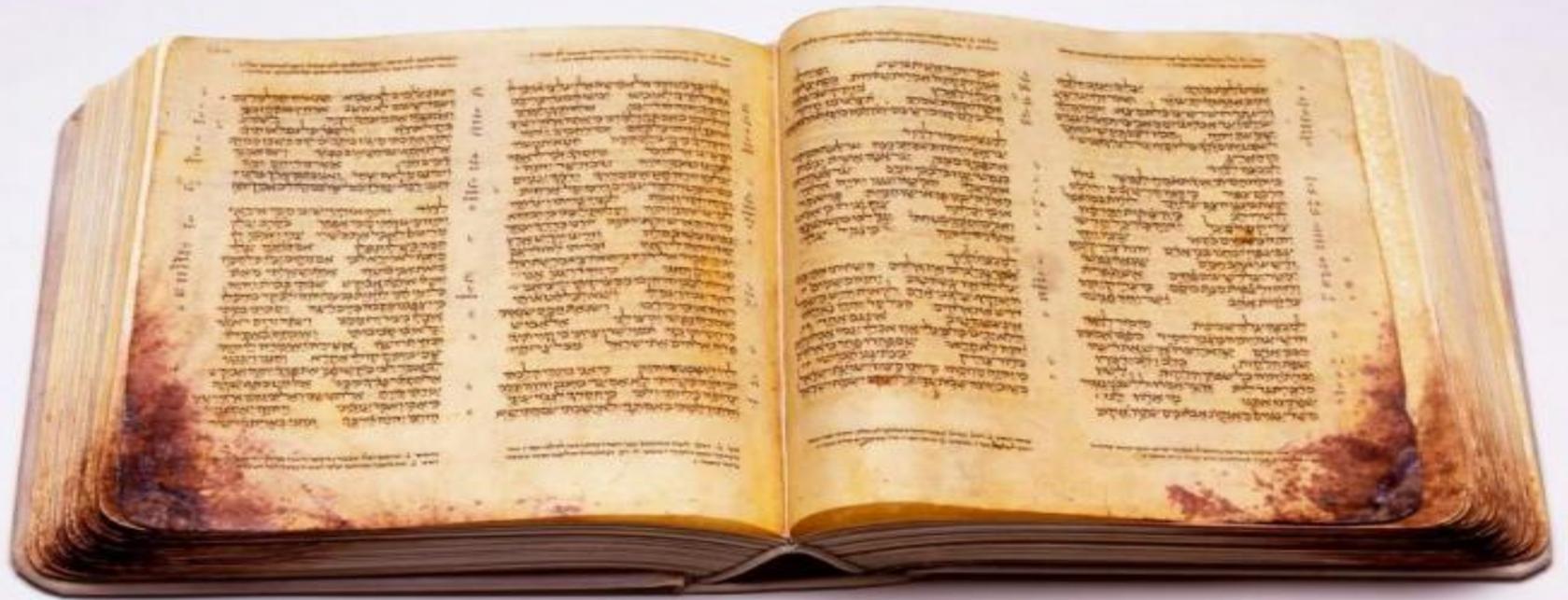
<http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/hebrew-bible/the-aleppo-codex/>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/29/magazine/the-aleppo-codex-mystery.html>

One day this spring, on the condition that I not reveal any details of its location nor the stringent security measures in place to protect its contents, I entered a hidden vault at the Israel Museum and gazed upon the Aleppo Codex — the oldest, most complete, most accurate text of the Hebrew Bible.



The Aleppo Codex, the oldest, most complete, most accurate text of the Hebrew Bible, in its vault at the Israel Museum. Michal Chelbin for The New York Times



The story of how it arrived here, in Jerusalem, is a tale of ancient fears and modern prejudices, one that touches on one of the rawest nerves in Israeli society: the clash of cultures between Jews from Arab countries and the European Jews, or Ashkenazim, who controlled the country during its formative years.

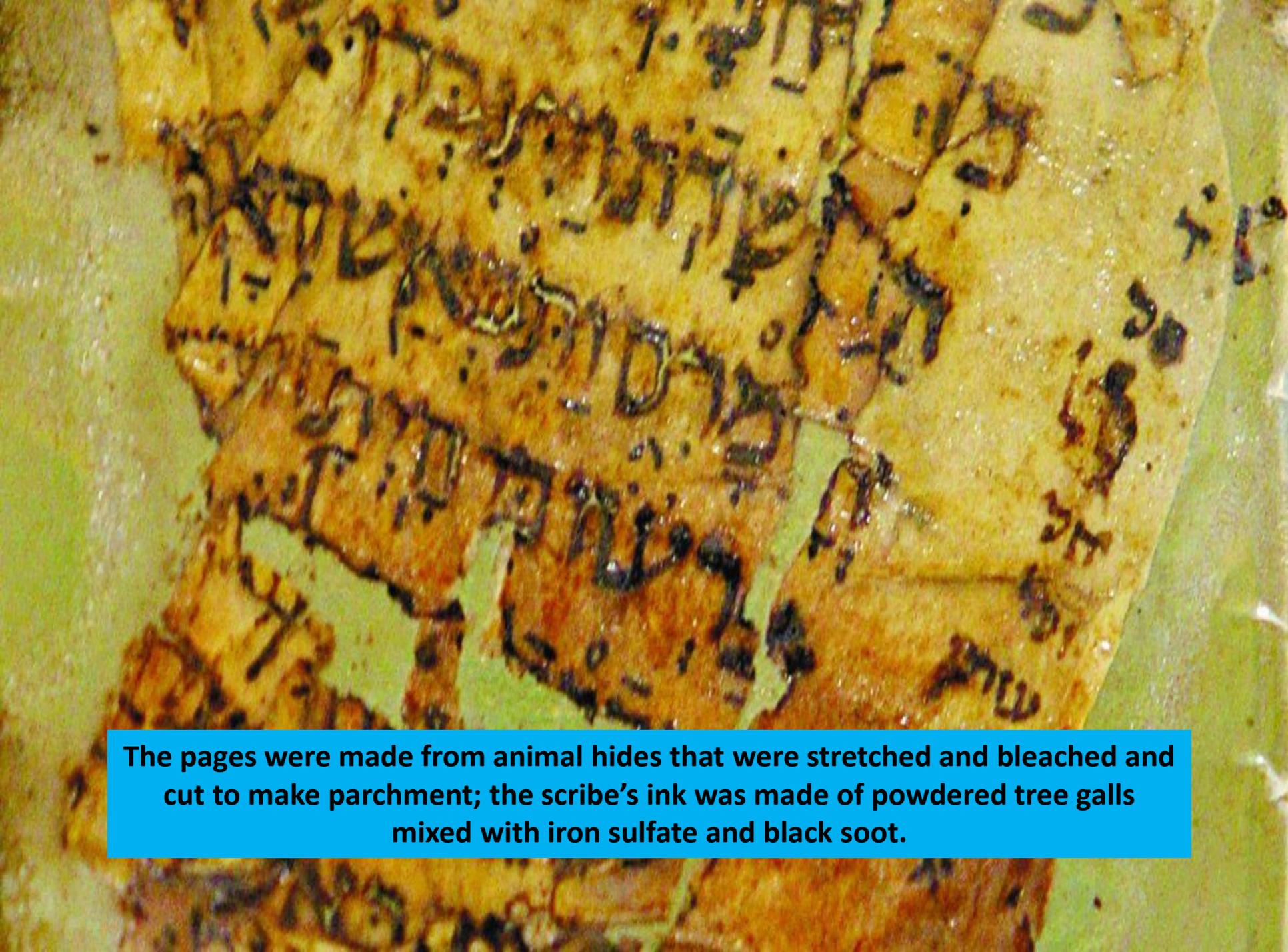


And the story of how some 200 pages of the codex went missing — and to this day remain the object of searches carried out around the globe by biblical scholars, private investigators, shadowy businessmen and the Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency — is one of the great mysteries in Jewish history.

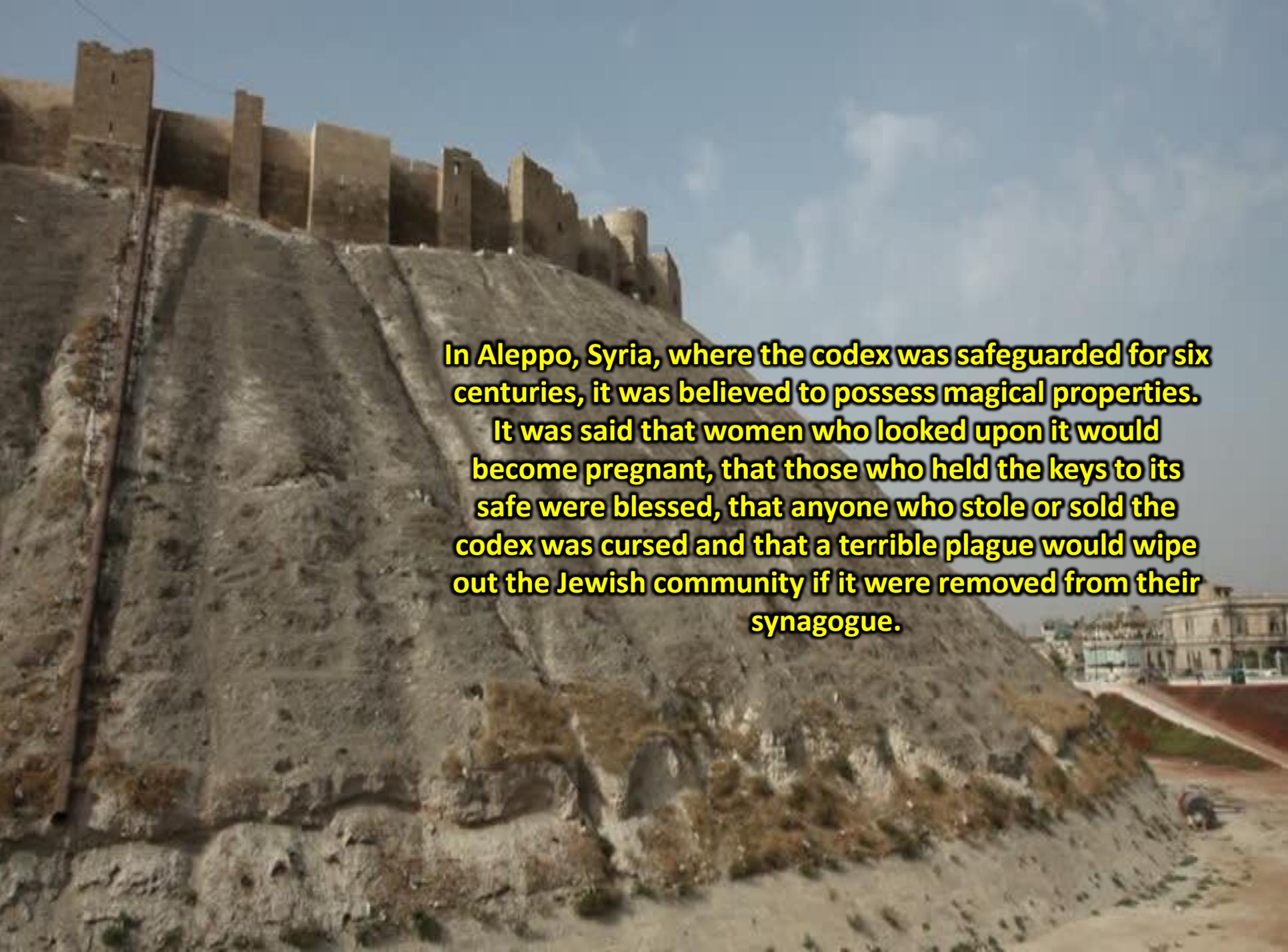
Exterior view of the Shrine of the Book Aleppo codex. In January 1958, the Aleppo Codex was smuggled out of Syria and sent to Jerusalem to be placed in the care of the chief rabbi of the Aleppo Jews.



