A **genizah** ([/ɡɛˈniːzə/](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help%3AIPA/English); [Hebrew](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_language): גניזה "storage", also *geniza*; plural: *genizot*[*h*] or *genizahs*)[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genizah#cite_note-2) is a storage area in a [Jewish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism) [synagogue](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synagogue) or cemetery designated for the temporary storage of worn-out Hebrew-language books and papers on religious topics prior to proper cemetery burial.



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The word *genizah* comes from the [Hebrew triconsonantal root](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semitic_root) *g-n-z*, which means "hiding", and originally meant "to hide" or "to put away".[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genizah#cite_note-katz-3) Later, it became a noun for a place where one put things, and is perhaps best translated as "archive" or "repository".

Description[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Genizah&action=edit&section=2)]



A genizah in a synagogue ([Samarkand](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samarkand), Uzbekistan, ca. 1865-72)

Genizot are temporary repositories designated for the storage of worn-out [Hebrew language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_language) books and papers on religious topics prior to proper cemetery burial, it being forbidden to throw away writings containing the [name of God](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Names_of_God_in_Judaism). As even personal letters and legal contracts may open with an invocation of God, the contents of genizot have not been limited to religious materials; in practice, they have also contained writings of a secular nature, with or without the customary opening invocation, as well as writings in other [Jewish languages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_languages) that use the Hebrew alphabet (the [Judeo-Arabic languages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judeo-Arabic_languages), [Judeo-Persian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judeo-Persian), [Judaeo-Spanish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaeo-Spanish%22%20%5Co%20%22Judaeo-Spanish), and [Yiddish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yiddish)).

Genizot are typically found in the attic or basement of a [synagogue](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synagogue), but can also be in walls or buried underground. They may also be located in cemeteries.[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genizah#cite_note-katz-3)

The contents of genizot are periodically gathered solemnly and then buried in the cemetery or *bet ḥayyim*. Synagogues in [Jerusalem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem) buried the contents of their genizot every seventh year, as well as during a year of drought, believing that this would bring rain. This custom is associated with the far older practice of burying a great or good man with a *[sefer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sefer_%28Hebrew%29%22%20%5Co%20%22Sefer%20%28Hebrew%29)* (either a book of the [Tanakh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanakh), or the [Mishnah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mishnah), the [Talmud](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talmud), or any work of [rabbinic literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabbinic_literature)) which has become *pasul* (unfit for use through illegibility or old age). The tradition of paper-interment is known to have been practiced in Morocco, Algiers, Turkey, Yemen and Egypt.

History[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Genizah&action=edit&section=3)]



A possible geniza at [Masada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masada), eastern Israel

The [Talmud](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talmud) (Tractate [Shabbat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shabbat_%28Talmud%29) 115a) directs that holy writings in other than the Hebrew language require *genizah*, that is, preservation. In Tractate [Pesachim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pesachim_%28Talmud%29%22%20%5Co%20%22Pesachim%20%28Talmud%29) 118b, *bet genizah* is a treasury. In Pesachim 56a, [Hezekiah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hezekiah) hides (*ganaz*) a medical work; in Shabbat 115a, [Gamaliel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gamaliel) orders that the [targum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Targum) to the [Book of Job](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Job) should be hidden (*yigganez*) under the *nidbak* (layer of stones). In Shabbat 30b, there is a reference to those rabbis who sought to categorize the books of Ecclesiastes and Proverbs as heretical; this occurred before the canonization of the [Hebrew Bible](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_Bible), when disputes flared over which books should be considered Biblical. The same thing occurs in Shabbat 13b in regard to the Book of Ezekiel, and in Pesachim 62 in regard to the Book of Genealogies.

In medieval times, Hebrew scraps and papers that were relegated to the genizah were known as *shemot* "names," because their sanctity and consequent claim to preservation were held to depend on their containing the "names" of God. In addition to papers, articles connected with ritual, such as [tzitzit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tzitzit), [lulavim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lulav%22%20%5Co%20%22Lulav), and sprigs of myrtle, are similarly stored.

According to folklore, these scraps were used to hide the famed [Golem of Prague](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golem#The_classic_narrative:_The_Golem_of_Prague), whose body is claimed to lie in the genizah of the [Old New Synagogue](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_New_Synagogue) in Prague.



Modern genizah collection receptacle on street in [Nachlaot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nachlaot%22%20%5Co%20%22Nachlaot), [Jerusalem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem)

By far, the best-known genizah, which is famous for both its size and spectacular contents, is the [Cairo Geniza](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cairo_Geniza). Recognized for its importance and introduced to the Western world in 1864 by [Jacob Saphir](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob_Saphir), and chiefly studied by [Solomon Schechter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solomon_Schechter), Jacob Mann[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genizah#cite_note-4)[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genizah#cite_note-5) and [Shelomo Dov Goitein](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shelomo_Dov_Goitein%22%20%5Co%20%22Shelomo%20Dov%20Goitein), the genizah had an accumulation of almost 280,000 Jewish manuscript fragments dating from 870 to the 19th century. These materials were important for reconstructing the religious, social and economic history of Jews, especially in the Middle Ages. For all practical purposes, the [Dead Sea Scrolls](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dead_Sea_Scrolls), discovered between the years 1946 and 1956, belonged to a genizah from the 2nd-century BCE.

In 1927, a manuscript containing [Nathan ben Abraham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nathan_ben_Abraham_I)'s 11th-century [Mishnah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mishnah) commentary was discovered in the genizah of the Jewish community of [Sana'a](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sana%27a), Yemen. Nathan had served as *President of the Academy* under the revised [Palestinian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestine_%28region%29) *[geonate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geonic_period%22%20%5Co%20%22Geonic%20period)*, shortly before its demise in the early 12th century CE. In 2011, the so-called [Afghan Geniza](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghan_Geniza), an 11th century collection of manuscript fragments in Hebrew, Aramaic, Judaeo-Arabic and Judeo-Persian, was found in Afghanistan, in caves used by the [Taliban](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taliban).[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genizah#cite_note-CBSNews-6)