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Archiving the Name of God

Genizah is the Jewish practice of preserving discarded holy texts and artifacts. This is following the biblical decree prohibiting the erasure or the blotting out of the name of God, which is believed to contain divine presence within matter. The verb *ganzakh* derives from ancient Farsi, where it denotes to hide, secrete and preserve. Later, genizah started to function in Hebrew as a noun which specifies a place: ›the treasury.‹ This root also appeared in late biblical texts, such as The Book of Esther, The Book of Daniel, and The Book of Ezra, all with clear Persian influences.[1] In Talmudic literature genizah designated a set of ritualized techniques for storing and removing written material containing the name of God but such that are determined to be defective or unusable. According to halakhic laws, which are the Jewish religious laws, these written materials were not to be destroyed or simply disposed of but treated with reverence fitting holy presence, typically by way of burial. This archaic practice encountered new challenges with the emergence of modern media, which not only introduced new technical means of storage and dissemination but also transformed the very logic of inscription. It is in this respect that genizah constitutes a prime example for Günter Thomas's designation of religion as a ›machinery‹ of mediation, and its modern media phases as the mediatization of religion.[2]

This chapter considers two cases of contemporary genizah in terms of analog and digital media as they comply and conflict with traditional decrees. The first is a debate surrounding the discarding of audiocassettes containing sermons that if were to be written textually rather than sound recorded would have to be treated as genizah worthy. The second is the feasibility of an obligatory digital genizah, containing both digital artifacts and documents. Ultimately, both cases were not deemed as genizah worthy due to their non-textual and non-inscriptional logic. The question of textual inscription was therefore central to both cases: first in establishing the status of analog sound recording as opposed to alphabetic symbols, and later, in establishing the status of digital documents in contradistinction to

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1 Abraham M. Haberman, *HaGniza ve HaGnizot* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1971), 12–20 [in Hebrew].

2 Günter Thomas, »The Mediatization of Religion – as Temptation, Seduction, and Illusion,« *Media, Culture & Society* 38, no. 1 (2016): 37–47.

analog media and, through it, to writing. In both cases the primacy of writing was key in determining the derivative status of technical writing, and consequently the instructions as to how to treat audio recorded religious content and digital text both on- and offscreen. This religious take of media throws a new light on traditional media concepts such as index, symbol, origin, copy and reproduction. The practice of genizah also provides an apt case for considering the way different media produce a different sense of presence – holy presence in this case – as it shifts from textual, to analog and then to digital.

Holy Media

The Jewish Encyclopedia defines genizah as the »storeroom or depository in a synagogue; a cemetery in which worn-out and heretical or disgraced Hebrew books or papers are placed.«[3] Others refer to genizah as »literally storing«[4] or »repositories for synagogue records [...] the genizah specifies a range of meanings from concealing and hoarding to archiving and storing.«[5] According to Sadan, a renowned (Cairo) genizah expert, it is the »habit or custom of collecting Hebrew texts and throwing them to a designated, specified place to undo the fear or concern that these papers would not be treated in a respectable manner.«[6] Sadan also wonders about the proper way to understand genizah as a process: whether as the final stage in the lifecycle of a text, or as a midway stage between collection and burial.[7] Genizah sometimes indicates a temporary stage before the burial of Jewish manuscripts,[8] and sometime it is »the repository for Jewish religious texts – Torah scrolls, prayer books, Bibles, rabbinic literature, and other religious and ritual Judaica – which under religious law must not be destroyed.«[9] In English, genizah is often referred to as *Shaimos*, the Hassidic-Yiddisher pronunciation of

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3 Solomon Schechter and Elkan N. Adler, »Genizah,« in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Isidore Singer (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901–6), vol. 4, 612–613.

4 Marianne Schleicher, »Accounts of a Dying Scroll: On Jewish Handling of Sacred Texts in Need of Restoration or Disposal,« in *The Death of Sacred Texts*, ed. Kristina Myrvold (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 20.

5 Philip Vilas Bohlman, *Jewish Music and Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 108.

6 Yosef Sadan, »Purity, Impurity and Genizah of books: between Islam and Judaism,« *Pe'amim Studies in Oriental Jewry* 70 (1997): 4–5 [in Hebrew].

7 Ibid., 19, 6.

8 Joan E. Taylor, »Buried Manuscripts and Empty Tombs: The Qumran Genizah Theory Revisited,« in *»Go Out and Study the Land« (Judges 18:2): Archaeological, Historical, and Textual Studies in Honor of Hanan Eshel*, ed. Aren M. Maeir, Jodi Magness et.al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 269–315.