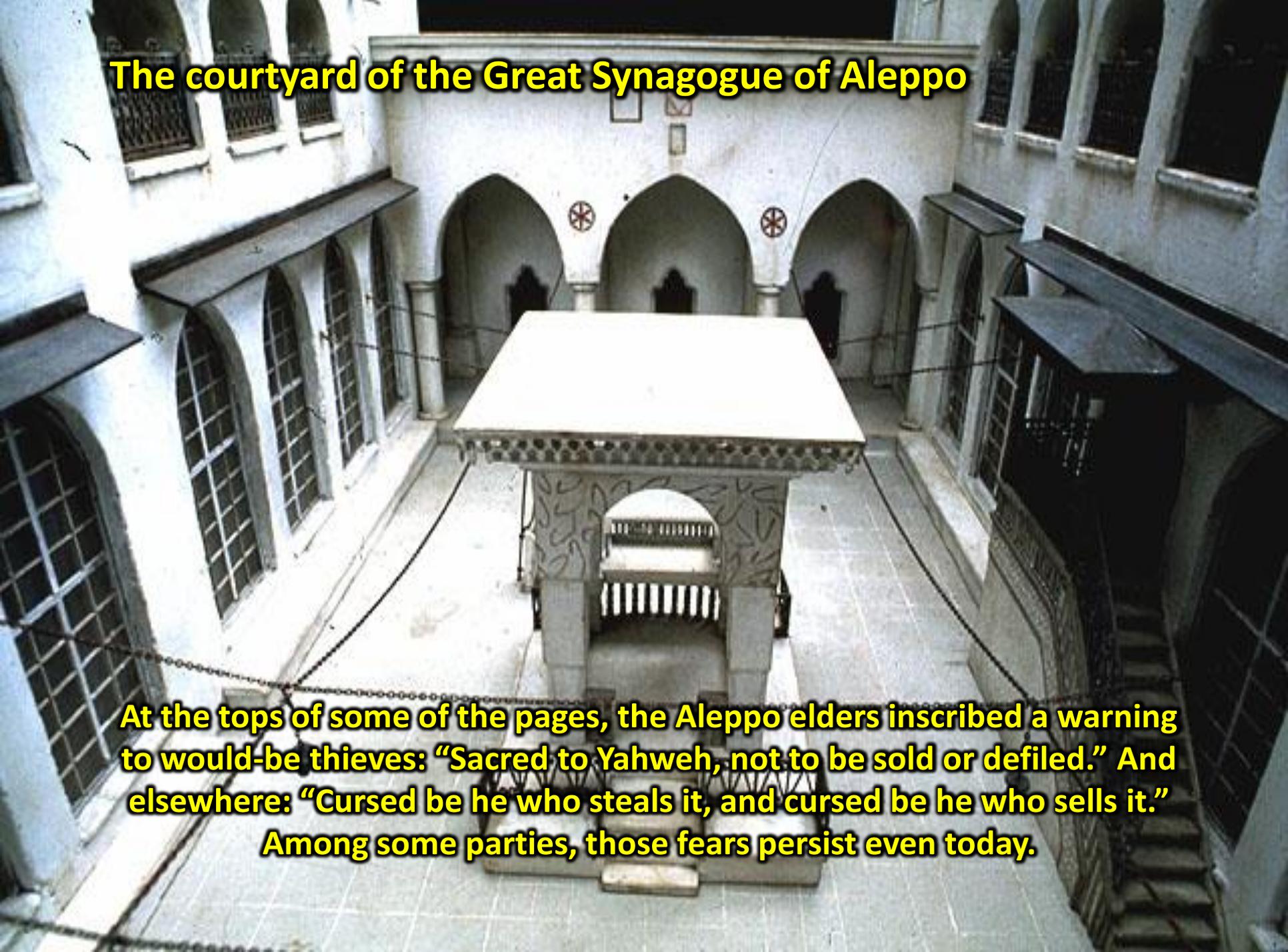
As a small group of us stood in a circle inside the vault in which the codex now resides, Michael Maggen, the head of the museum's paper-conservation lab, donned a pair of gloves and carefully lifted one of its unbound pages, covered with three columns of beautiful calligraphy, for us to see.



The pages were made from animal hides that were stretched and bleached and cut to make parchment; the scribe's ink was made of powdered tree galls mixed with iron sulfate and black soot.



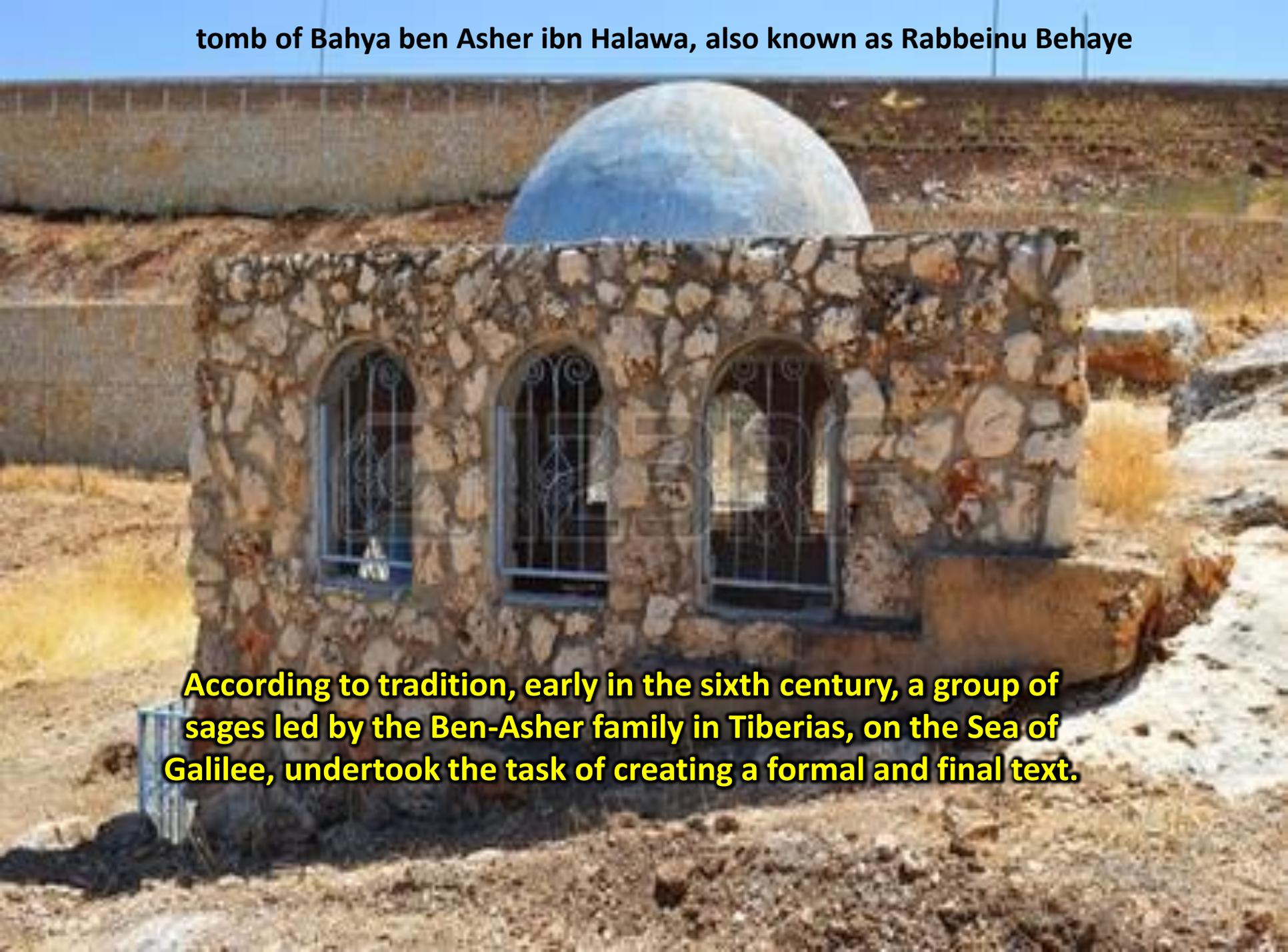
In Aleppo, Syria, where the codex was safeguarded for six centuries, it was believed to possess magical properties. It was said that women who looked upon it would become pregnant, that those who held the keys to its safe were blessed, that anyone who stole or sold the codex was cursed and that a terrible plague would wipe out the Jewish community if it were removed from their synagogue.

The image shows the interior courtyard of the Great Synagogue of Aleppo. In the center is a large, rectangular stone structure, likely a mikveh, with a flat top and a decorative base. The courtyard is surrounded by a two-story building with white walls and numerous arched windows and doorways. The ground is paved with light-colored tiles. The overall atmosphere is one of historical significance and architectural grandeur.

The courtyard of the Great Synagogue of Aleppo

At the tops of some of the pages, the Aleppo elders inscribed a warning to would-be thieves: "Sacred to Yahweh, not to be sold or defiled." And elsewhere: "Cursed be he who steals it, and cursed be he who sells it." Among some parties, those fears persist even today.

tomb of Bahya ben Asher ibn Halawa, also known as Rabbeinu Behaye

A photograph of a small, square stone tomb with a white dome. The tomb is constructed from rough-hewn, light-colored stones. It features three arched windows on the front facade, each with a decorative metal grille. The tomb is situated in a dry, open landscape with sparse vegetation and a clear blue sky in the background. A concrete base is visible at the bottom right of the structure.

According to tradition, early in the sixth century, a group of sages led by the Ben-Asher family in Tiberias, on the Sea of Galilee, undertook the task of creating a formal and final text.

Hammat Tiberias synagogue floor

The use of codex technology — a method that made it possible to record information on both sides of a page, in book form, as a cheaper alternative to scrolls — had already evolved in Rome. Around A.D. 930, the sages in Tiberias assembled all 24 holy books and completed the writing of the codex, the first definitive Tanakh, or Hebrew Bible.

A dramatic painting depicting a Crusader knight in full plate armor, mounted on a white horse. The knight is pointing forward with his right hand, leading a battle line of soldiers on horseback. The scene is set against a cloudy, overcast sky. The knight's horse is adorned with a red cross and a red lion rampant. The soldiers behind him are also on horseback, some holding spears and shields. The overall atmosphere is one of a fierce battle or a march to war.

