

ABSTRACT

WRITTEN NEW YEAR'S GREETINGS ACCORDING TO
TEXTS FROM THE CAIRO GENIZA AND RABBINIC LITERATURE

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The article deals with the history of written New Year's greetings sent before Rosh Hashanah. Most of the article is devoted to the origins and development of the custom of sending greetings, from the mid-eleventh to the late nineteenth centuries, which was the peak of the phenomenon of mailing Happy New Year's cards. In this context, we examine expressions of greetings in the diaspora both in writing and orally. Written greetings were usually included in letters of peace and friendship missives and were first documented in Egyptian merchant letters from the eleventh century onwards, as preserved in the Cairo Geniza. Written greetings were also preserved in twelfth-century Ashkenazi rabbinic correspondence, although in a random way. From the fourteenth century, these wishes were also included in non-rabbinic correspondence, with the encouragement of Rabbi Shalom from Neustadt and his students. Alongside the written greeting, people in fourteenth century Ashkenaz also used to express the greeting orally when visiting friends on the eve of the New Year, as Rabbi Ya'akov Ben HaRosh wrote. However, over time, the connection between wishing and visiting was severed, and the custom of wishing people a good new year remains a recommended custom that stands on its own.