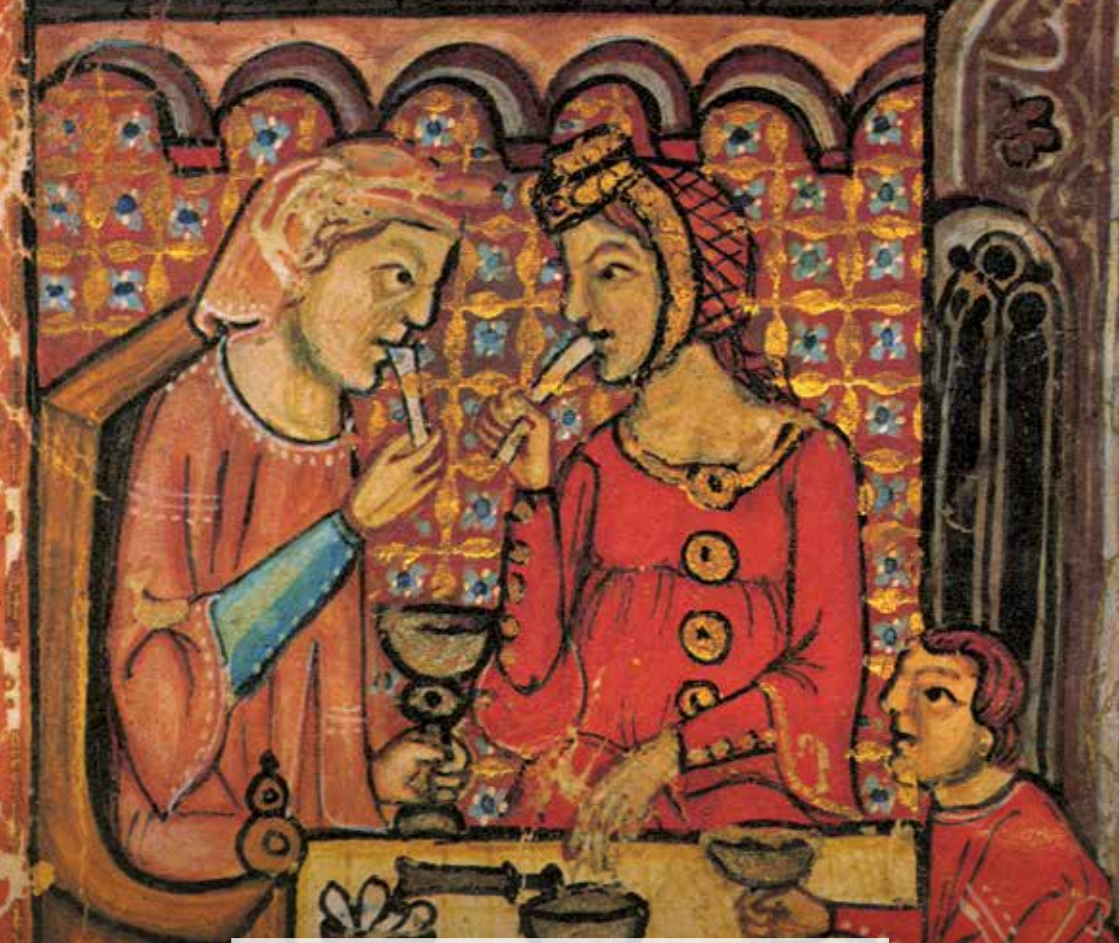


ESTELINA'S TABLE

JEWISH FOOD IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Museum of Jewish History
June 20 – September 17, 2017

PATRONAT CALL DE GIRONA
Ajuntament de Girona
Diputació de Girona
Generalitat de Catalunya

"Tell me what you eat and I'll tell you who you are"

Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1825)

A FOOD-BASED IDENTITY

In medieval Catalonia, eating habits established differences among the different cultural and religious communities that often would coexist in the same space. The nobles did not eat the same way the lower classes did, nor did city folk eat the same way as farmers. In the same way, a Jew did not have the same diet a Christian did.

Food was one of the distinctive traits of Jewish identity. Eating habits were based on a series of very strict dietary standards, described in detail in the Bible. The Mosaic prescriptions on food and cooking are the same today as 3,000 years ago, and still serve as a symbol and fundamental element of the identity of the Jewish people.

