

Fragment of the Month: April 2011

## **A poet for all seasons, T-S Misc.25.24 and T-S Misc.8.90**

By Amir Ashur

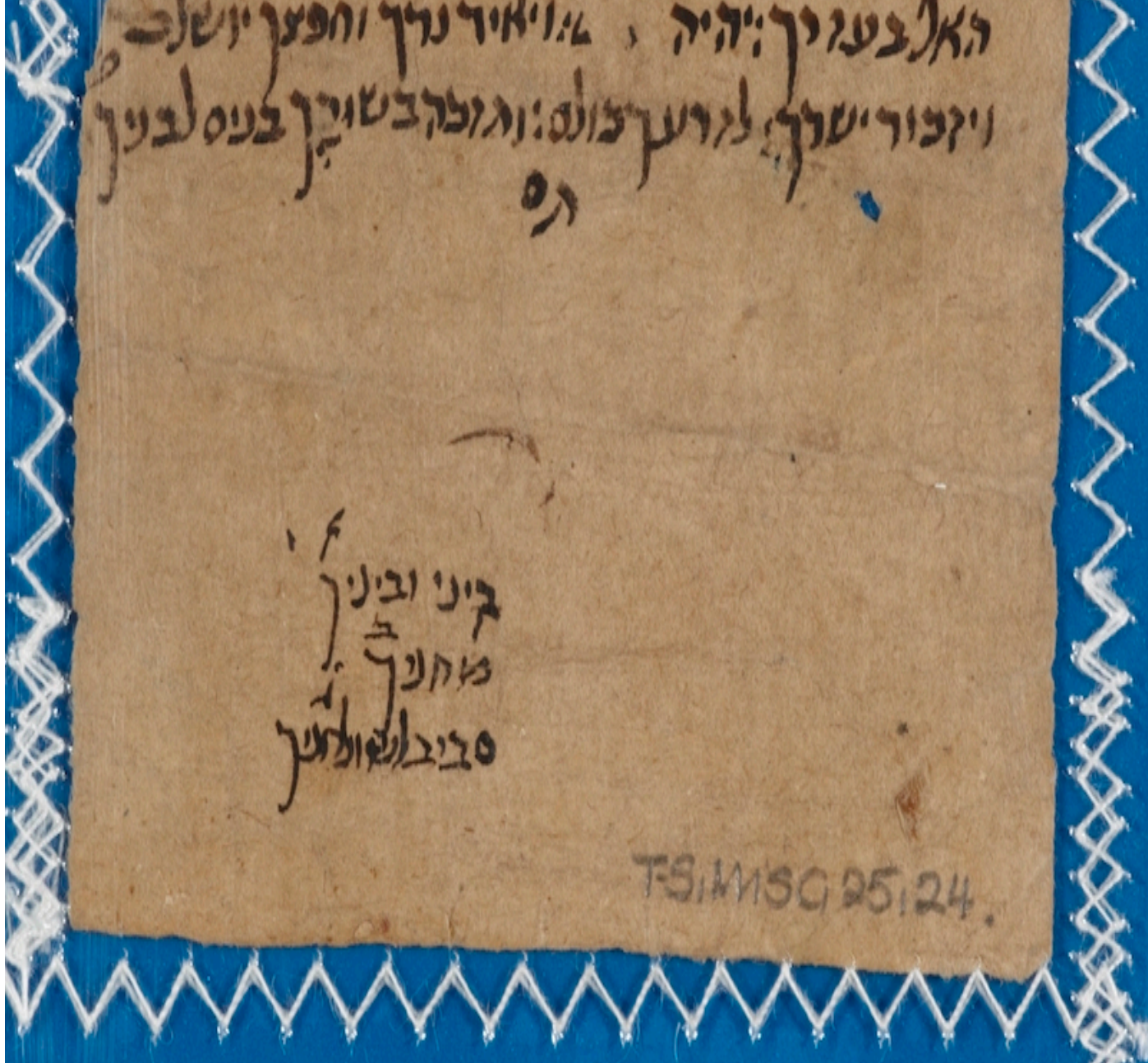
There are many poems found in the Cairo Genizah that relate to actual persons or were penned for special occasions. Some were written by amateurs; others by those who made a modest living from their poetry. One such jobbing poet has, so far, left behind eight pages of drafted poems, two of which will be described below. Six pages from this poet's notebook are to be found in the collection at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, ENA 1810 (dated ca. 1186) and were discussed and partially published by Goitein & Friedman, *India Book*, II, pp. 464–468 (and described in Goitein & Friedman, *India Traders*, p. 523).

Who was this poet? In ENA 1810, fol. 3r, he describes himself as a poor Egyptian from a good family, who is unable to pay the poll-tax, and so has to hide from the government.