From Tiberias, the codex was taken to Jerusalem. But Crusaders laid waste to the city in 1099, slaughtering its inhabitants and taking the codex.



The first of the Crusades began in 1095, when armies of Christians from Western Europe responded to Pope Urban II's plea to go to war against Muslim forces in the Holy Land. After the First Crusade achieved its goal with the capture of Jerusalem in 1099, the invading Christians set up several Latin Christian states, even as Muslims in the region vowed to wage holy war (jihad) to regain control over the region.

<http://www.history.com/topics/crusades>

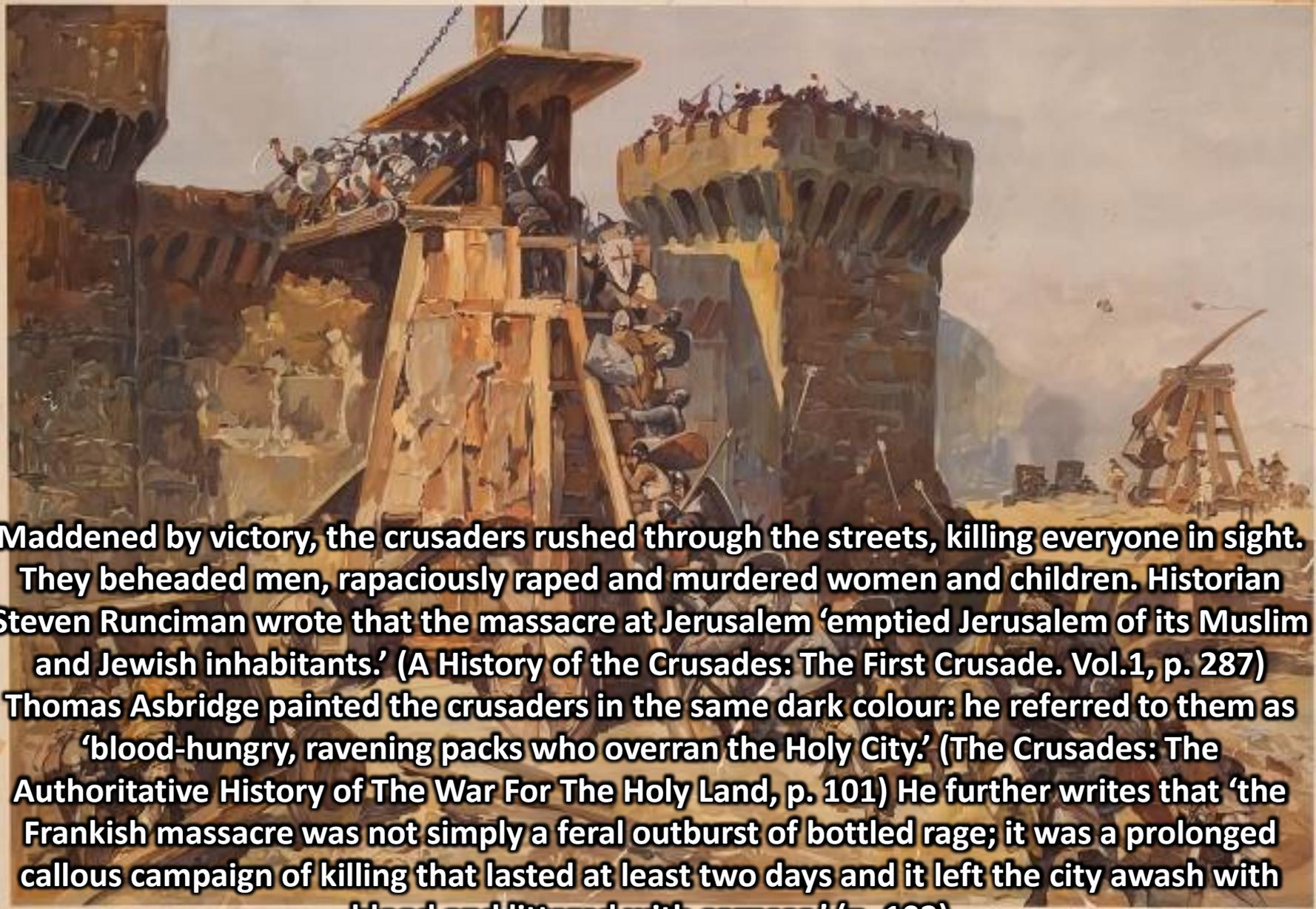


The reasons for joining the Crusade varied widely – remittance from penance, a desire to see the Holy Places, greed for the power and booty that might be captured. But the prize at the end of it all, be it spiritual or temporal, was the Holy City of Jerusalem. The journey's spectacular culmination was the long siege of Jerusalem, at the end of which the Crusaders, by a brilliant tactical maneuver, broke down its defenses and poured into the city, which erupted in a bloody massacre.



<http://www.crusadesandcrusaders.com/2014/03/18/siege-jerusalem-1099-savage-massacre-typical-post-siege-violence/>

After spending two years fighting the Muslims, reconquering land for the Byzantines; faced with starvation, disease and near annihilation, the crusaders finally accomplished what they had set out to do; what their pope had urged them to do. Jerusalem was restored to Christian rule once again. Certainly not on peaceful terms though.



Maddened by victory, the crusaders rushed through the streets, killing everyone in sight. They beheaded men, rapaciously raped and murdered women and children. Historian Steven Runciman wrote that the massacre at Jerusalem 'emptied Jerusalem of its Muslim and Jewish inhabitants.' (A History of the Crusades: The First Crusade. Vol.1, p. 287) Thomas Asbridge painted the crusaders in the same dark colour: he referred to them as 'blood-hungry, ravening packs who overran the Holy City.' (The Crusades: The Authoritative History of The War For The Holy Land, p. 101) He further writes that 'the Frankish massacre was not simply a feral outburst of bottled rage; it was a prolonged callous campaign of killing that lasted at least two days and it left the city awash with blood and littered with corpses.' (p. 102)

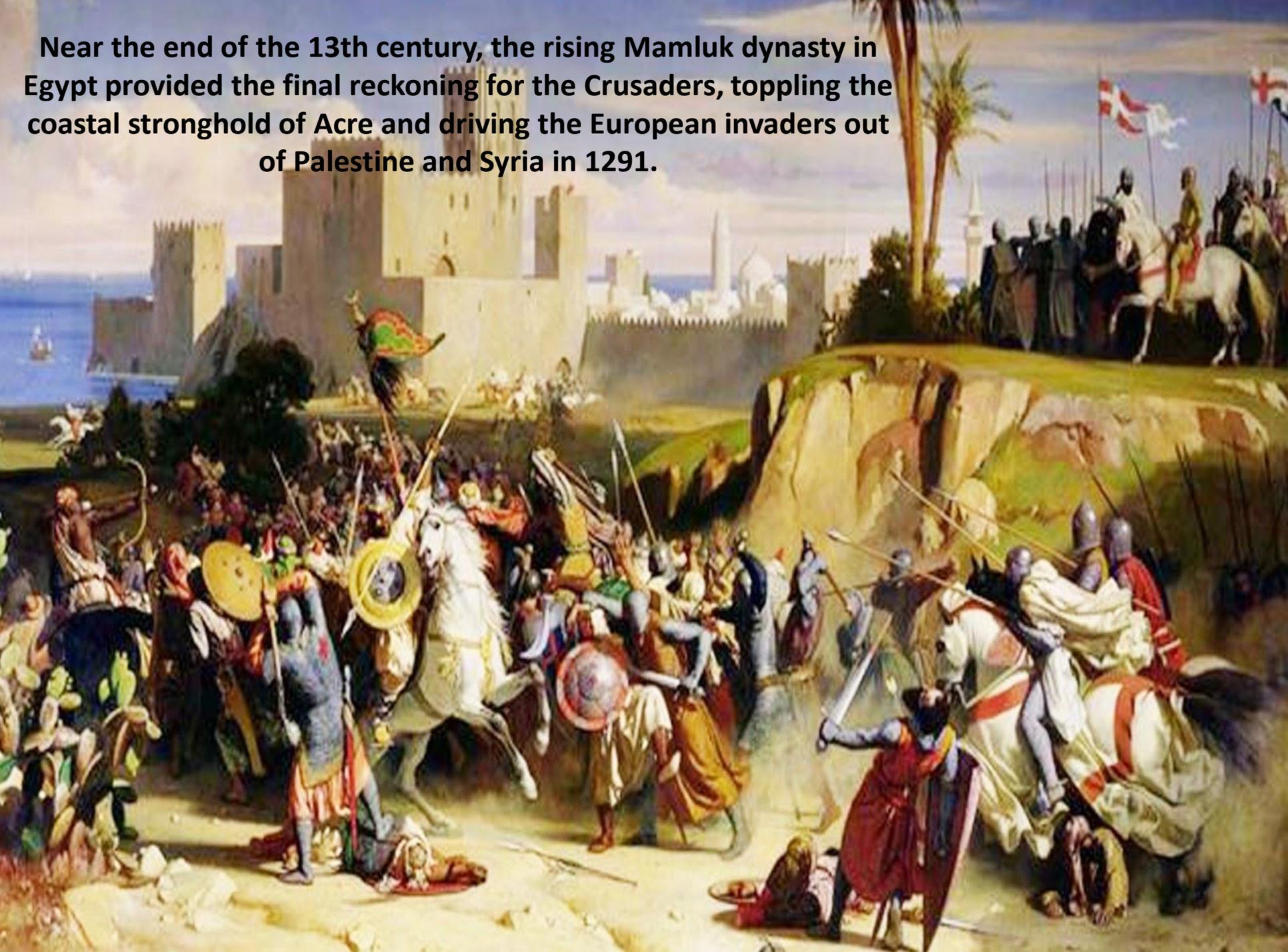


After the Siege of Jerusalem (1099) during the First Crusade, the Crusaders held the codex and other holy works for ransom (along with Jewish survivors).



Deteriorating relations between the Crusaders and their Christian allies in the Byzantine Empire culminated in the sack of Constantinople in 1204 during the Third Crusade.

Near the end of the 13th century, the rising Mamluk dynasty in Egypt provided the final reckoning for the Crusaders, toppling the coastal stronghold of Acre and driving the European invaders out of Palestine and Syria in 1291.