9 Menahem Schmelzer, »One Hundred Years of Genizah Discovery & Research: The American Share,« *Judaica Librarianship* 11, no. 1–2 (2002–2003): 57.

the Hebrew word *Shemot* (names), which refers to the prohibition concerning the erasure or blotting out the name of God.

The custom nowadays is that any holy text, inclusive of all canon of the Hebrew Bible, as well as Rabbinic and everyday modern texts that mention the names of God, or even a biblical verse, is genizah obligated. To put any holy media product through genizah means to bury, treasure, keep, or otherwise salvage it so that it will rest in peace and suffer no harm. It is an act that shows deep respect to the materiality of media, as it emphasizes its power to store and capture not only the holy text, but also the holiness associated with godly presence. The act symbolizes the end of the road for holy texts by treating them as if they were human, that is, God-made. Genizah, then, is the religious regulation for holy media. It asks questions about the textual apparatus and decrees, and about the mortality of or immortality of media holding holy content. Genizah is the art of preserving that which was once deemed holy but now, though defected, still contains a trace of holiness, hence still contains something associated with God. As such, genizah can be described as a Jewish media theory of sorts, one that deals with criteria such as tangibility, the material status of contents, textual and technological apparatuses – a media theory that provides an interesting contrastive case to some of the precepts of contemporary media theory.

Genizah and holy writing go hand in hand. But how can one determine whether a text is holy, other than looking for the presence of God through a signifier such as his name or his titles? The content is not the only prism through which to determine the quality of holiness. The criteria of what makes a text holy also concerns the technology, the materials, and the substance of writing. Sanctity is present within the intangible God and is made present mainly through texts. The written names of God, and the Tetragrammaton being in the foreground, are the clearest example, functioning as an indexical sign to God. In Mishna's *Yadaim* (hands) tractate it is said that the status of holiness is given to a text if and when three elements are put into practice: An Assyrian script, a parchment as a material, and writing in ink.[10] The Talmud adds another criterion, stating that a fragment of the Torah must contain either a name of God or a minimum of 85 coherent letters from the Torah in strict sequence for it to be considered holy, a criterion that relies on the fact that the shortest Torah portion is composed out of 85 letters.

According to the halakha, there are 39 labors that Jews are forbidden from doing during the Shabbat, writing being one of them. It is prohibited to write more than one letter on the Shabbat, and even though there may be controversy about everything else, all adjudicators agree that writing two different letters that can be read together as a meaningful word is what constitutes writing. It follows that one letter is not ›actual writing,‹ but a minimum of two letters. Other Torah portion adds another criterion to *Melechet Kotev*, labor of writing, writing with a real existing material, such as ink, on a real existing material, such as a scroll.

[10] Schleicher, »Accounts of a Dying Scroll,« 14.

Some characterize ›material existence‹ as even partial durability, which shows a basic understanding of materiality, while others call for ›sufficient durability‹ in the temporal sense, stating that if the writing lasts or can be seen for less than one day, it does not count as existing at all. This indicates that in the Jewish ruling writing's most important and fundamental function is that of permanence – and so permeance also dictates the status of the writing surface. Vilem Flusser presents an alternative Jewish-based model of writing: ›writing as digging‹. Based on his interpretation of the Jewish story of the creation of mankind, which suggests the making of a clay figure by God, Flusser explains writing as a transformation from the pictographic and mystical world into the world of notions, structure and history.[11] If in this allegory writing stands for the creation, or the beginning, genizah might stand for the end, the final resting place of both body and text: »for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return« (Genesis 3:19).

Reproducing the Holy

Genizah is an act performed on sacred texts, but with the invention of print in the 15th century, Jews had to rethink and redefine anew what precisely constitutes texts. The new technology seemed very similar to handwriting and followed the same logic of phonetic alphabet code. Yet, the human hands that were used to hold the writing device itself were now pressing upon the printing press. While writing the holy, which is the word of God, had clear and distinct instructions, the recipe for printing the holy was yet to be completed. New questions arose: Is print equivalent to writing? Is a printed Torah valid? Do halakhic verdicts of handwritten texts apply to printed ones? Rabbinic views were not unanimous. But one thing was consistent, and that was a methodology for comparison between the two technologies, placing a verdict based on its similarity or dissimilarity to writing.

