



ROOM 7

The cultural heritage



■ Dance of Jewish Women. *Sarajevo Haggadah*, fol. 28r. Catalonia, s. XIV. Facsimile. MHJ, Girona.

Very few archaeological and material remains have reached us from the Jewish communities who lived in medieval Catalonia. Nevertheless, its cultural legacy is very important, and includes nearly all the sciences. Between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries, more than one hundred and twenty Jewish authors devoted themselves to the study of philosophy, theology, exegesis, literature, astronomy, astrology and medicine. Likewise, the art of writing and expressing feelings translated into high quality, touching poems, by such figures as Messulam de Piera, Moshe ben Nahman, Isaac ben Seshet, Mimó Gallipapa or Moshe Natan. Of the poems which have been conserved, one is attributed

to a Jewish poetess called Merecina de Girona, who in the fifteenth century wrote, there these beautiful verses:

Blessed, majestic and terrible
You established the Torah in Israel
happy are they who seek your shelter
they do not forget the Lord's will.

I will say what I must, and tell
The truth to him who taunts me
Keep slander far away from me;
Grant peace to the people of Israel.

PUT IT BACK IN ITS PLACE, THANK YOU



ROOM 8

The letters of Moshe ben Nahman

Moshe ben Nahman was a famous rabbi and a great intellectual of his time. He spent nearly his entire life in the city of Girona, where –to make a living– he worked as a doctor. He had disciples coming from everywhere, and many years after his death there were still thinkers who continued to consider his words and writings as an authentic guide. Isaac ben Seshet, an important Catalan Jewish philosopher, who at



■ A Jewish wise man. *Rylands Haggadah, fol. 28b.* Catalonia, s. XIV. Facsimile. MHJ, Girona.

the end of the fourteenth century affirmed that the great thinker from Girona was “a highly learned man, whose words were like burning coals. He was trusted throughout Catalonia as if Moses had spoken in the name of God”.

Around 1267, He left Girona and started off for the land of Israel. In Jerusalem, he contributed to the reconstruction of Jewish life, and he even raised a synagogue there which is still existing today. He was also in Akko (San Juan de Acre) and there gave the sermon of the New Year of 1270.

From the land of Israel, Moshe ben Nahman wrote beautiful and touching letters which reveal nostalgia this teacher from Girona felt on behalf of this city and its people. In one of them, addressed to his son, Nahman, who was in Girona, he expressed himself as follows:

“I am a man who has felt the stab of pain. I left the table laid, I moved away from friends and companions since the trip is long and full of difficulties. I, who was a prince among my brothers, now live in a shelter for passers-by. House and inheritance, I’ve lost it all; soul and spirit I left behind there with the sons and daughters whom I loved, and with the small children that I caressed in my lap. They are on the first step of my zeal, as pleasurable as they were. How I wish I could have them now! I will have my eyes and heart on them for evermore”.