



## Call for Papers

### **Treasures of Jewish Material Culture: Living Archives of Memory, Heritage, and Research in the Middle East and North Africa**

The Ben Zvi Institute, Jerusalem, March 29-30, 2026

The Ben Zvi Institute in Jerusalem invites scholars to submit proposals for a two-day conference, to be held in Jerusalem on **March 29–30, 2026**. This conference will explore the rich material legacy of Jewish communities in the Middle East and North Africa, examining how these tangible remnants serve as living archives of social, cultural, and historical experience.

Although today only a few Jewish communities remain in the Middle East and North Africa, the region preserves a rich and multifaceted Jewish past. This heritage is embodied in an extensive array of material culture, including hundreds of synagogues and cemeteries, and countless Judaica items and textual sources dispersed across Arab and Islamic countries. These materials are not static relics; they form part of a *living archive*, a dynamic and tangible conduit through which the histories and experiences of Jewish communities can be reinterpreted within their lived environments and the social, cultural, political, and historical dynamics that shaped them and continue to reshape them. The study and preservation of this living archive emerges within the broader context of minority rights and cultural heritage in the region, though this conference will focus specifically on Jewish heritage itself rather than minority issues more broadly.

Building on this perspective, the dynamic character of the living archive is continually reinforced, as ongoing discoveries and studies of archives, sites, and genizot further underscore its vitality. It is a continually evolving repository, offering invaluable sources for both qualitative and quantitative research across disciplines. Beyond their historical significance, these materials are vital for understanding how Jewish heritage is preserved, reused, and reinterpreted within local cultural practices and public discourse today—usually taking place through government institutions and civil-society organizations—most of whom are not Jewish and who regard the products of Jewish culture as part of the local culture.

The conference invites contributions that explore, but are not limited to, the following themes:

- **Mapping Jewish Material Culture:** aesthetics, spatial organization, and reinterpretations of Jewish-Muslim relations
- **Jewish Sites as Spaces of Memory:** synagogues, cemeteries, and public heritage sites



- **Libraries, Genizot, and Papyri:** archival discoveries and the study of Jewish life in MENA
- **Contemporary Responsibilities:** preservation and legal status of Jewish sites, Judaica, and cultural heritage in modern Arab states
- **Nationalism and Identity:** the positioning of Jewish heritage within national narratives
- **Repurposing and Reuse:** adaptive uses of Jewish sites and Judaica in contemporary contexts

Each talk will be 20 minutes long, followed by a discussion.

Interested participants should submit a 300-word abstract and a short biography to: via [this link](#) by November 9, 2025.

Questions may be directed at Ms. Sandra Fortus: [Sandra@ybz.org.il](mailto:Sandra@ybz.org.il)

**The conference will be conducted primarily in Hebrew, with several lectures in English. Proposals may be submitted in either language.**