A Family Celebrating Passover
Barcelona Haggadah. Catalonia, 1325-1350
London, British Library, Add MS 14761, folio 20 *verso*



"Don't boil a young goat in its mother's milk"

Exodus 23:19 and 34:26, and Deuteronomy 14:21

JEWISH COOKING

In Jewish kitchens in the Middle Ages, everything that was cooked, the way it was obtained, how it was prepared and even how it was eaten, depended on the Torah. Some foods were permitted (**kosher**) and others were prohibited (***tameh***); there were also products that could not be mixed, and, according to Jewish law, animals had to be slaughtered (**shechitah**) according to a strict ritual. The dietary norms, recorded in Leviticus and Deuteronomy and observed generation after generation, guaranteed the maintenance of Jewish tradition and adherence to Mosaic Law.

Dietary rules and kitchen and eating customs are a building block for a sense of community. In this regard, **kashruth**, i.e., the body of Jewish laws concerning the suitability of food, has been a cohesive element of the Jewish Diaspora throughout the world.







THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF KASHRUTH

"And I have given animals to you for food. From now on, you may eat them, as well as the green plants that you have always eaten. But life is in the blood, and you must not eat any meat that still has blood in it." (Genesis 9: 3-4)

"The life of every living creature is in its blood. That's why I have forbidden you to eat blood and why I have warned you that anyone who does will no longer belong to my people." (Leviticus 17:14)

"After you enter the land, you will plant fruit trees, but you are not to eat any of their fruit for the first three years. In the fourth year the fruit must be set apart, as an expression of thanks to me, the Lord God. Do this, and in the fifth year, those trees will produce an abundant harvest of fruit for you to eat." (Leviticus 19:23-25)

"If you plant a vineyard, don't plant any other fruit tree or crop in it. If you do plant something else there, you must bring to the place of worship everything you harvest from the vineyard." (Deuteronomy 22: 9)

"Don't eat any disgusting animals. You may eat the meat of cattle, sheep, and goats; wild sheep and goats; and gazelles, antelopes, and all kinds of deer. It is all right to eat meat from any animals that have divided hoofs and also chew the cud. But don't eat camels, rabbits, and rock badgers. These animals chew the cud but do not have divided hoofs. You must treat them as unclean. And don't eat pork, since pigs have divided hoofs, but they do not chew their cud. Don't even touch a dead pig!

You can eat any fish that has fins and scales. But there are other creatures that live in the water, and if they do not have fins and scales, you must not eat them. Treat them as unclean.

You can eat any clean bird. But don't eat the meat of any of the following birds: eagles, vultures, falcons, kites, ravens, ostriches, owls, sea gulls, hawks, pelicans, ospreys, cormorants, storks, herons, and hoopoes. You must not eat bats.

Swarming insects are unclean, so don't eat them. However, you are allowed to eat certain kinds of winged insects." (Deuteronomy 14:3-20)

[1] *Tanakh* or Hebrew Bible: *Devarim* (Words) or Deuteronomy 14
Samuel the Scribe, son of Samuel Ibn Musa
Lisbon, 1482
Facsimile Edition of Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, *Lisbon Bible 1482: British Library Or. 2626*. Tel Aviv: Nahar Miskal, 1988.
Bibliographic Collection of the Nahmanides Institute for Jewish Studies

The laws governing kashruth appear in different Biblical verses, such as, for example, Leviticus 11 or Deuteronomy 14. The interpretation of some verses, such as "Don't boil a young goat in its mother's milk" has led to the prohibition, established in ancient times, against mixing any type of milk product with any type of meat. And the rabbinic debate regarding whether or not to classify poultry within the category of meat has generated historical debates within Judaism.