One page from the same notebook is kept here in Cambridge University Library, T-S Misc.25.24, the recto of which contains a draft of a poem in honour of a circumcision. More exciting, however, is the other side, which contains a draft of a poem written in honour of one 'Moses' – who may well be Moses Maimonides himself, as shown by ENA 1810, fols 2–3, where there is a draft of a poem and a letter clearly addressed to Maimonides (see Goitein & Friedman, *India Traders*, p. 523; fols 2–3 are to be published by Friedman as *The Cairo Geniza's*







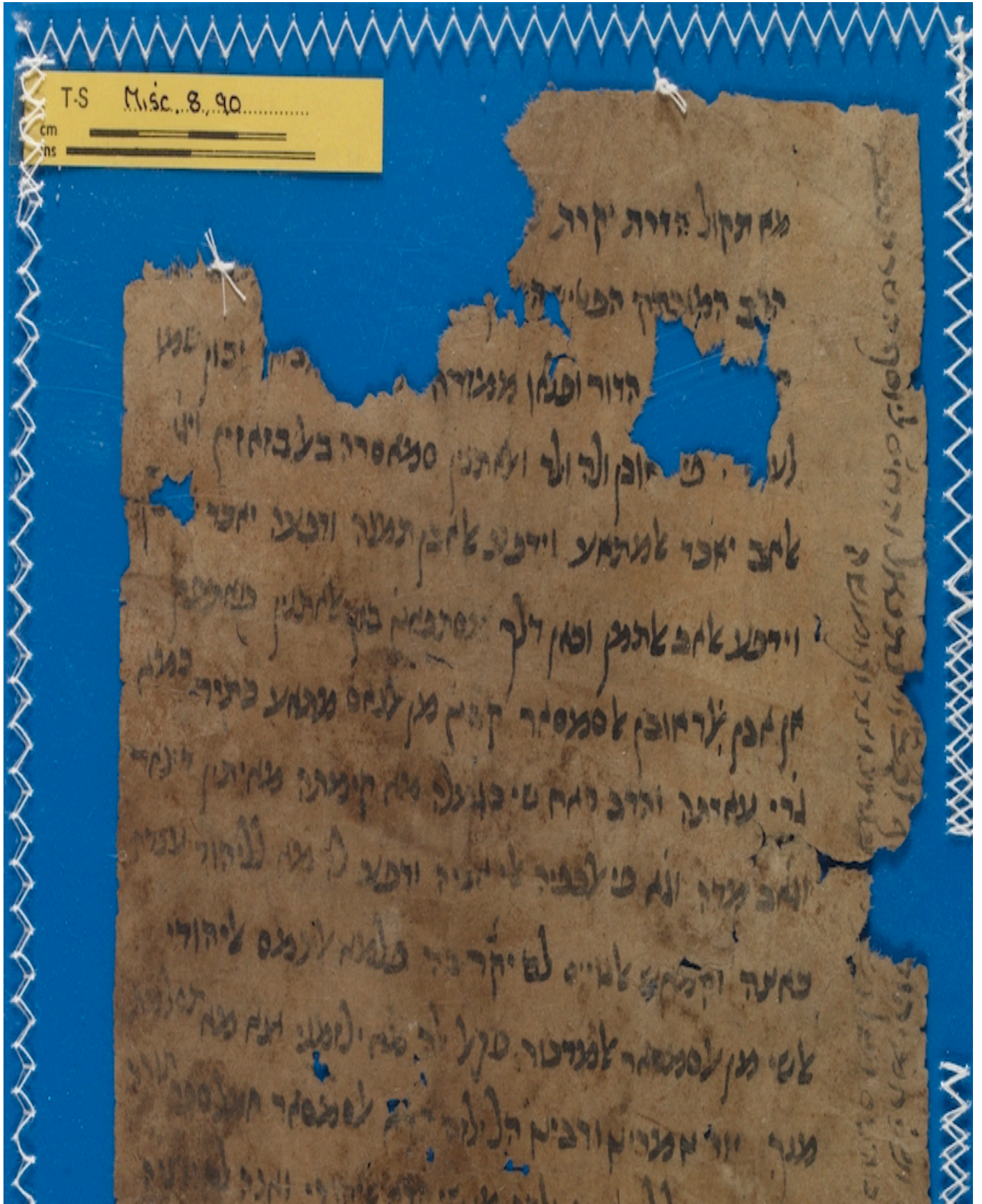
T-S Misc.25.24, recto, a rough draft of a poem in honour of the Rambam

Another leaf seems to be written by the same would-be poet, T-S Misc.8.90. Recto of this leaf contains a legal query sent to Maimonides along with his autograph responsum (which was published by Blau, *Maimonides Responsa*, no. 283). The verso contains a draft of a long dirge for the death of three prominent members of the Jewish community, who are only identified as Rabbis 'Samuel, Solomon and Isaac'. I am not yet able to identify who these three communal leaders were. Although this leaf is not from the same notebook, the verso almost certainly was written by the same hand, that of the down-at-heel

