

The number of possible matches the computer analyzing Cairo Genizah fragments can make per hour

10 million



“The computer compares two images of manuscripts to discover if they have the same writer”

—Yaacov Choueka

Putting the Puzzle Pieces Together

More than a hundred years after the discovery of the Cairo Genizah, its best-kept secrets may soon tumble out thanks to a mega-computer at Tel Aviv University (TAU) that is cataloging and digitalizing the fragments, one by one, at record speed.

The TAU mega-computer is actually made up of more than 100 linked computers that analyze 500 visual clues for each of 157,514 Genizah fragments, which means checking a total of over 12 billion possible pairings. Already over 3 billion paired fragments have been examined since the process began on May 16, and work should be finished by the end of June.

“The computer compares two images of manuscripts to discover if they have the same writer, by checking the writing structure and ink, among other factors. It uses the same method by which two paintings can be compared to see if they were done by the same artist,” says Professor Yaacov Choueka, leader of the Genizah project, who is fluent in all of the languages the documents are written in — Hebrew, Aramaic, and Judeo-Arabic.

The Genizah, discovered in 1896 in a storeroom

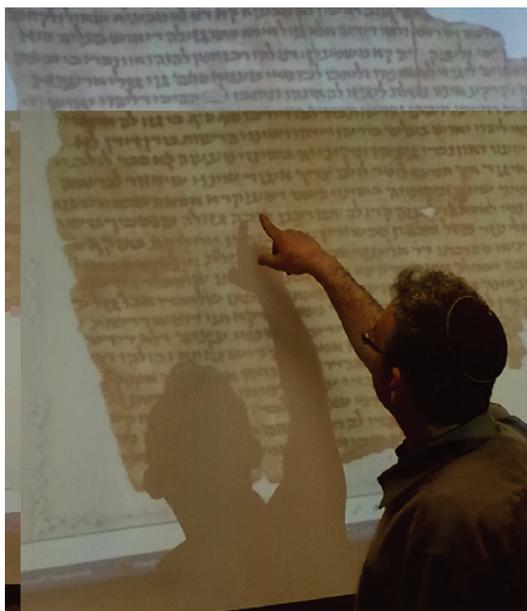
at Cairo’s Ben Ezra synagogue, included more than 300,000 pages. Some of them date back as far as 1,000 years, including writings by the Rambam, who was known to frequent the Ben Ezra synagogue.

Following their initial discovery, the documents and fragments were scattered across the globe in libraries and private collections, the largest of which are at England’s Cambridge and Manchester universities. Until now, scholars had to travel to wherever a fragment was stored to try and piece puzzle parts together. In 1999, Canadian philanthropist Albert Friedberg committed \$20 million to fund the Friedberg Genizah Project, enabling scholars to explore the vast wealth of information about Jewish life in Egypt.

“There is everything here,” says Professor Choueka, who was himself born in Cairo in 1936. “Contracts of marriage and divorce, *tzedakah* lists, medications, lists of Jewish-run pharmacies, even alchemic recipes for making silver — shedding light on Jewish life from centuries ago.”

The high-resolution digital images of the manuscripts are, in a certain sense, “better” than the original manuscripts, as they can be visually enhanced by computer-generated viewing tools and accessed worldwide through the project’s online research platform. By using this one-of-a-kind technology, the Genizah project is able to build a unique database that will be accessible to serious researchers and the public alike.

—Shira Yehudit Djalilmand



Jewish Heritage at the Senate

When freshman Congressman Brad Schneider (D-IL) took office in January, he said, “the first thing I did was put a mezuzah on my door. It wasn’t a question. It’s who I am.”

Rep. Schneider joined several Jewish elected representatives who proudly displayed their colors at a luncheon marking Jewish American Heritage Month. Rep. Brian Schatz of Hawaii stated that for him, being Jewish means “fighting for what is right, not what is easy.” Former comedian-turned-senator Al Franken (D-MN) mentioned that his Holocaust-generation parents taught him how to laugh “and to remember.”



PHOTO: SHMAUELENCHEVSKY

"Fighting for what's right, not what's easy." Front row (l-r): Harvey Kaylie, Rabbi Elie Abadie, Sen. Brian Schatz, Daniel Kestenbaum. Back row (l-r): Sen. Richard Blumenthal, Simcha Eichenstein, Ezra Friedlander

It was Jewish congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL) who introduced a resolution in 2006 declaring May as Jewish American Heritage Month. This year's celebration was coordinated by the Friedlander Group, a New York- and Washington-based public policy consulting firm, chaired by Greg Rosenbaum of the Jewish Heritage Month Foundation, and hosted by Rabbi Joseph Potasnik.

A smattering of elected officials, Jews and non-Jews, from both sides of the aisle, converged in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Room. "This was Johnson's office when he served as the senate majority leader," says Ezra Friedlander, president of the Friedlander Group.

Honorees were chosen for their contributions to Jewish heritage or for having achieved a milestone. The Safra Synagogue, established by the Safra family as a spiritual home for Sephardic Jewry on Manhattan's East Side was commemorating its 10th anniversary. Its spiritual leader, Rabbi Elie Abadie, and ten founding couples attended. Simcha Eichenstein was honored for his contribution to government, and Harvey and Gloria Kaylie were honored for their contribution to Ohel and Camp Kaylie, a camp for children of all abilities.

Daniel Kestenbaum of the boutique auction house Kestenbaum & Company was honored for preserving and publicizing Jewish art and culture. "Since most of us aren't going out and making connections in states where there aren't any Jews, we can nevertheless make a good impression on their elected officials," Kestenbaum told *Mishpacha*.

Some non-Jewish elected officials used the occasion to connect with a Jewish audience. Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), who is married to a Lebanese-American attorney, noted Israel's importance as an American ally. Rep. Joseph Kennedy III (D-MA) thanked the Jewish community for its contributions.

"It was nice for me to hear Senator Bob Casey [D-PA] speak about his long friendship with my father, and how you can be successful without compromising your faith," said Harry Rothenberg of the Allen Rothenberg Law Firm LLP, honored for contributions to the legal system. "When we davened Minchah there, it drove home the debt of gratitude we feel to the US for the religious freedoms it established from the outset."

— Barbara Bensoussan



PHOTO: ARGONNE NATIONAL LABORATORY

BUSINESS & TECHNOLOGY

TAKE HEART » Heart Failure 2013 might be a dubious name for a medical conference, but some heart-warming news came out of the gathering in Lisbon: the first drug to improve heart failure mortality in over a decade. The new drug boosts the level of naturally occurring Coenzyme Q10 often lacking in cardiac patients. It heralds an advance over statins, which reduce cholesterol, but also suppress CoQ10. Initial trials show risk of heart failure was cut in half. (*Science Daily*)

CLEAR AS CEMENT » It's not lead into gold, but it might be better: Alchemists at the Department of Energy's Argonne National Laboratory are conjuring liquid metal from liquid cement. The product offers better resistance to corrosion than traditional metals and is less brittle than traditional glass. Applications include thin-film resistors used in LCD displays in computer monitors and handheld devices.

TOP DOG » Don't feel sorry for the poor hot dog vendor — he may be making more money than you. A top dog vendor in New York can earn up to \$100,000 a year, according to a *Forbes* scan of out-of-the-box job opportunities. Personal shoppers get \$25,000 to \$100,000; virtual headhunters \$250 to \$10,000 per referral; ice cream tasters scoop up \$56,000, and a lipstick reader (instead of palms) can get as much as \$200 an hour.

— Nehemiah Horowitz



Money Saver

Save on flowers for your wedding by sticking to seasonal blooms. (*USAToday*)