[2] The Set Table or *Shulchan Aruch*
Código de leyes judías: Kitzur Shulján Aruj. Una compilación de las leyes y costumbres judías / [Joseph Caro]; Traducción de Saba Belsky; revisión estilística de Moisés Katznelson. Buenos Aires: Yehuda Libros, 1979.
Bibliographic Collection of the Nahmanides Institute for Jewish Studies

Born in Toledo in 1488, Joseph ben Ephraim Karo was forced to emigrate along with his parents in 1492. In Safed he wrote one of the most influential works of Judaism, the *Shulchan Aruch* (The Set Table, 1565), the last great compilation of Jewish laws. Initially received with some opposition, it ended up becoming an unquestionable authority for the entire Jewish world. However, before Karo's treatise, the Barcelonese rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet had already compiled his *Torat HaBayit* (The Law of the Home), a manual on the laws on food and daily ritual. This book was commonly found in Jewish homes in Girona in the 14th and 15th centuries.



GOING TO MARKET

The cooking and diet of Jewish communities were conditioned by the supply of food: how and where they obtained the basic products from which they would make their daily food. They would go to the market to purchase a good part of what they needed from gardeners and country folk, who produced and distributed the vegetables to all the city's inhabitants. There were, however, three products whose supply was not a simple matter: meat, wine and bread.





MEAT

Animals had to be ritually slaughtered according to the Biblical prescription. The animal had to be slaughtered by an expert, the **shochet**, who used a knife free of dents, let the blood run over the ashes and buried it while reciting some prescribed blessings. In addition, these ritually slaughtered animals could only be obtained at a Jewish market stall, never at a Christian one. Furthermore, the meat could not contain even one drop of blood and, consequently, it had to go through advance preparation before being cooked.







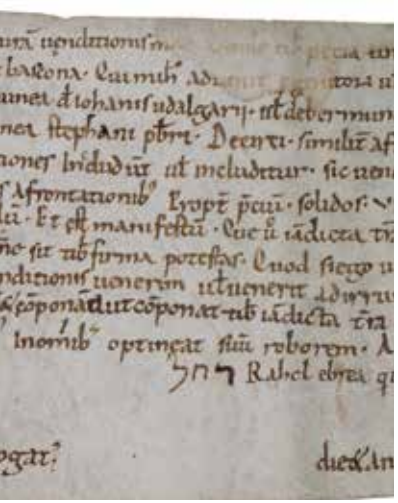
WINE

Numerous Catalan documents mention "vi juhich" or "vi juheresc" (Jewish wine), an indispensable element for family ritual, which was under rabbinic supervision. This implied a dedicated system of production in vineyards owned and cultivated by Jews, a production system and finally, distribution among taverns inside Jewish quarters. In the Late Middle Ages there were areas like Aragon with production surpluses, because there was a smaller Jewish population there, while there were more populous areas with an insufficient supply of vineyards, such as Girona, where it was often necessary to import boots of Jewish wine produced in other regions.



BREAD

Bread meant for everyday consumption was not a problem. The storage of the flour was not a problem (flour is always kosher, as it is a product of the earth). Grinding the grain was not a problem; cooking (in mills and public ovens, generally) was not a problem either. Kashruth did have to be observed in the preparation of unleavened bread for Passover: the unleavened bread had to be made with specially selected flour that was free of any trace of leavening, and cooked in ovens that had not held regular bread before that. For this reason, the unleavened bread bore a special marking, guaranteeing its suitability as food for the festival.



[1] The Sale of a Plot of Land in Girona
Chapter Archive of the Girona Cathedral, Parchment 46.
Girona, May, 1st, 1047
Facsimile Copy from the Museum of Jewish History

Documents from the Middle Ages show us that Catalan Jews had vineyards since remote times in order to ensure a supply of kosher wine. Rachel, a Girona resident from the 9th century, signed this sales document in Hebrew. In this way, she transferred her land, inherited from her parents, to a man called Elias. The land was located in the Bascona basin (today Sant Daniel), an area devoted to viticulture, and was surrounded by vineyards belonging to Christians.



[2] Silver Kiddush Cup
Central Europe, mid-19th century
Museum of Jewish History (Uriel Macías Kapón Collection)

The **kiddush** (sanctification) is the blessing over the wine that is recited at the beginning of Sabbath meals and during other Jewish holidays. This age-old tradition, based on the obligation of remembering the Sabbath that appears in Exodus 20:8, was observed in the Middle Ages just as it is now. The master of the house would bless the wine, drink some of it, and then pass it along to all who were in attendance. The custom is to serve a silver cup or glass with a minimum capacity of 150 milliliters.



