



# ROOM 2

## Life in the community

The council of the *aljama*, the governing body within the Jewish community, had full authority over its members. The council proclaimed the ordinances, which had to be approved by the crown. The *aljama* was also in charge of collecting the taxes that the community had to pay directly to the royal treasury, since the Jews who lived within the Catalan territories were legally considered *servi regis*, or property of the king. Internal laws, known as the *takkanot*, were drawn up in order to rule the community life based on Jewish law. These *takkanot* were announced in the synagogue. There were community institutions in charge of providing protection and social aid to the most needy. Some of these were: the *somre holim*, aid for the ill; the *caparin*, to bury the dead; and the *heqdes*, for alms and hospital. These societies functioned by private donations. Astruc Caravida, from Girona, bequeathed, in his 1345 testament, an important sum of money in order to establish “the charity for the impoverished Jews of the *call* of Girona.”

### The life cycle

The first week of life of the child was considered dangerous, because the Jewish society, as all of medieval society, was superstitious and they feared the influence of the evil spirits. In order



Jewish woman with music instruments; *Golden Haggadah*, fol 15r (14<sup>th</sup> C), British Library, London

to keep them away different amulets were used. If the child was a boy, he would be circumcised on the eighth day. The ceremony, performed with ritual instruments by the *mohel*, took place in the synagogue. The *sandaq*, or godfather, holds the boy on his lap on a special cushion, using a ritual knife like the one that can be seen in the showcase. During this ceremony the baby receives his name. Girls received their names on the Saturday following the birth.

The most common names among boys were: Astruc, Bellshom, Benet, Bonastruc, Bonet, Bonhome, Bondia, Bonjuà, Bonsenyor, Bonhom, Caravida, Perfet, Vidal, and among girls were: Amorettes, Astruga, Bonadona, Bonafilla, Bonastruga, Clara, Dolça, Ester, Estelina, Floreta, Goig, Mairona, Perla, Preciosa and Regina. ■

Forty days after the birth, the new mother was required to purify herself in the *mikveh*, the ritual bath. This was an important moment in the woman's life cycle as were the purification baths after each menstruation and on the morning of her wedding. The ritual baths had to have specific measurements and structures. They had to be supplied by running water and filled to a specific amount. The *mikveh* was not always a separate building. At times due to urban conditions of the *call* and the difficulties of space, the *mikveh* could



be a room within the public baths of the city which the *aljama* would rent from the Christian owner. This was the case in the 13<sup>th</sup> century in Valencia and Girona. By the mid 14<sup>th</sup> century the *mikveh* in Girona formed part of the synagogue and belonged to the *aljama*. **2**

**2** Ritual use of a mikveh  
Hispanic Haggadah, fol. 90r  
(14<sup>th</sup> C), British Library, London

The Jewish People had an obligation to grow and multiply.

This is why the most important event in life was marriage. During the betrothal ceremony, *erussin*, in the presence of both families, the future husband placed a ring on the bride's finger and pronounced the ritual word: "with this ring you have been consecrated to me as my wife, according to the Law of Moses" **3**. Afterwards, the marriage certificate, or *ketubah*, was signed. The Catalan Jews also signed a document called *shetar aharauiuc*, in which the husband agreed to return the dowry to the bride's family if she were to die without having had children. During the ceremony, which was held



**3** Engagement and freely of the ring; *Hebrew Manuscript*, fol 25r (15<sup>th</sup> C), Biblioteca Palatina, Parma

under a canopy called a *chuppah*, the rabbi pronounced seven ritual blessings. He then broke a branch from a tree or a crystal glass in order to remember the destruction of the Temple and to symbolize the fragility of human happiness.

## The months of the jewish year

**TISHRÍ** (September-October)  
**MARJESHVÁN** (October-November)  
**KISLEV** (November-December)  
**TEVET** (December-January)  
**SHEVAT** (January-February)  
**ADAR** (February-March- this month is doubled during the embolic years)  
**NISÁN** (March –April)  
**IYAR** (April-May)  
**SIVÁN** (May-June)  
**TAMMUZ** (June-July)  
**AV** (July-August)  
**ELUL** (August-September)

## The jewish festivities along the year

**ROSH HASHANAH:** The New Year, (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> days of Tishri)  
**YOM KIPPUR:** The Day of Atonement, Day of repentance and expiation of sins (10<sup>th</sup> day of Tishri)  
**HANUKKAH:** The Festival of Lights, Commemoration of the rededication of the temple (25<sup>th</sup> day of Kislev) **4**



**4** Purim celebration; *Italian Haggadah*, fol. 19r (14<sup>th</sup> C), British Library, London

**PURIM:** The Festival of Esther, Celebration of the liberation of Jews of Persia (14<sup>th</sup> day of Adar)  
**PESSACH:** Passover, Celebration of the freedom from slavery and the Exodus from Egypt (15<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan)  
**SHAVUOT:** Pentecost or Feast of Weeks, Celebration of the offering of the first fruits to the temple and the giving of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai (6<sup>th</sup> day of Sivan)  
**TISHAH BE-AV:** The Ninth of Av, Commemoration of the destruction of the Temple  
**SUKKOT** (Feast of Tabernacles), Commemoration of the 40 years of wandering in the desert (15<sup>th</sup> day of Tishri)  
**SIMHAT TORAH:** The Rejoicing of the Law, Celebration of the completion of the reading of the Torah in the synagogue (23<sup>rd</sup> day of Tishri)