**Back to the story of the Aleppo
Codex:**

**The prosperous Jewish
community of Fustat, near Cairo,
paid a huge ransom for it. Later,
in the 12th century, it served
Maimonides, who referred to it
as the most accurate holy text, as
a reference for his major work,
the Mishneh Torah.**

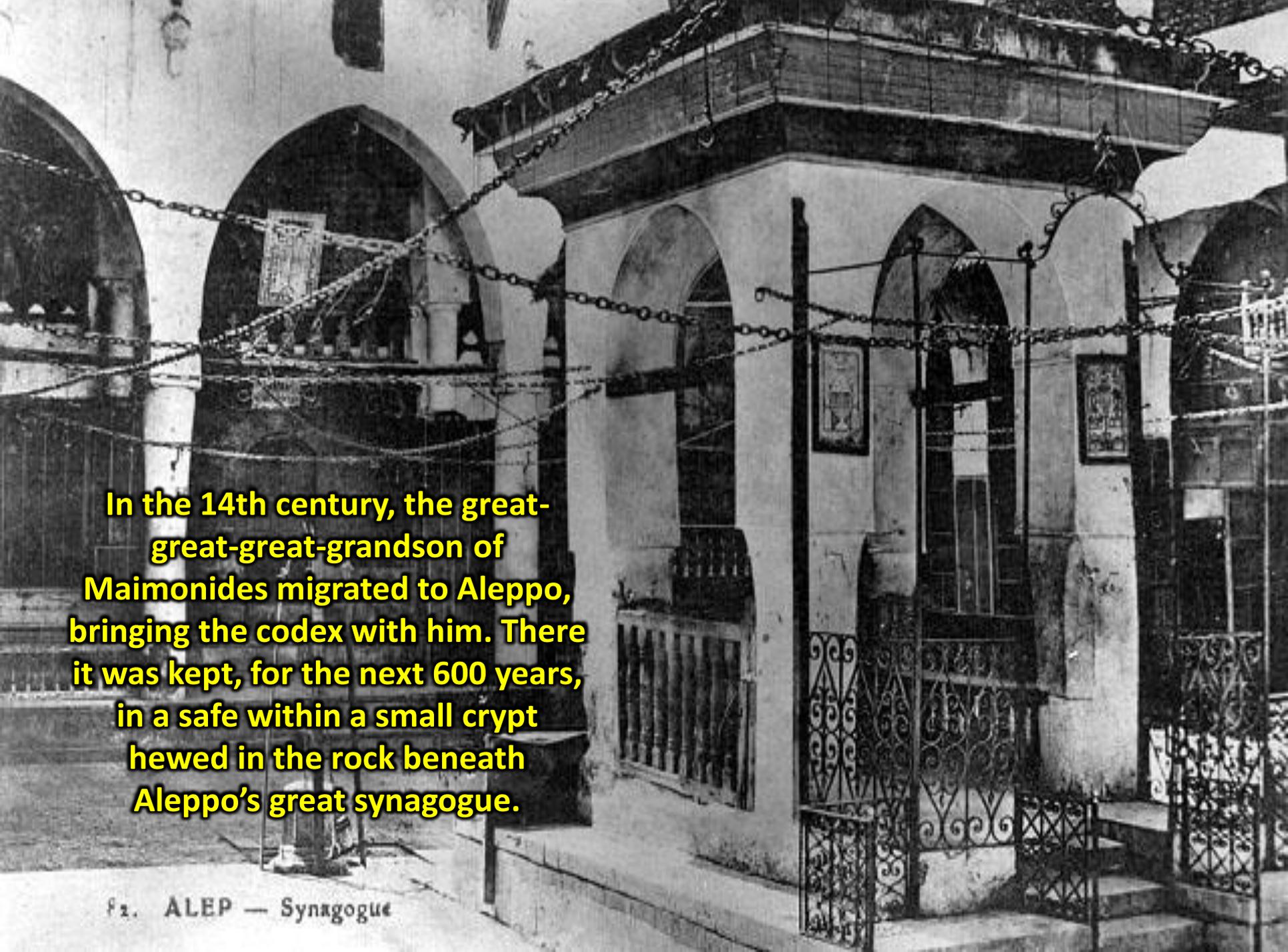
GREATER CAIRO

NILE

FUSTAT

1 km





In the 14th century, the great-great-great-grandson of Maimonides migrated to Aleppo, bringing the codex with him. There it was kept, for the next 600 years, in a safe within a small crypt hewed in the rock beneath Aleppo's great synagogue.

The Aleppo Codex was one of their top priorities, but numerous attempts to retrieve it were thwarted, which for many Jews hailing from Aleppo was further proof of the myths surrounding the book.



YITZHAK BEN-ZVI



At the head of these ill-fated efforts was a leader of the Zionist movement, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, a prominent politician and a scholar of some renown, with a special interest in Jewish communities in Arab lands. (He was also among the first members of the armed nucleus of Jews in Palestine and was involved in the assassination of an ultra-Orthodox opponent of the Zionist mission.)



In 1935, Ben-Zvi traveled to Aleppo, where the elders of the Jewish community allowed him only a glimpse of the case in which the codex was kept. When he tried to convince them that the volume belonged in Jerusalem, they rejected his entreaties as the manipulations of an outsider intent on taking what was theirs to protect. Eight years later, in the midst of World War II, Ben-Zvi and other scholars tried again to win over the Aleppo community, fearing that the codex, contained as it was in an Arab state during wartime, was in danger.



University lecturer named Yitzhak Shamosh, who was a native of Aleppo, to try to extricate the codex.

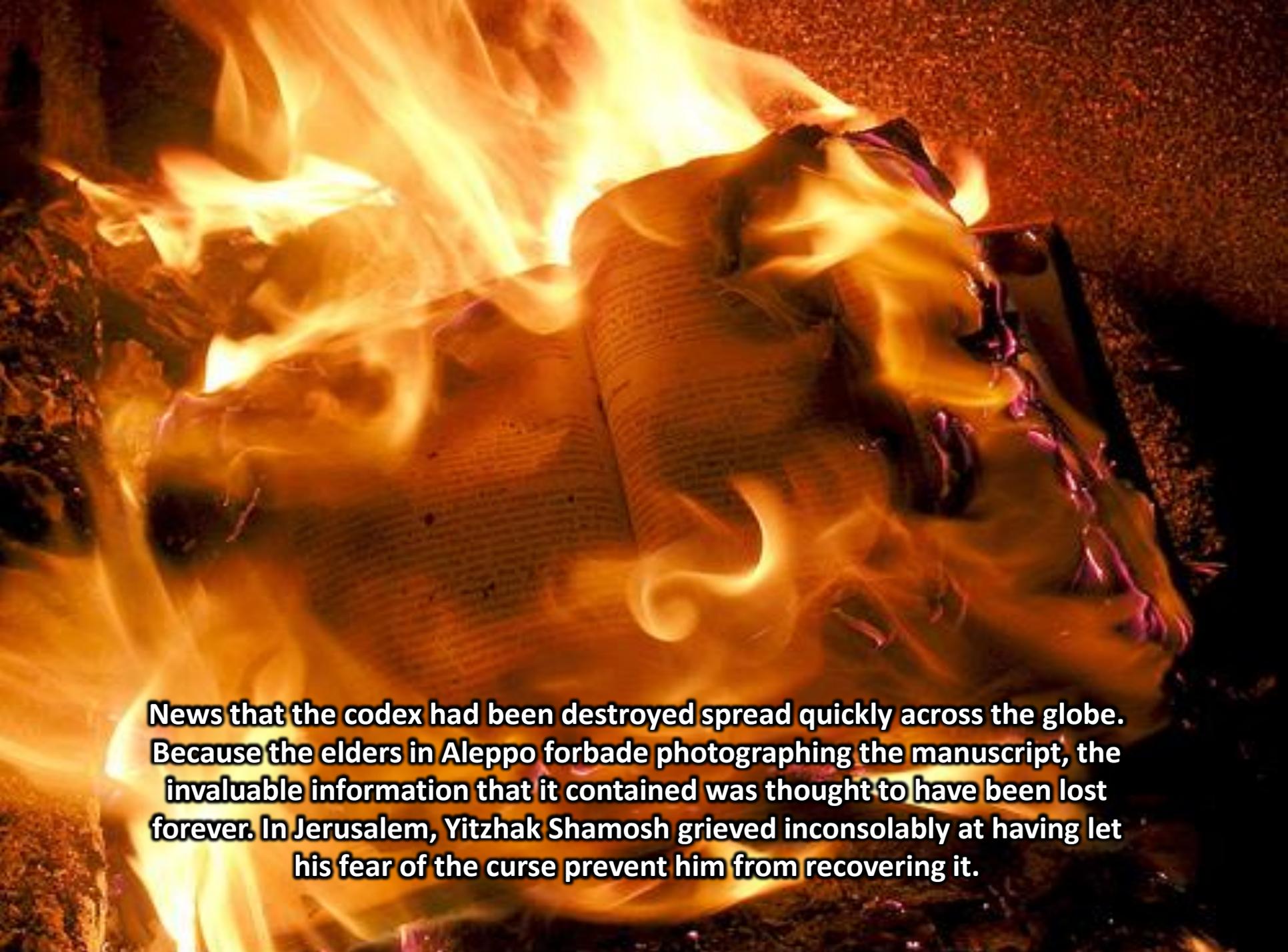
Shamosh endangered his life by crossing the border into Syria, but once there, he, too, was rebuffed by the Aleppo leaders. Some of the younger members of the community, however, sharing Ben-Zvi's fear that the codex was in danger, offered to help Shamosh steal it from the elders.



Ben-Zvi's fears about the codex proved correct. On Nov. 30, 1947, the morning after the U.N. General Assembly voted in favor of the establishment of a Jewish state, a mob stormed the Jewish quarter of Aleppo, attacking the Jews and demolishing their businesses and setting fire to the synagogues.