[3] Bread-marking Seal
Catalonia, 14th century
Copy belong to the Museum of Jewish History (the original is in the Museum of Rural Life)

This circular seal with a handle bears the inscription, "Shevat Yamim Tochelu Matsot beshalom" ("Seven days shall you eat unleavened bread in peace," based on Exodus 12:15), with the symbols of the moon and a star, encircling the figure of a bird as seen from the side, a six-pointed star and four ears of grain or thistles. The inscription relates this seal to matzah, the bread consumed during Pesach, or Passover, unleavened bread that would be marked with this seal to distinguish it from regular bread. The bronze original was found outside l'Espluga de Francolí.



The Jewish Butcher Shop
Jacob ben Asher, *Arba'ah Turim*. Italy, 1435
Vatican City, Apostolic Library, Cod. Rossian. 555, folio 127 *bis verso*

The ritual of the shechitah took place in the Jewish butcher shop. On the left, we can see the ritual sacrifice of an ox, during which the shochet holds the animal by its side with his knees and places its head in the proper position with his left hand while he cuts its neck with a long knife. On the right, the inspector (*bodek*) checks the lungs of an open ox, hung by his rear hooves in order to facilitate complete exsanguination. In the background, two birds are being slaughtered, also hanging by their legs. The woman sticking her head through the door might be a customer.



Trellised Grapevine
Rothschild Manuscript 24. Ferrara, Italy, circa 1470
Jerusalem, Israel Museum, Ms. 180/51, folio 125 *verso*

The harvest of the vine was subject to Jewish law. In the Middle Ages, like now, wine was obtained from the vineyard, but the fruit was also consumed. Before eating the first grape, a blessing is said. After the grape is eaten, the same blessing is recited. The procedure is the same for figs, pomegranates, olives and dates.



Baking Unleavened Bread
Hispano-moresque Haggadah. Castile, ca. 1300
London, British Library, Oriental Manuscript 2737, folio 88 *recto*

To bake any type of bread, all the inhabitants of medieval cities had to use public ovens; the king had a monopoly on these ovens. These ovens were contaminated by the presence of leaven, and were not suitable for baking matzah, the unleavened bread consumed during the Passover holiday. Thus, the unleavened bread for Passover, produced by avoiding any type of contamination with any type of leavening before the grain was ground, was baked at home clandestinely, or payment was made to obtain a royal privilege to construct an oven specifically for the festival.

"There are three things in the world: Christian prayer, the celebration of Jewish holidays, and Muslim justice"

Lo Llibre de Tres (The Book of Three) (15th century)

FESTIVE DISHES

Jewish holidays are moments of symbolism and emotion, when families get together, tell stories, sing, enjoy themselves ... and eat. In medieval times, since everyday meals were usually quite modest and not that varied, it was in the festive meals where the traditions and dietary laws were most evident and food acquired an almost sacred dimension: the *afamí* on Saturdays, cooked the day before so as not to violate the Sabbath day of rest; the unleavened bread, the bitter herbs, the lamb and the hard-boiled eggs on Passover; the sweets on Purim and Hanukkah, the fruits on Sukkoth or the dairy products on Shavuot. All of these dishes make up a rich collection of recipes, repeated as part of a centuries-long tradition at Jewish tables celebrating life.

Jacme de Casafranca, a *converso* and the king's deputy, confessed to the Inquisitors that he celebrated "the Jewish Passover holiday in the city of Gerona on St. Lorenç street at the house of Joan Çarriera, himself a converso" and that "the Rabbi of the Jews of Gerona would go there and bring unleavened bread and a casserole of food with one piece of goat or lamb and hard-boiled eggs and also brought (...) Jewish wine."





PESACH

The most important festival of the Hebrew calendar is Pesach, or Passover. It takes place from the 15th through the 22nd of *Nissan* (March or April). The holiday recalls how the Angel of Death passed over the houses of the Children of Israel, an act which led the Pharaoh to authorize Moses to take his people out of Egypt. All the dishes from the first Passover dinner are symbolic: matzah (since the Children of Israel had to leave in haste and did not have time to let the dough in the bread rise, hence the unleavened bread), *karpas* (sweet spring vegetables, such as radish or parsley), *maror* (bitter herbs such as celery or certain types of lettuce), *beitzah* (a hard-boiled egg, symbolizing spring and rebirth), *charoset* (a dark, sweet mixture composed of fruits and nuts and dried fruits, a reminder of the clay the Children of Israel used to make bricks during slavery), *zeroah* (the shank bone, the shank of a lamb, such as those that were sacrificed in ancient times at the Temple) and *chazeret* (a stalk of lettuce to represent the harshness of slavery in Egypt). The large plate served to display these different dishes, so the diners could serve themselves.

