



## ROOM 4

# The first jewish population in Catalonia

The Jews did not arrive to Catalonia, but rather it was Catalonia that arrived at a place where there were already Jews going back for a rather long time. Ever since the first centuries of Christianity, we begin to have evidence of a considerable number of Jews in the area. It must be noted that not all of them came from the Diaspora of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries C.E., caused by the destruction of Jerusalem and the Roman occupation of Palestine. Other reasons must be considered that would explain the expansion of Judaism within the local population. A strong proselytism took place in the Roman provinces which meant that the Jewish religion spread among the upper classes of the Roman and Visigothic societies. This fact, together with the repeated migrations of Jews who arrived from other areas of the Mediterranean, such as the Maghreb, are elements which must be tak-

en into consideration when determining the origin of the Jewish communities established along the coasts and cities of the future Catalonia.

From the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E. onwards, quite a few documents bear witness to the Christian church's desire to eradicate Judaism. These documents give written proof that there were Jews established in various

places in the peninsula.

Equally, it is from these centuries that we start to find archeologic remains that gives constancy of the presence of the Jews in Catalan land **1**. A few documents found in the Catalan archives, dating from the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, indicate the presence of Jews in the most important cities of the country. In 876 the Frank king, Charles the Bald, gives thanks to the Barcelonese, through a Jewish emissary, a certain Judacot or Judah, the Hebrew, for their fidelity. In 985, when Al-Mansur destroyed



**1** Trilingual gravestone with inscriptions in Hebrew, Greek and Latin, 6<sup>th</sup> C; *Treasury of the Tortosa Cathedral*



**2** Shield of Catalonia in a Hebrew manuscript; *Hispanic Haggadah, fol 27v (14<sup>th</sup> C), British Library, London*

Barcelona, the Jews were just as adversely affected as the Christians, as reflected in a document which mentions the lands and property belong to Jews who died in that attack. **2**

In reference to Girona, a document dating 898 mentions the arrival and the establishment of 25 Jewish families, which would correspond to approximately 100 people. They came from *Judaicas*, a rural area not far from Girona. These are the first documented Jews in the city. This does not mean that there were no Jews in earlier periods. It is probable that some Jews established themselves as merchants and artisans at the beginning of urban life, between the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE and 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, along with the Roman army. After the 7<sup>th</sup> century, many Jews may have fled the city due to the raids by the Moors which badly damaged the area. Once the Moorish threat disappeared, those who had taken refuge in the countryside returned to urban area which was more appropriate for their social and economic lifestyle. Already in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, documents refer to Jews who were active in the urban life: men and women who buy, sell, barter, pay tithe and taxes, sign documents, own houses and a synagogue. They are Jews, both men and women, who live within the walls of Girona and form part of the society and of urban history. **3**



**3** Representation of Jews in the Tapestry of the Creation, Girona Cathedral, 12<sup>th</sup> C; *Fotography: Josep Ma. Oliveras (Patronat Call de Girona)*