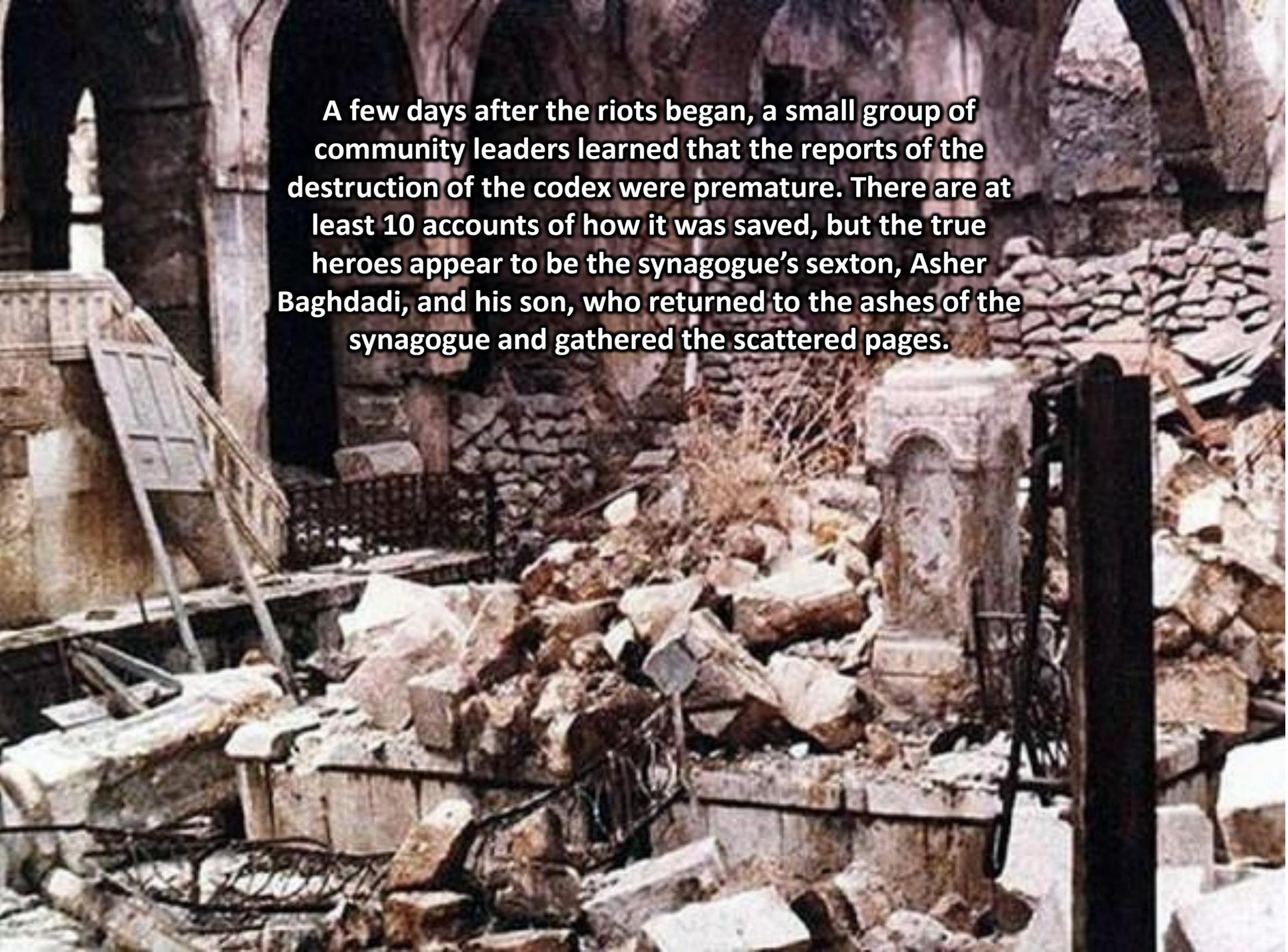


Professor Yom Tov Assis, an Aleppo native who today heads the [Ben-Zvi Institute](#), formed in 1948 for the purpose of studying Jewish communities under Islam and in the Arab world, was 5 years old at the time. “I saw the mob kicking one of the rabbis and setting fire to the Jewish club,” he said. “The demonstrations and the yelling and the rioting went on for many days.”



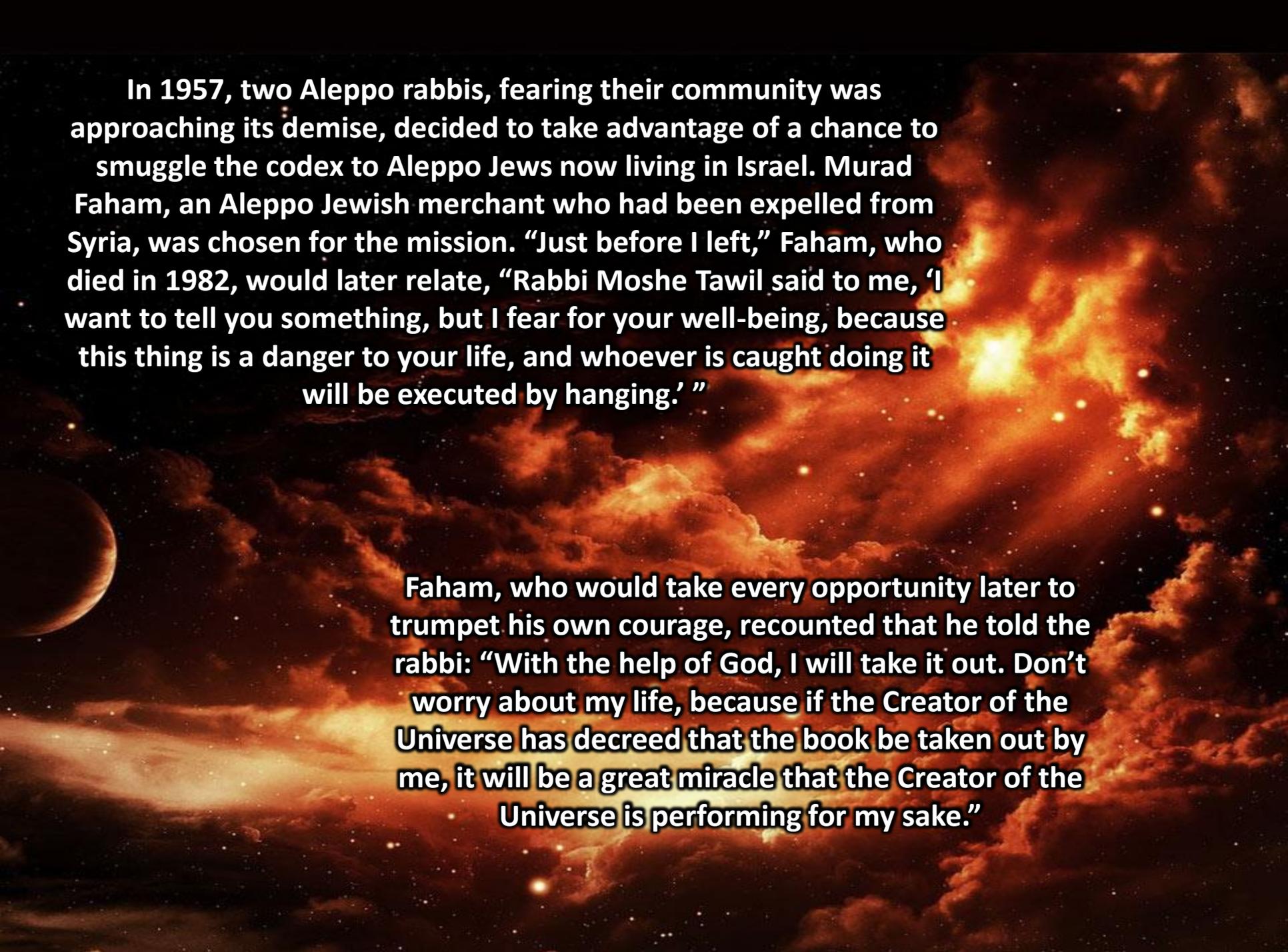
News that the codex had been destroyed spread quickly across the globe. Because the elders in Aleppo forbade photographing the manuscript, the invaluable information that it contained was thought to have been lost forever. In Jerusalem, Yitzhak Shamosh grieved inconsolably at having let his fear of the curse prevent him from recovering it.

A few days after the riots began, a small group of community leaders learned that the reports of the destruction of the codex were premature. There are at least 10 accounts of how it was saved, but the true heroes appear to be the synagogue's sexton, Asher Baghdadi, and his son, who returned to the ashes of the synagogue and gathered the scattered pages.



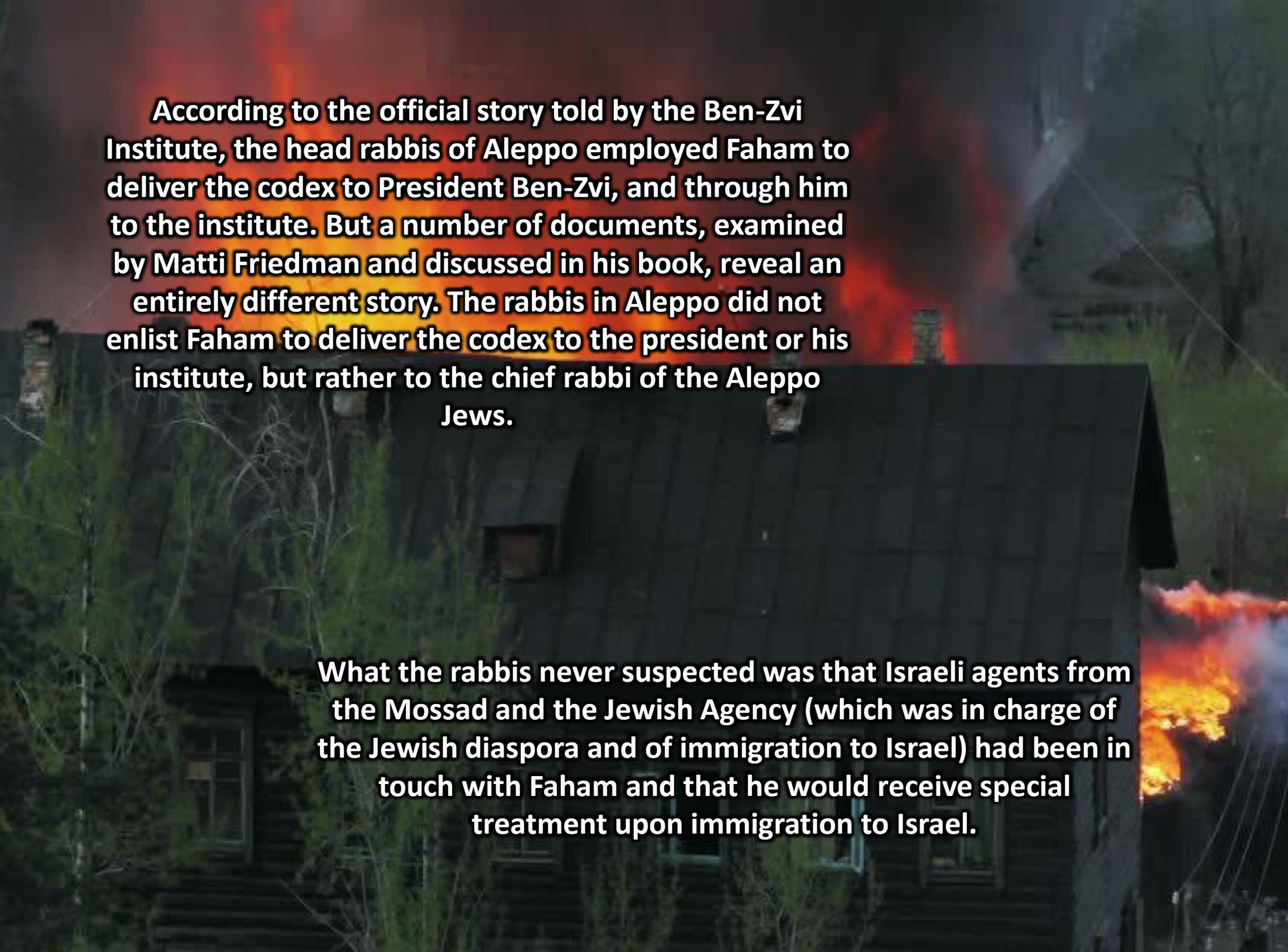
The Syrian government took an interest in the codex after an American antiquities merchant offered \$20 million for it, and so the leaders of the Aleppo synagogue went to great lengths to persuade Syrian intelligence that the book had been burned. For 10 years, even after word got out that the codex had not been destroyed, they kept it hidden in secret locations and refused to contemplate moving it from Aleppo.