Passover Plate
Crown of Aragon, 15th century
Copy from the Museum of Jewish History (the original is in the Israel Museum)



Passover Seder
Rylands Haggadah. Crown of Aragon, ca 1330
University of Manchester Library, Rylands Hebrew MS 6, folio 19 *verso*, detail

The Haggadah is a book containing blessings, stories and songs and serves as a guide for the ritual service and ceremonial dinner on the first day of Passover. Every Jewish home has at least one. In medieval Catalonia, well-to-do Jewish families would commission lavishly decorated Haggadot, depicting Biblical and domestic scenes from different moments of the ceremonial Passover dinner. Today these manuscripts are scattered in libraries throughout the world and allow us to know how the most important meal of the Jewish calendar took place in the houses of the Catalan Jewish quarters.

SHAVUOT

Shavuot (the Festival of Weeks) is a two-day agricultural festival that falls during the month of Sivan (between May and June), seven weeks after Passover. It is traditionally associated with the first fruits of the harvest and also commemorates the giving of the Torah to Moses on Mt. Sinai. In the Middle Ages, Jewish families would leave their houses with food and spend the day in the nearby fields, where they would eat bread and cheeses or other dairy products, since this is the time when baby goats and lambs are suckled.









ROSH HASHANAH

The Jewish New Year usually falls in September or early October, coinciding with the Jewish month of Tishri, which marks the beginning of an agricultural calendar of prehistoric origin. The holiday commemorates the creation of the world and is considered to be a harbinger of events that will happen later in the year. That's why it needs to begin sweetly, with honey. The dishes for the New Year also include foods that symbolize rebirth and fertility, such as round loaves of bread and pomegranates (filled with seeds).

Representation of a Pomegranate, Symbol of Fullness
White earthenware, decoration in copper green and manganese brown. Girona Jewish Quarter, 14th century. Girona City History Museum

SUKKOTH

The Feast of Booths or Tabernacles is celebrated for a week starting on the 15th of Tishri (September or October). The holiday is observed by constructing a hut (sukkah) outdoors to recall the time when the Israelites wandered through the desert after leaving Egypt. The idea is to live there for the entire week, and invite friends and relatives to share meals, which are frugal and are based on the products of the harvest (wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates). This festival is depicted in medieval manuscripts and we know it was celebrated in the 15th century thanks to the testimony of the conversa from Girona, Joana Libiana, who lived in Tarragona, where "she kept and celebrated the Festival of Booths... she entered a house where they had constructed the booth with leafy foliage."

HANUKKAH

Hanukkah is the Festival of Lights. It lasts eight days during the month of Kislev (December). It commemorates the purification of the Temple in Jerusalem, after the victory of the Maccabees in the 2nd century BCE. A cruse of oil found in the rededicated Temple miraculously burned for eight days. Because of this, the traditional dishes of this week include fish recipes and sweets fried with oil, such as for example, beignets. As a matter of fact, Jewish cooking was closely linked with olive oil all year round, since animal grease is not kosher. This prohibition differentiated the aromas of Jewish cooking from that of Christian houses, where only animal fat or lard was used. It is not surprising, then, that converso women above all were suspected of Judaizing, betrayed by the odor of their recipes.





Hanukkah Lamp
Puigcerdà, 15th century
Copy from the Museum of Jewish History (the original is in the Cerdà Museum)

PURIM

Purim (or lots, as in "to draw lots") is celebrated on the 14th day of Adar (February or March) and revolves around the Book Esther, in which the beautiful heroine saves her people from the extermination programmed by the evil Persian minister Haman. The day before Purim is a fast day. This is a happy holiday, characterized by the public reading of the Book of Esther from a scroll called the *Megillah*, acts of charity, gifts of food, disguises, abundant food, and also, excessive drinking (justified by the determinant role of wine in saving the Jews). In the Middle Ages, when it was not possible for most people to frequently consume animal protein, the celebration took shape through abundant meals, such as chicken stews or chicken with hard-boiled eggs, and the consumption of large amounts of wine.