One example is the case of a Rabbi from 16th century in Italy, who determined that printing on a parchment is prohibited because of *Marit Aiyn* (appearance), a halakhic debate concerning the impression one gets from certain permitted acts or artifacts that resemble in appearance forbidden ones. This ruling was based upon the fact that although a printed text could be mistakenly taken by a naked eye to be a handwritten one, it ought not to be so because there is a technical difference between the two in the ›quality‹ of holiness. A similar distinction can be extracted from a 17th century adjudicator in Turkey, who claimed that the appropriate treatment of a damaged handwritten book is putting it through

[11] Vilem Flusser and Mark Poster, *Does Writing Have a Future?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 13–14.

genizah, while printed books should only be covered with a sheet.[12] Importantly, both treatments resemble burial habits. A Rabbi from Prague also argues in a 18th century rulings that the Torah is a text written on parchment and that one should remember that referring to printed texts on paper as books is only a metaphor,[13] which is employed to help make sense of the new medium. He also makes another distinction between those two items, or technologies, guided by halakhic logics that a printed book does not share the sacred and physical characteristics of the written book. Although the explicit distinctions between the two labors of writing and printing were made on different grounds and by different actions, it is clear that making the distinction was of great importance to halakha and its adjudicators.

As the original text is believed to be lost, what has been left for thousands of years are only copies of the Bible. Each copy, until the invention of printing press, was deemed as having a direct relation to God, and as such was considered holy. When copying techniques changed, the copy of the ›original‹ copy in the newer method was appraised as that of a lesser value. The new product was deemed not to have the same qualities, and more importantly, did not fulfill the same demands that its antecedents did. The texture of the writing surface, the cumbersome labor, the required concentration, and the passion and devotion put into the manufacturing of hand-written texts – all that was met with a mechanical alternative. Printing the holy created a series of paradoxes, for example ›the original copy‹, that is in this case the handwritten Torah as opposed to the ›regular‹ copy, the printed Torah.

Many copies were to be made in a short period of time, with the use of a machine, making it an unthinking technique, with the end-product lacking direct human touch – and hence of diminished holiness. An adjudicator named Landsofer claimed that writing is a kind of drawing in which every letter is unique both in its making and intention. He described the process of printing as a non-mindful, unthinking work and then coined the phrase *Melechet Ha-kof*, a labor comparable to that of a monkey.[14] This term contrasts with *Melechet Machshevet*, which means ›a thoughtful act,‹ the halakhic title for all types of labor that are prohibited during Shabbat and holidays, including writing as previously mentioned. *Melechet Ha-kof* is an example of an act carried out faultlessly in terms of execution, but lacking human *kavana*, that is, deep intention and meaning, a quality and ability reserved only to human agents. This term could easily be

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12 Yitzhak Z. Kahane, »Print in Halakha,« in *Researches in Responsa Literature* (Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute and Bar Ilan University Press, 1973), 279.

13 Ibid., 302.

14 Avram Israel Reisner, »On the Exodus (and Genesis) of Shemot,« 2003, last accessed March 13, 2020, https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/20012004/Reisner%20Shemot.pdf, 4–7; Avraham Berliner, »First Printed Books and Their Impact on Jewish Culture« in *Selected Writings* B. ed. Avraham Haberman and Avraham Berliner (Unknown: Rav Kook Press, 1945), 124; Kahane, »Print in Halakha,« 275–276.

called a Golem's labor, or a more contemporary analogy, a robot's labor. While written Torah was the labor of a professional scribe called *sofer stam* (writer of books, tefilin and mezuzot), the printing of the books was sometimes made by a goy, a gentile. The *sofer stam* had specific punctilious instructions: an obligation to copy the text from one parchment to another, not to recall text or know it by heart, to show deep commitment in his toil, intention and obligation to God with writing every letter, and was prohibited to correct a letter by etching.

Analog Sounds of the Sacred

Audio cassettes are an example of analog sound recording technology in which the magnetic tape captures fugitive sounds as physical traces of sound.[15] The naked eye cannot see these traces, but the vibrations of sound waves are stored electromagnetically as evidence of what has happened. As Rothenbuhler and Peters claim, the stored information functions as an indexical sign, an actual connection between the record and the event recorded.[16] What of audio cassettes containing holy content from a halakhic point of view? If these cassettes hold words from the Bible, or even the name of God, should they not be subjected to genizah procedures?