In 1957, two Aleppo rabbis, fearing their community was approaching its demise, decided to take advantage of a chance to smuggle the codex to Aleppo Jews now living in Israel. Murad Faham, an Aleppo Jewish merchant who had been expelled from Syria, was chosen for the mission. “Just before I left,” Faham, who died in 1982, would later relate, “Rabbi Moshe Tawil said to me, ‘I want to tell you something, but I fear for your well-being, because this thing is a danger to your life, and whoever is caught doing it will be executed by hanging.’ ”

Faham, who would take every opportunity later to trumpet his own courage, recounted that he told the rabbi: “With the help of God, I will take it out. Don’t worry about my life, because if the Creator of the Universe has decreed that the book be taken out by me, it will be a great miracle that the Creator of the Universe is performing for my sake.”

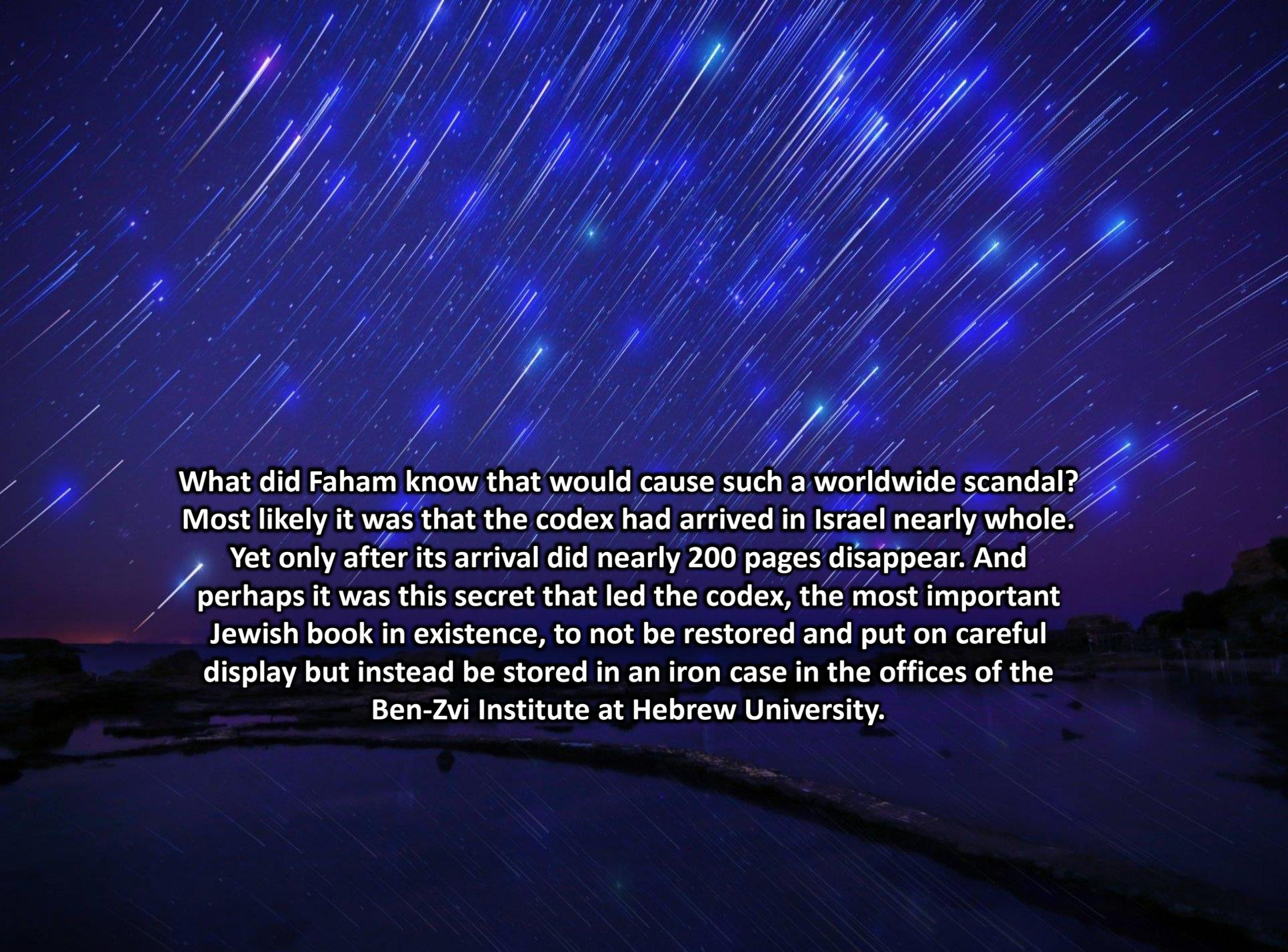


According to the official story told by the Ben-Zvi Institute, the head rabbis of Aleppo employed Faham to deliver the codex to President Ben-Zvi, and through him to the institute. But a number of documents, examined by Matti Friedman and discussed in his book, reveal an entirely different story. The rabbis in Aleppo did not enlist Faham to deliver the codex to the president or his institute, but rather to the chief rabbi of the Aleppo Jews.

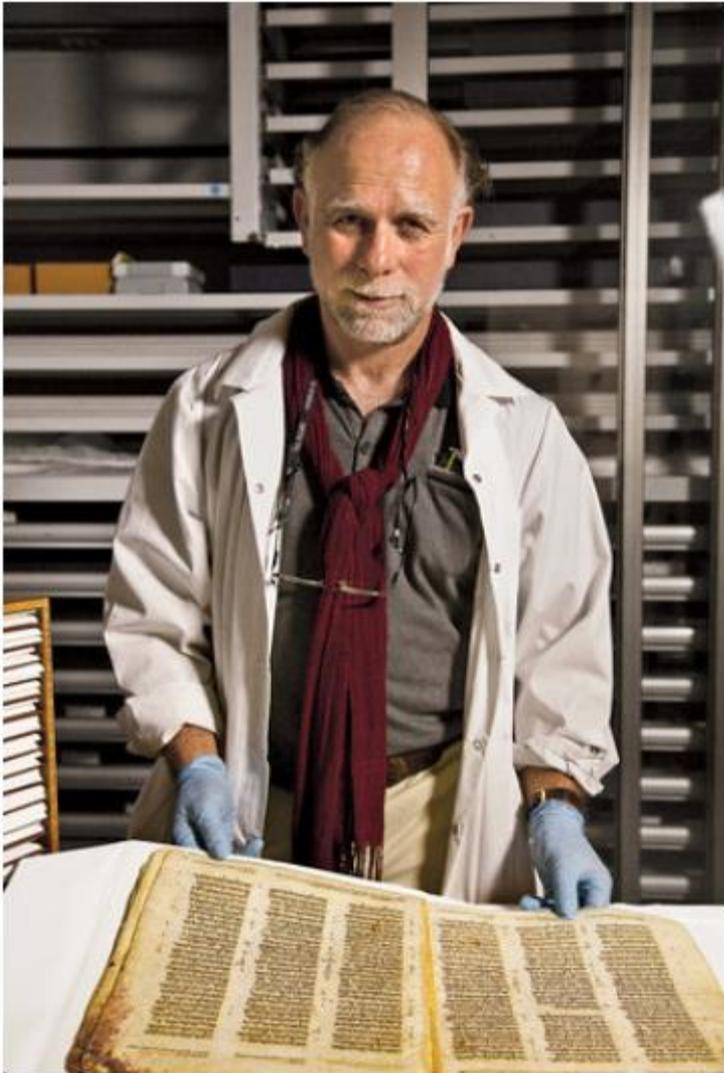
What the rabbis never suspected was that Israeli agents from the Mossad and the Jewish Agency (which was in charge of the Jewish diaspora and of immigration to Israel) had been in touch with Faham and that he would receive special treatment upon immigration to Israel.

Officials from the Jewish Agency met Faham in Turkey and informed authorities in Jerusalem of all his movements. When Faham arrived safely at the port in Haifa, instead of handing the codex to a representative of the Aleppo community, he handed it to a member of the Jewish Agency's immigration department, who passed it on to President Ben-Zvi.





What did Faham know that would cause such a worldwide scandal? Most likely it was that the codex had arrived in Israel nearly whole. Yet only after its arrival did nearly 200 pages disappear. And perhaps it was this secret that led the codex, the most important Jewish book in existence, to not be restored and put on careful display but instead be stored in an iron case in the offices of the Ben-Zvi Institute at Hebrew University.



Michael Maggen, the head of the paper-conservation lab at the Israel Museum.
Michal Chelbin for The New York Times

During the course of the work, which took six years, Maggen, the head of the museum's paper-conservation lab, discovered something of major significance: Until then, the story that had been officially told was that the missing pages were destroyed in the blaze at the Aleppo synagogue, a theory supported by the purple signs of charring that existed on the edges of the rescued pages. But Maggen found that the purple markings were not caused by fire at all, but rather by a mold that discolored the pages. If these pages weren't damaged by fire, then how could the others have been destroyed?

A philanthropist from the Aleppo community in New York donated money for the restoration of the book, and it was transferred in an armored van to the conservation laboratory of the Israel Museum.