Manises Ceramic
Girona, 17th or 18th century
Girona Museum of Art, Collection of the Provincial deputation of Girona

SHABBAT

Saturday is the day devoted to God, the seventh day, when the Creator contemplated his Creation, as it says in Genesis. Keeping the Sabbath includes the prohibition against working and lighting fire, and consequently, cooking. Medieval Catalan *afamí* (Hebrew *Hamin*) was a dish made of leguminous plant seeds and vegetables. It was cooked in a pot on Friday until sunset, while making fire was permitted. After sunset, it was kept on the coals until the next day, to feed the family until the next sunset.





Gray Ceramic Pot
Girona, 11th–15th century
Museum of Jewish History

"In the month of September... not to eat the entire day until the first stars came out at night"

Inquisitorial Trial of Joana Libiana (Barcelona, 1495)

FASTS AND MOURNING

For the Jewish community, fasting was, above all, a manifestation of sadness and mourning. The only fast prescribed in the Torah is the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). There was, however, fasting on the Feast of Queen Esther (Purim) and the ninth day of Av (*Tisha B'Av*). On these days, no food or liquid was consumed from sunset on the eve of the fast day to early evening on the day of the fast. Once the fast had ended, people would have a dinner made up of fish, fruits vegetables, legumes and sweets, but never meat.

This is how Marquesa, who had converted to Christianity, explained it to the Inquisitors in 1495, when she confessed that "when she was 11, she observed the Jewish fast day in the month of September [Yom Kippur], that is to say, she did not eat or drink the whole day until the first stars were observed, and for dinner that evening, they would eat chicken or fish, but they would not eat meat from a butcher shop."

In the case of the death of a family member of close friend, the family would manifest its mourning through food, such as in the ***se'uddat havra'a*** (meal of consolation), prepared and served by friends or neighbors.



The Meal of Consolation
Rothschild Manuscript 24. Ferrara, Italy, ca 1470
Jerusalem, Israel Museum, Manuscript 180/51, folio 122 *verso*

The *se'uddat havra'a*, or meal of consolation, is the first meal that relatives of the deceased have after burial. Also, in the Middle Ages, those who had lost a loved one could not eat "their own bread." For this reason, the meals were prepared and served by people who were close to the family, as we see in the image. The black robes of the family in mourning, seated on the floor, contrast with the colorful dress of the two men seated at the table. To evoke the cycle of life, round food is consumed: eggs, lentils, or bread, the same foods that were eaten in the last meal before the *Tisha B'Av* fast (Jewish day of mourning).



[1] Ceramic Cup with Honey-Colored Chalk Finish
Girona, 11th–15th century
Museum of Jewish History



[2] Faience Bowl, decoration in blue
Girona Jewish Quarter, 15th century
Girona City History Museum

The pots and pans found in Jewish houses were no different from those that could be found in Christian homes at the time. In the Middle Ages, household crockery was limited to bowls to hold the more liquid dishes, with their traditionally wooden spoons, knives, cutting boards and an occasional serving dish, from which all the diners would eat. In this area, once again, the wealth and social status of the family would determine the difference in day-to-day objects.

"All that grows from the earth is kosher"

AND NOW WHAT?

This rich fabric of laws, traditions, rituals and customs is perpetuated year after year, in Israel and throughout the world, wherever there are Jewish communities. In Catalonia, observant Jews follow the dietary regulations and symbolic norms of kashruth. They can do so thanks to the support they receive from the Jewish communities, who take care to ensure that families can procure adequate supplies of kosher products.

Some Catalan slaughterhouses supply kosher meat and some wine cellars get wine that is in compliance with Jewish regulations. In Catalonia, there are companies that manufacture all types of kosher products, but some food has to be imported from countries with larger Jewish communities and a greater demand, such as France or Great Britain. All these products are sold on the market and are available to anyone who wishes to comply with Jewish dietary laws.



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PATRONAT CALL DE GIRONA

Ajuntament de Girona

Diputació de Girona

Generalitat de Catalunya