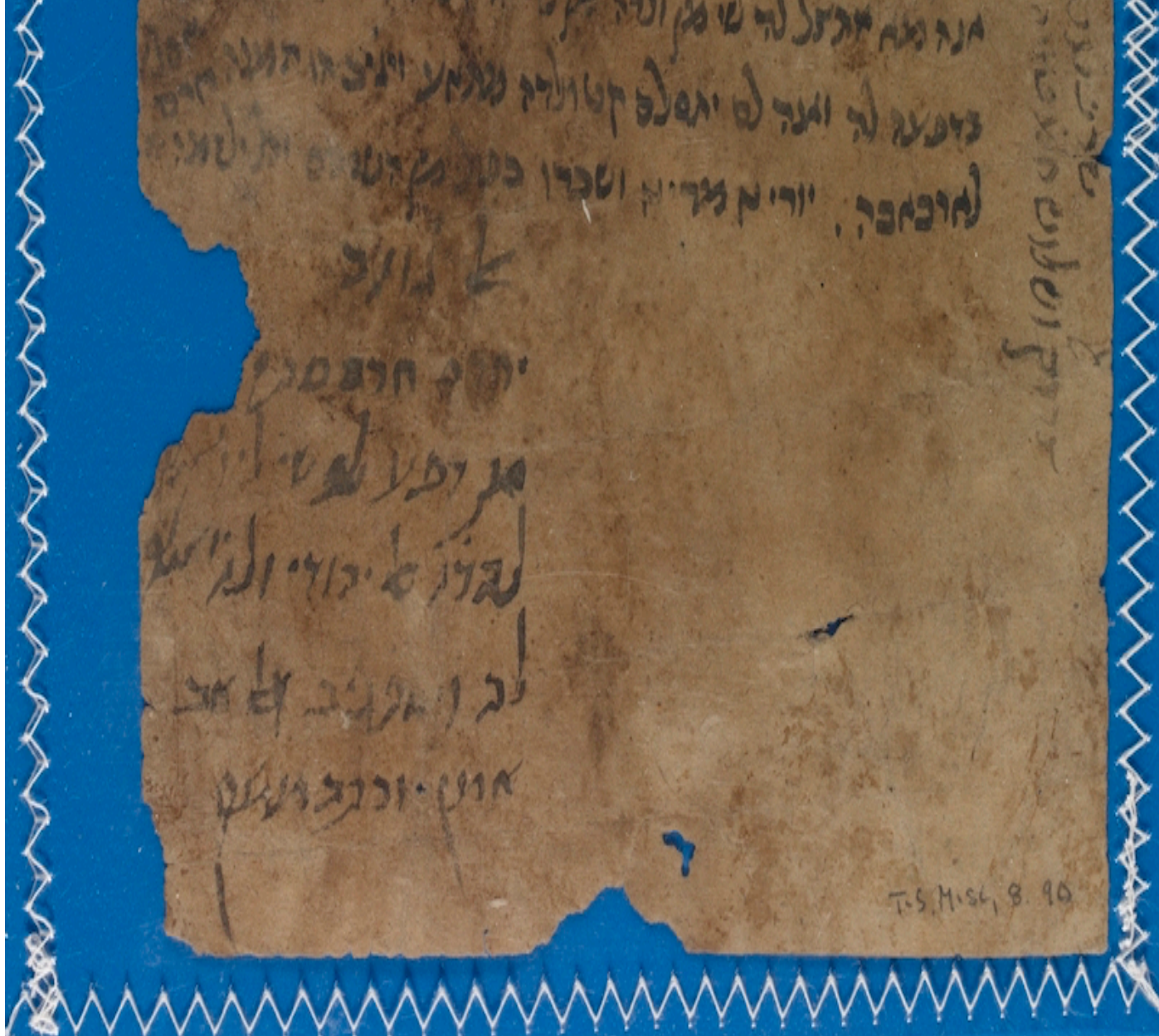


Cairene, who hoped to reap some benefit from his attempts at poetry. We can only guess how Maimonides' autograph responsum came into his possession.

I want to thank Prof. M.A. Friedman and Prof. Shulamit Elizur for their comments.







T-S Misc.8.90, draft of a dirge on the death of three prominent members of the community

### Bibliography

S. D. Goitein & M. A. Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza ('India Book')* (Leiden, 2007).

—, *India Book II: Maḍmun Nagid Of Yemen And The India Trade* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 2010).

Maimonides, *Responsa* = R. Moses b. Maimon, *Responsa*, edited by J. Blau (Hebrew; 4 vols; Jerusalem, 1957–1986).

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