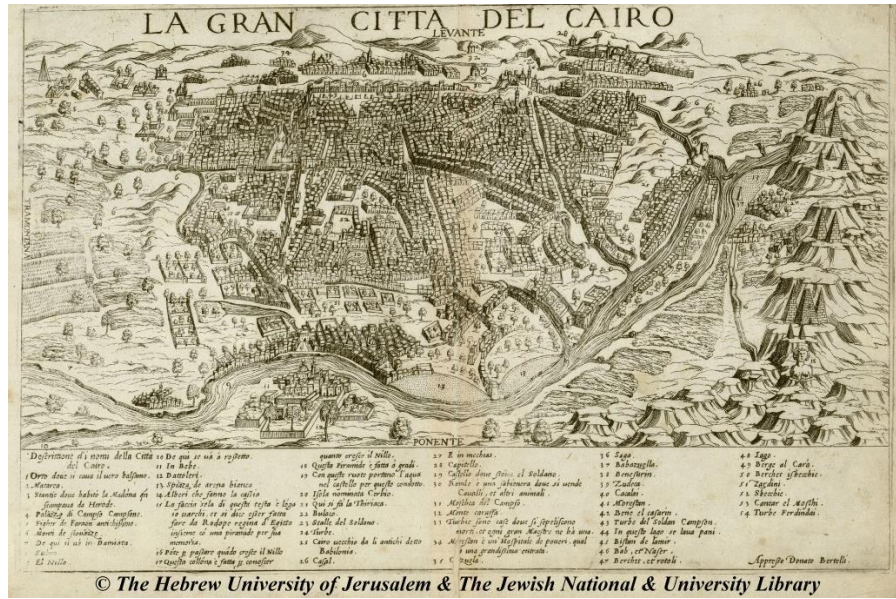


## A Letter from the Cairo Genizah



### Introduction:

A Genizah is a depository for discarded religious texts. The texts contain God's name thus, according to Jewish law, they cannot be thrown out. Genizahs are most commonly found in attics or basements of synagogues. One of the most famous Genizahs in the world is the one that was unearthed in a synagogue in Cairo which remained hidden and untouched for centuries until it was rediscovered. It is extraordinary how much we can learn about a community by studying that which was once hidden.

The following video tells an astounding story that would have remained hidden had the Cairo Genizah not been uncovered.

[Watch video] <https://youtu.be/uPDzuvoZeFs>

### Activity

#### Materials needed:

1. Pens
2. Paper
3. Envelope

#### Our Hidden Objects – Relevant for a Small Group

Working in small groups, each participant looks in his/her handbag, pockets, or other places that they might have objects with them. Answer the following questions:

- What objects do you find?
- What do the objects reveal about you?
- What could an archaeologist learn about you from the items?

Ask members of the audience to place their hidden objects in an envelope. This envelope will be sent to the National Library of Israel and will serve as a time capsule- a hidden wealth of stories that will be preserved in the archives for future discovery.

### **Revealing Our Story- Relevant for a Large Group**

What can we “hide” now that will reveal something about you later? Have each member of the group write a short story or anecdote about themselves or about an object that is important to them.

The gathered stories should be placed in an envelope. This envelope will be sent to the National Library of Israel and will serve as a time capsule- a hidden wealth of stories that will be preserved in the archives for future discovery.

### Conclusion

Objects that may seem insignificant at the time, reveal much about their owners and the society in which they lived. When discovered much later, they offer fascinating information. The ephemera collection at the National Library of Israel, which contains items such as photographs, postcards, signs, and more, is a powerful tool for reconstructing Jewish culture in previous generations.

### Appendix

Who are the Karaites?

Karaite Judaism, begun as early as the eighth century CE, recognizes the Bible (*Tanakh*) as the supreme authority on Jewish law (*Halakhah*), as opposed to Rabbinic Judaism which accepts the Oral Law (Talmud, etc). Karaites will consider the insights of the rabbis as expressed in the Oral Law but they don't consider the rulings as binding. As a result, many differences in practice arise between Karaites and mainstream, Rabbinic Judaism. Some examples include eating meat and milk together as long as the meat is not the child of the animal that produced the milk, not celebrating Rabbinic holidays such as *Hanukkah*, removing their shoes in synagogue and prostrating themselves, and not requiring a *minyan* (quorum) for communal prayer. Karaite Judaism was based in Egypt, Turkey and Crimea but since the 1950's when Jews were expelled from Egypt, the largest Karaite communities are located in Israel and the United States.