More than 40 years ago, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef was asked to look into the issue and determine the matter of erasing liturgical songs that mention God's name. As one of the first to address the question, Yosef applied criteria of old media to the new, considering the technological predecessor of the audio cassette, the Gramophone. He based his ruling on a previous one, which stated that it is not forbidden to erase the name (of God) from a Gramophone record, since it has no forms of letters in it whatsoever. Yosef invoked Maimonides, who ruled that God's name should never be blotted out. The latter lived in the 12th century, a period where the common storage media was parchment holding handwriting. Resorting to the views of his predecessors, Yosef's ruling provides a physical explanation: »the sound waves are being registered on the cassette in an electronic way, that no human eye can see, and only through electronic process can one re-listen to the pre-recorded songs, and therefore it is not forbidden to erase them by other recordings, even if they contain the holy names.«[17] Yosef went to Talmudic literature, bringing a case that demonstrates that if one cannot see and make intelligible holy texts, they are not considered holy, or even considered to be writing. Since the human eye cannot identify the writing, or for that matter any other readable

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15 Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 4.

16 Eric Rothenbuhler, John Durham et.al., »Defining Phonography: An Experiment in Theory,« *The Musical Quarterly* 81, no.2 (1997): 246.

17 Ovadia Yosef, *Y'haveh Daat IV* (Jerusalem: A«B Press, 1979–1992), 50 (נ) [in Hebrew].

traces, and since only a deliberate act initiates the technical process of writing the name of God, erasure of electromagnetic traces is permitted. Other modern adjudicator claimed, after relying on the explanation of a technician, that because the recording process involves magnetic impression over iron oxide coating, without any lines, cracks or drawings (at least none that are observable) it likewise could not be considered as writing. If there is no writing, the question of erasure is annulled.

This case of audio and genizah demonstrates the intricate negotiations between the tradition-oriented halakha and the advent of new technologies. In an article that illustrates the halakhic challenges of understanding and using new media technologies written by an expert in the Jewish law, the question of erasure takes on a new dimension.[18] Covering key responsas he emphasizes another crucial criterion: that of substance. When the technology does not produce a product that consists of recognizable substance, the destruction of its content is not deemed by halakha as erasure, or overwriting in case of the audiocassettes. *The Book of Writing and Erasing* (ספר הכותב והמוחק), written in 1997, summarizes the majority of halakhic rulings concerning writing and erasing throughout the torah, later commentary and recent decisors, and as such, constitutes an anthology to the ontology of writing, erasing and everything in between. The book cites halakhic legal scholars saying that for texts to be considered texts de facto, they must be written on a tangible surface, such as paper, parchment, or stone, with a tangible substance such as ink, charcoal, dye, etc.[19] It seems that according to this logic, writing is not only a matter of legible letters but also of tangible substance, both the writing surface and writing material.

Therefore, »writing with the mouth,«[20] as sound recording is named in some responsas, is not really writing, rather an antinomy. Other responsas mention the literal action of writing with the mouth, namely, putting a pen in the mouth and writing with it, saying these actions are not considered writing. Maimonides, for example, claimed that writing with the left hand, the back of one's hand, with feet, mouth, or an elbow, is not banned, which means that in his understanding it is not writing, and therefore could be done on the Shabbat. Accordingly, erasure can only occur in a situation where writing is taking place. In other responsas recording is described as ›making impressions (or inscription) with speech‹. Recording, therefore, according to the halakha, is understood from a textual perspective, with sound recording being a secondary act to writing, yet still not writing proper but something more akin to inscriptions and impressions.

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[18] Steven H. Resnicoff, »Contemporary Issues in Halakhah,« in *Modern Judaism: An Oxford Guide*, ed. N. De Lange and M. Freud-Kandel (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 365.

[19] Yitzhak E. Adler, *The Book of Writing and Erasing: Halakhot and Rules on Writing and Erasing on Shabbat, and Other Topics* (Hebrew) (Ofakim: YA Adler, 1997), 15.

[20] Ibid., 41.

Digital Genizah

With the proliferation of personal computers and the internet, rabbis were flooded with questions and deliberations concerning the usage of new media in everyday lives, and genizah or erasure of God's names was one of the most popularly debated topics. The new technology gave rise to new questions: what happens or what should happen to holy digital texts when they are out of use? Does one erase the word God or other biblical verses when writing with a word processor program? Should one bury a USB drive or a disc? What would be the halakhic verdict for digital genizah?