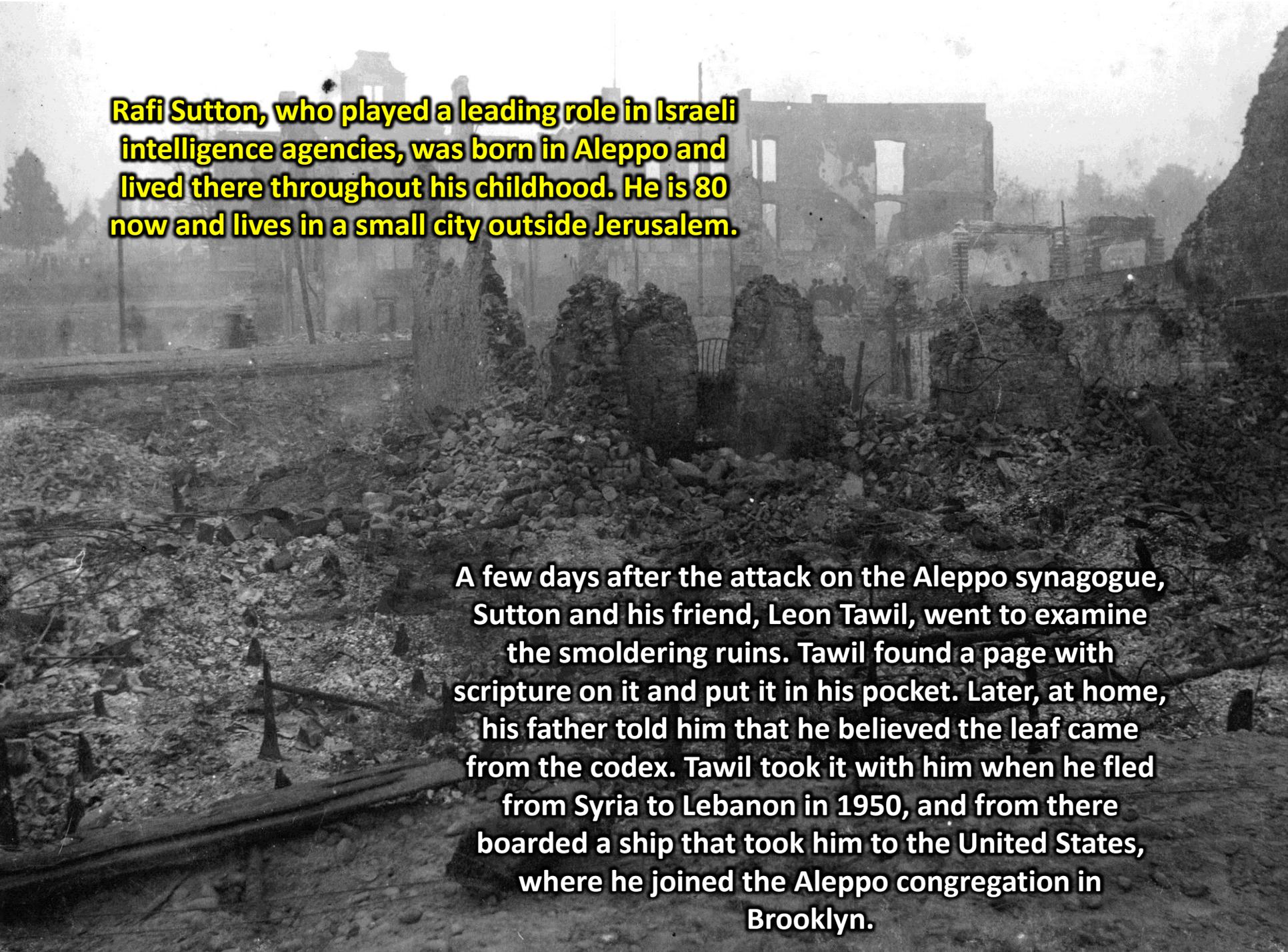


Rafi Sutton

**Midi
Kando**

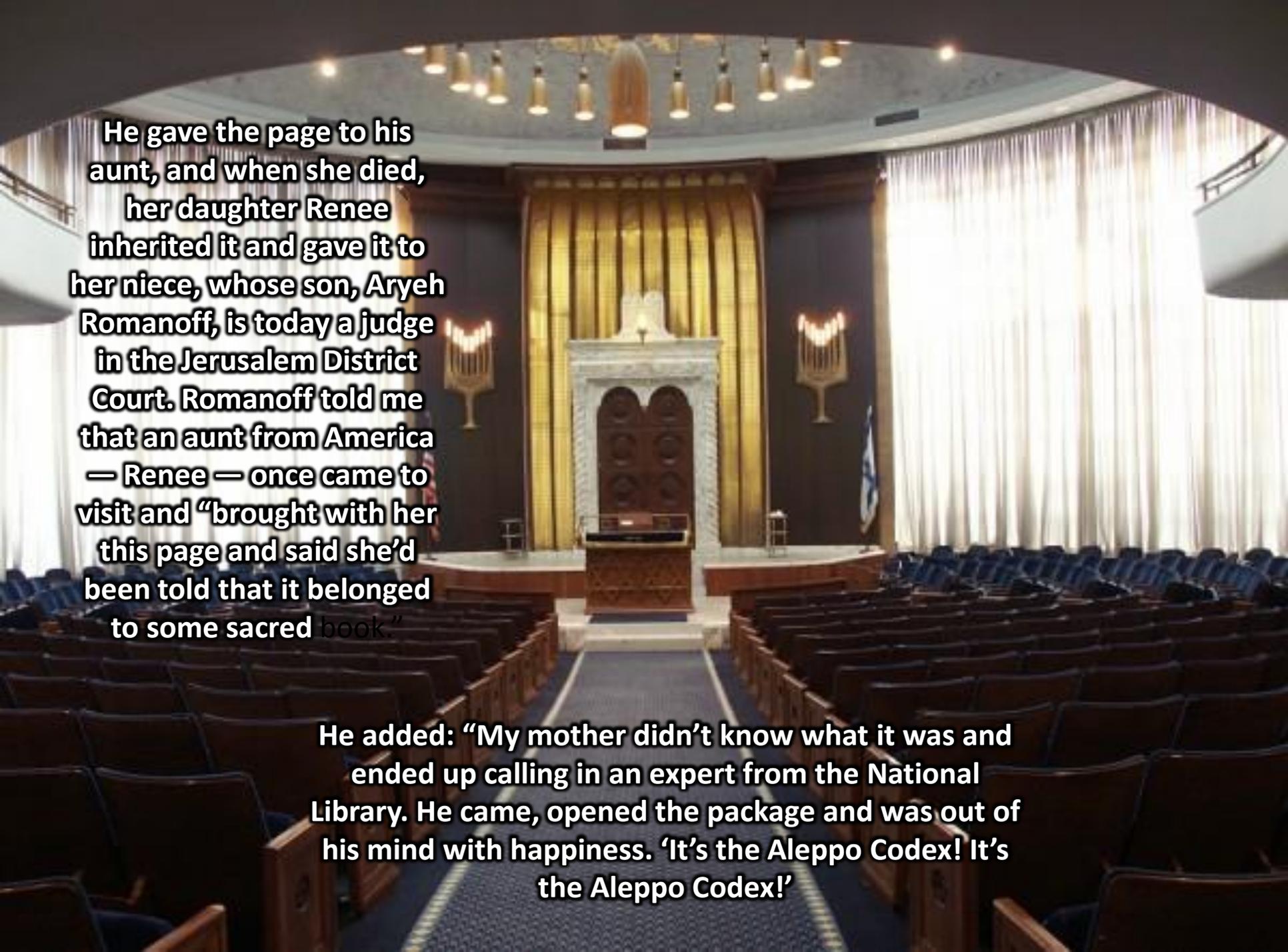
Shmuel Goren

**Sami
Nahmias**

A black and white photograph showing the aftermath of a destruction in a city. The foreground is filled with a large pile of rubble, including bricks, stones, and twisted metal. In the background, several multi-story buildings are left as skeletal remains, with their walls missing and windows empty. The sky is overcast and hazy, contributing to a somber and desolate atmosphere.

Rafi Sutton, who played a leading role in Israeli intelligence agencies, was born in Aleppo and lived there throughout his childhood. He is 80 now and lives in a small city outside Jerusalem.

A few days after the attack on the Aleppo synagogue, Sutton and his friend, Leon Tawil, went to examine the smoldering ruins. Tawil found a page with scripture on it and put it in his pocket. Later, at home, his father told him that he believed the leaf came from the codex. Tawil took it with him when he fled from Syria to Lebanon in 1950, and from there boarded a ship that took him to the United States, where he joined the Aleppo congregation in Brooklyn.

The image shows the interior of a large, ornate hall, likely a synagogue or a formal assembly room. The room features a central altar area with a wooden podium and a decorative archway. The walls are dark, and the ceiling is high with several hanging lights. Rows of dark wooden chairs with blue seats are arranged in the foreground, facing the altar. Large windows with white curtains are visible on the right side. The overall atmosphere is solemn and formal.

He gave the page to his aunt, and when she died, her daughter Renee inherited it and gave it to her niece, whose son, Aryeh Romanoff, is today a judge in the Jerusalem District Court. Romanoff told me that an aunt from America — Renee — once came to visit and “brought with her this page and said she’d been told that it belonged to some sacred book.”

He added: “My mother didn’t know what it was and ended up calling in an expert from the National Library. He came, opened the package and was out of his mind with happiness. ‘It’s the Aleppo Codex! It’s the Aleppo Codex!’



In 1988, Menahem Ben-Sasson, deputy director of the Ben-Zvi Institute, located another fragment of a page, jealously guarded by an elderly man named Shmuel Sebbagh, who lived in Brooklyn. It was part of the Book of Exodus, which relates how, after the Nile turned to blood, Aaron stretched forth his staff, causing a plague of frogs to descend on Egypt.

Sebbagh wouldn't say where he obtained the fragment, which he had laminated and kept in his pocket at all times. Only after his death, and in exchange for a large and undisclosed sum of money, did the Sebbagh family agree to hand it over to the Ben-Zvi Institute.



TAMIL EELAM



In the mid-1990s, Mossad, with some involvement from the C.I.A. and the U.S. State Department, conducted a large-scale secret operation to get the last Jews out of Syria, including the devastated Aleppo community, many of whose members believed that the curse of the codex had befallen them.



As part of that operation, the Mossad managed to smuggle Torah scrolls and other sacred books back to Israel, but efforts to locate the missing codex pages led only to dead ends.



Shortly before he died, Shlomo Zalman Shragai, whose colleague took the codex from Faham at the port in Haifa, told Sutton that the manuscript reached him almost intact.

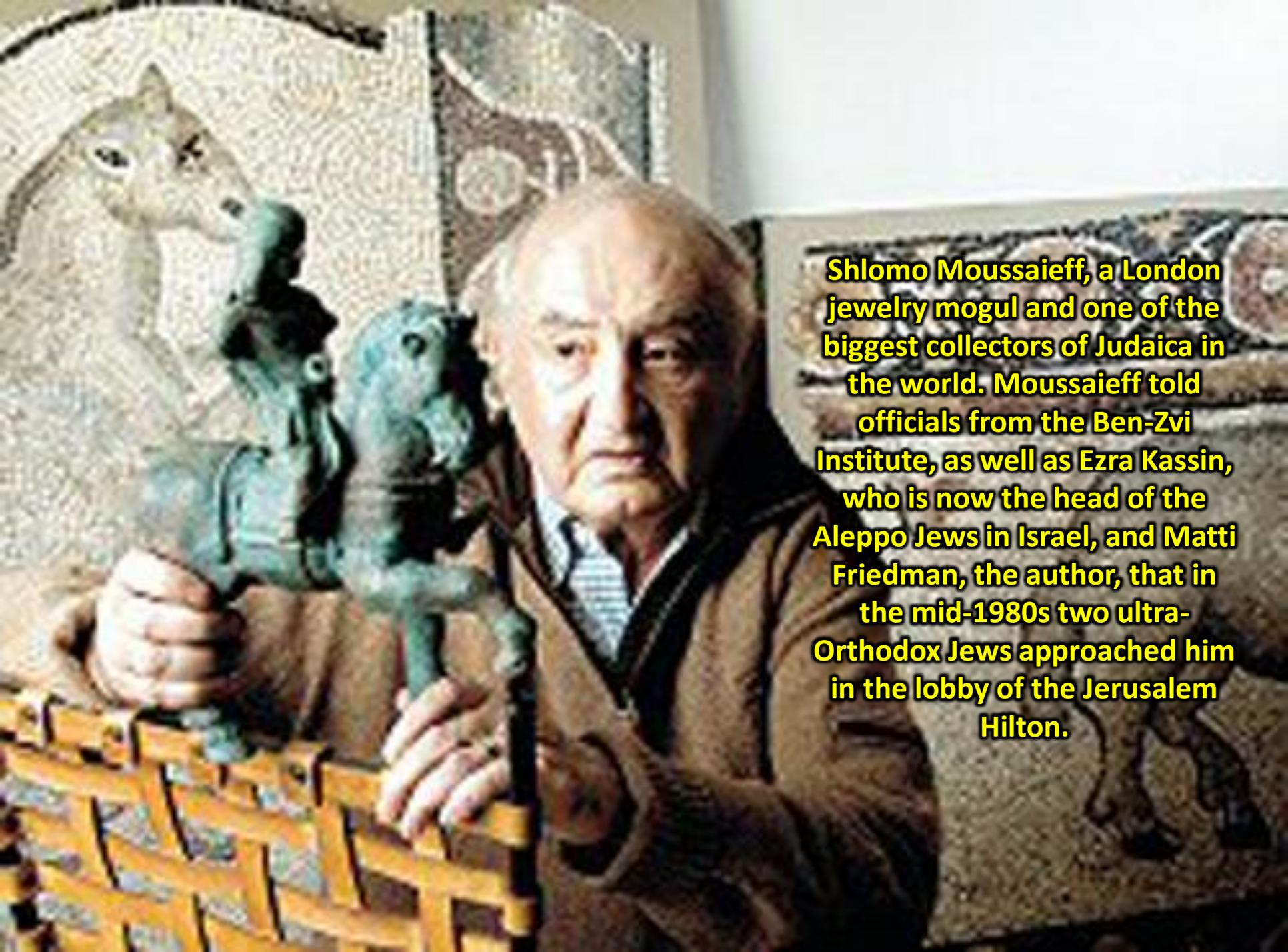


Shragai's son told Ezra Kassin, as part of Kassin's ongoing investigation, that he was present when the codex was brought to their home and that he definitely saw that "only a few pages were missing, three or four, all the rest were intact.