One contemporary adjudicator takes up the challenge by comparing the analog and the digital in terms of their holiness status.[21] Analog recording, as above, is not readable to human eyes and therefore is not regarded as writing, which solves the problem of genizah from the outset. Yet when it comes to the digital, the relevant comparison, at least according to this adjudicator, is between writing and photography: he compares the digital to a photocopy of the bible, written in small letters that require the use of a magnifying glass. This mini bible is not deemed holy because being unreadable to the naked human eye it does not ultimately constitute writing. To his understanding, the hard disk has no real letters, only magnetic traces, and for this reason deletion is permitted. As to the letters that appear on the computer screen, these are »not writings [...] worse, it is electric light,«[22] and they are quick to vanish. He urges his readers to distinguish in their understanding of the computer between the screen and the disc, a common distinction among modern halakhic legal scholars. To delete text from the computer is not like erasing it from a CD; not because of the different mechanics of erasure, but because of the difference in visibility and quality of presence. Rabbi Yosef also dealt with the question of digital erasure by resorting to his early ruling about audiocassettes. To him, deleting content from a CD is not a direct act of erasure because there are no real words inscribed on the disc, only encoded information, which makes the act of deletion permissible. Alternatively, another view suggests that one should refrain from deleting God's name because of *Marit Aiyn*, meaning that the act may look like or be perceived as the act of erasure – even if it is not the actual case.[23]

In these aforementioned responsas there are views contradicting the belief that the analog has a real, indexical quality to it, while the digital is symbolic, based on translating reality into numerical sequences. Moreover, these halakhic deliberations often put both the CD and the audiocassettes in the same category, based on the appearance of the media artifacts rather than on their technology.

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21 Pinhas Z'bihi, »Ateret Paz,« A2 no. 14, 4, accessed March 13, 2020, http://www.bsd-paz.org/.

22 Ibid.

23 Yoel Cohen, *God, Jews and the Media: Religion and Israel's Media* (London: Routledge, 2012), 23.

The emphasis halakha makes in this case is on appearance, on the tangible qualities of the different media, mainly on the text's materiality and accessibility. If written or printed texts are like the solids of Jewish media materiality, the digital and the analog are gas and plasma; they resemble each other in appearance, but differ in their chemical qualities.

The consensus among leading figures in the halakhic community has been that the letter in the digital does not properly exist, and hence is not writing: when a word appears on the screen, it is actually electric light – electrons that are being fired constantly, creating patterns that are eventually seen on the screen as words in rapid movement which the human eye cannot detect. They interpret and characterize the letter in its electronic, digital form as non-permanent in time, not complete in space, not static and not visible to humans without usage of technological media, and therefore, according to their understanding it does not exist. It is non-permanent because it is changeable, constantly being refreshed without leaving traces visible to humans. Deliberations about screens are widespread and diverse and include, for example, this question: »Is there any difference between the types of screens? Do flat screens produce more *realness* due to the liquid crystal display than traditional television screens that used electronic rays?«[24] These questions vary in technology but similar in logic – the technology of the screen is the crucial technology when debating the digital, and not digital technology itself. Perhaps because the screen embodies the key three principles of writing according to Jewish halakha: appearance, corporeality and permanence.

A discussion titled »Cyber Torah« states that letters appearing on screen are not the outcome of physical changes, unlike the ink printed on the paper, rather, it is only the appearance of a text, produced by contrast of dark and light. In this discussion the debater chose a specific medium to visualize his claim – electricity: »This can be compared to a group of flashlights that, when shined upon a surface, produce the letters of a Holy Name. We could hardly suggest that by turning off the lights one is erasing a Holy Name«.[25] In another debate, focusing on LCD monitors, another rabbi yet again used electricity as the precedence in previous responsas questioning whether it is permissible to unplug an instalment of light bulbs that spell out the name of God. The Rabbi answered that since electric supply makes the lights constantly ›rewrite‹ the name of God, shutting down the electricity will not be considered an erasure. This logic is applied to resolve the question of onscreen writing.[26] Another display technology worth mentioning

[24] Unknown, »Ask the rabbi: deleting the name of God from a computer screen,« December 2010, accessed March 13, 2020, http://www.kipa.co.il/ask/show/232532-%D7%9E%D7%97%D7%99%D7%A7%D7%AA-%D7%A9%D7%9D--%D7%94-%D7%9E%D7%9E%D7%A1%D7%9A-%D7%9E%D7%97%D7%A9%D7%91.

[25] Mordecai Kornfeld, »The Weekly Internet: Erasing Cyber-Torah,« accessed March 13, 2020, http://www.shemayisrael.co.il/parsha/kornfeld/archives/re%27eh1.htm.

[26] Harvey Belovski, »So... Can You Write God's Name On A Computer?,« January 2008, accessed March 13, 2020, https://www.rabbibelovski.co.uk/2008/01/so-can-you-write-gods-name-on-computer.html.

is the E-ink or E-paper, used mainly in e-readers (e.g. Amazon‹s Kindle). If in previous display technologies electricity produces the appearance of permeance, the E-ink presents a different display technology in which the letters persist even when power is turned off. This technology is based on millions of microcapsules that contain oppositely charged black and white particles which create patterns forming the text. In this way, electricity is only used to alter what's written on the screen, not maintain it.[27] Still, such texts are not genizah obligated as well, even though they are more permanent, owing to the lack of the physical act of writing.

Considering the *genizah* from a digital perspective might seem as an oxymoron, the question of archiving the holy under conditions of information technology. John Durham Peters says jokingly wonders »what a digital *genizah* would look like, perhaps one already exists in Google's servers.«[28] In this he seems to suggest that digital *genizah* might not have an appearance and not even a full real presence in space. We are living in times where local storage is transient while the cloud storage,[29] though far off, unknown and alienated from the place where the information was formed is more permanent and perhaps more real in presence.

Conclusion

The genizah reveals a halakhic media theory, complete with its own peculiar approach to technique, medium, materiality, impression, meaning and appearance. This halakhic media theory, which concerns the lifecycle of holy texts, seeks to establish the status of the holy within the material, the trace of the otherworldly inside the physical and the technical. The halakha presents an alternative to the traditional tenets of media theory, with its differentiation between the symbolic and the nonsymbolic, and the analog as opposed to the digital. In halakhic terms, the written texts reigns supreme, constituting the ultimate yardstick for holiness, while all other media are measured against it, and hence necessarily deemed substandard to it. They are judged by their resemblance to writing rather than their own material qualities.

Genizah also affords an alternative conception of the relation between writing and deleting, which has traditionally been taken as constituting a binary opposition. For the halakha, to erase is the reverse the act of writing, to cancel it out ex post facto. The practice of genizah may be viewed as the interregnum between writing and erasing, the twilight zone between what is no longer or not fully holy

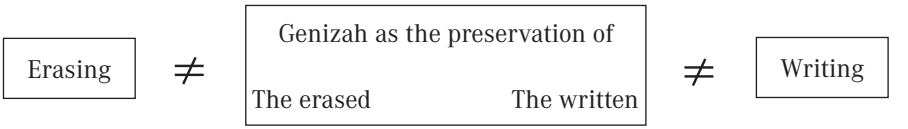
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27 David Auerbach, »Deleting the Digital Name of God,« August 2018, accessed March 13, 2020, https://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/269413/deleting-the-digital-name-of-god.

28 John D. Peters, »Proliferation and Obsolescence of the Historical Record in the Digital Era,« in *Cultures of Obsolescence: History, Materiality, and the Digital Age*, ed. Babette Tischleder and Sarah Wasserman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) 79–96.

29 Auerbach, »Deleting the Digital Name of God«.

text and what will never be entirely secular and mundane text. Genizah is the limbo of the Jewish religion's media. Insofar as encompassing the substandard, the defected, the blemished, and the outworn, genizah is the storehouse for the preservation of the written as well as the erased. On the one hand, genizah is the archive for texts once holy but no longer. They are kept since still deemed as holding something of the holiness they served to worship – but ultimetly failed to satisfy the condition of perfection.



Yet on the other hand, *genizah* is also the archive of the erased, and of the erasure itself. It is the final resting place of the holy errata. Although the text may be flawed or even erroneous, it is still kept and preserved as having been touched by holiness. Erasing in Hebrew is M.KH.K (מ.ח.ק) which originally meant to smoothen leathers in the process of transforming them into parchments. This might be suggestive of the material bond between the content and the material of writing that genizah upholds. Ultimately it is the manmade quality of writing which makes a text holy. Sanctity may appear textually only when a human is involved in the process. The *sofer stam* thus emerges as the medium of holy texts: he is required to show deep devotion and intent during the copying, which is to be done manually. If the *sofer stam* brings holy texts into existence, midwifing the sacred by copying, the genizah is the terminus of all these texts, immaculate or faulty. The logic of writing accompanies the holy both in entering and exiting the world.