Meir Benayahu, who was Ben-Zvi's personal secretary when the codex reached him and who was also the first director of the Ben-Zvi Institute, had drawn up a memo upon receipt of the codex. Given Benayahu's scholarly background and the historical significance of the codex, you would assume that there would be precise notes detailing its condition and the number of pages it contained, and yet apart from the name Keter Aram Tzova — the manuscript's Hebrew name — no further details were provided.

Furthermore, shortly after the codex was delivered, Ben-Zvi supplied the editors of the Hebrew Encyclopedia with incorrect information, which he had been given by Benayahu, regarding the number of pages. Only after some time was it discovered that almost half of the codex was missing.

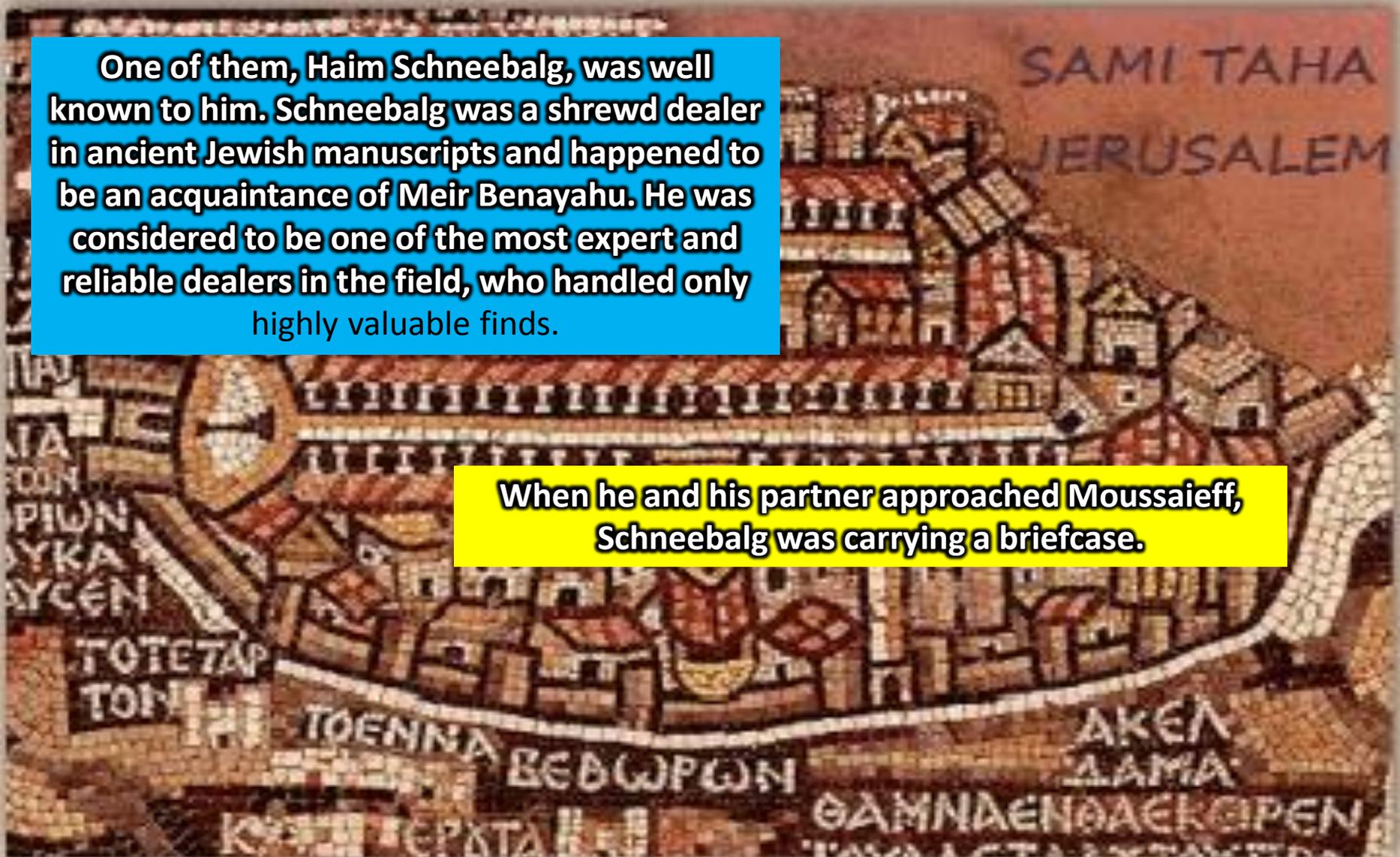


Shlomo Moussaieff, a London jewelry mogul and one of the biggest collectors of Judaica in the world. Moussaieff told officials from the Ben-Zvi Institute, as well as Ezra Kassin, who is now the head of the Aleppo Jews in Israel, and Matti Friedman, the author, that in the mid-1980s two ultra-Orthodox Jews approached him in the lobby of the Jerusalem Hilton.

BIBLICAL ARTIFACTS

One of them, Haim Schneebalg, was well known to him. Schneebalg was a shrewd dealer in ancient Jewish manuscripts and happened to be an acquaintance of Meir Benayahu. He was considered to be one of the most expert and reliable dealers in the field, who handled only highly valuable finds.

When he and his partner approached Moussaieff, Schneebalg was carrying a briefcase.





In an interview shown in 1993 on Israel national TV, Moussaieff recalled: “They put the suitcase on the bed, opened it, opened a silky paper that was covering it. All of a sudden, my eyes popped out. I saw between 70 and 100 parchment pages lying on top of each other, inscribed with black ink that because of time had reddened slightly. In large letters, about double the size of a Torah scroll’s letters, with vowels. The handwriting was a little like a dancing handwriting. . . . I have no doubt that what I saw was part of the Aleppo Codex.”

שמעך ג' ומל' וזהו שמעך כי יצאך שמעך וזהו
זהו שמעך וזהו ג' ו

באפלה ב' וזהו משש לם וזהו דרכם להם ג'
וזהו דרך ישעיהו באפלה ג'

ולא תאכל ג' ולא תאכל הנפש שורך שבוח
תבכה ולא תאכל ג'

1

אשר לא תוכל להרפא
מקפתך ויעד קדקדך
ולך ויחזה אתך ואתי
מלכל אשר תקום עליו
אלנו אשר לא ידעת
אתה ואבתיך ועבדי שם
אלהים אחרים עזראבו
והיית לשמה למשל
ולשנינה בכל העמים
אשר ינהגו ויחזה שמה
זרע רב תוציא השדה

ב' ג'

ואז מחייה ופכה ויחזה
בשחזו מעלוטוב עפלוס
וכנרב ובחרס אשר לא
תוכל להרפא ופכה ויחזה
בשגעון ובכעורו ובתמחח
לבבו ויהיית משש בעחוס
באשר ימשש העור כט
באפלה ולא תצלוח את
הרכיב ויהיית אך עשוק
ונזול כל הימים ואח מושע
אשה תאיש ואיש אחל

ובטהרים
קלי

ב'

ג' ד'

ה' ו'

ז' ח'

ט' י'

יא' יב'

יג' יד'

טו' טז'

ומש ארתך ארוך פרוכטנג
ופרי ארמתך שער אלפך
ועשתות צאגך ארוך אתה
בבארוארוך אתה בעאתך
וישלח ויהודה בך את המאכה
את המהומה ואת המגעות
בכל משלח וידך אשר תעשה
עדה שמך ויעד אכדך
מהר מפני רע מעלונך י
אשר עובתני ידבק ויחזה
בך את הדבר עפלותו אתך

ב'

ג'

דבל

ט'

The two argued over the price, and Moussaieff finally offered to buy only part of the manuscript, to which Schneebalg replied that it was all or nothing. In retrospect, Moussaieff would admit that he made a huge mistake. As he told a reporter from an Israeli newspaper in 1993: "I was greedy."



Ben-Zvi Institute officials say they tried to persuade Moussaieff to give them his name. “He did not admit anything,” Yom Tov Assis, the current director of the institute, told me. “I asked him to help me, but he kept mum, wouldn’t answer and seemed very hostile.”



Nor will Schneebalg ever reveal who bought the codex from him. On Aug. 16, 1989, in a room at the Plaza Hotel in Jerusalem, his body was discovered with blood dripping out of his nose. The person who rented the room, under the name Dan Cohen, had vanished, and the details he gave when checking in turned out to be false.

Schneebalg's ultra-Orthodox family refused to have a forensic autopsy carried out because of religious precepts, and the cause of death was never conclusively established. Many in the world of Judaica believe that he was murdered because of his involvement with the codex.

A stone relief carving depicting a group of figures in traditional attire, with a large menorah symbol above them. The figures are shown in various poses, some standing and some seated, with intricate details in their clothing and headwear. The background features architectural elements like columns and a triangular pediment.

By virtue of the standing and prestige of President Ben-Zvi, some 3,000 manuscripts originating from Arab lands, some of them of major significance, have been deposited at the Ben-Zvi Institute. In contrast to the Aleppo Codex, most of these documents were donated willingly, in the confidence that the institute would protect and preserve them. As a result of Matti Friedman's investigation, it has now emerged that throughout the 1950s and 1960s, a systematic plundering of ancient books and manuscripts not related to the codex took place there.

Menahem Ben-Sasson, today the president of Hebrew University:

“The codex has become so important that anyone who’s holding it, if anyone is, may never agree to take it out of hiding, not for all the money in the world. It may be that generations will go by before his sons or his sons’ sons will be free of the sense of guilt for holding on to it and will deliver it to its natural resting place, the Shrine of the Book in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.”





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