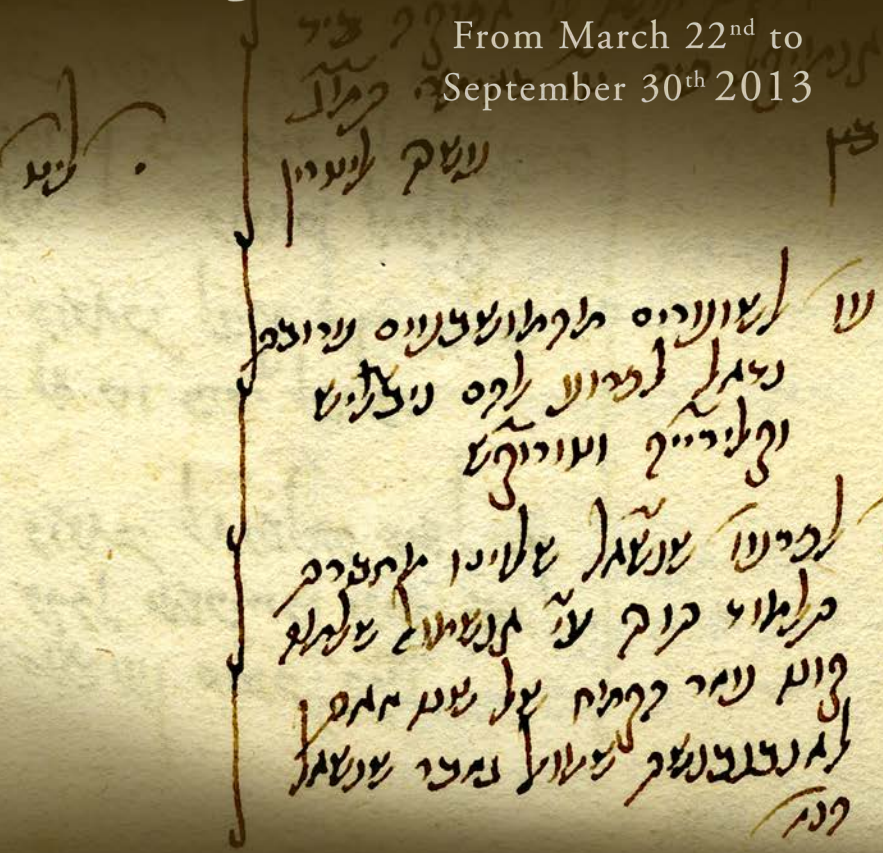
the languages of Judaism

From March 22nd to September 30th 2013



Account book by J. Zabara (1443) AHG. G2. 212

Organised by:

PATRONAT CALL DE GIRONA

Ajuntament de Girona

With the collaboration of:

Generalitat de Catalunya
Departament de Cultura
Arxiu Històric de Girona

Diputació de Girona

CAMINOS DE SEFARAD
RED DE JUDERÍAS DE ESPAÑA

introduction

This exhibition presents a comprehensive overview of the four languages related to the Jewish world, which has been, throughout its history and excelling at it, the world of the word.

First of all, there is the **Hebrew** language, the language par excellence of the people of Israel, and one of the most singular languages in the history of mankind: with more than three thousand years of age, the Hebrew language, the language of the Bible, is still today a language full of life and creativity in the State of Israel, where it has come to life again as a spoken language, after many centuries of being used solely as a language of prayer and written culture.

The exhibition also presents the **Yiddish** language, the language of the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe before the Holocaust, and carrier of a huge literary wealth.

"The languages of Judaism" also offers information about the **Judeo-Spanish** language, deriving from the medieval Castilian language, which has been preserved by the Jewish communities in the eastern Mediterranean, as well as testimonies of the **Catalan** language written by Jews during the Middle Ages, usually employing Hebrew letters.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth (...) and God said
(Genesis, 1, 1-3)

the languages of Judaism

The Hebrew, Yiddish and Judeo-Spanish languages are alive. All around the world, newspapers, books and magazines are published in these languages for a very diverse public, who usually speaks them, or remembers them from their childhood.

"**The languages of Judaism**" is based on panels, maps showing the geographical area of each language, texts, objects and books. It also relies on technological elements and interactive systems that allow us hearing them through the different sound files of various types, as well as free writing and recording voice cuts for everyone who wishes to participate personally. With this exhibition, the Call de Girona Board aims to present a broad overview of the cultural and linguistic diversity that is always the evidence of wealth and advancement in civilization.

"A city breathes when there are spaces in it for the word", wrote the French philosopher Michel de Certeau. And this exhibition wants to be that: a place for the word, a place that gives breath, speech and memory to the Girona Jewish Quarter and to the history of the people who lived there and left a strong impression through their writing and their daily speech, among other things.

Hebrew and Aramaic

the holy languages

Hebrew is the language spoken by the inhabitants of the territories which the Bible calls "the land of Canaan" and which from 1000 BC on is known as the land of Israel. Most of the books forming this great library which is the Bible, have been written in that language.
During the 6th century BC in Babylon, the people of Israel started to speak **Aramaic**, a Semitic language of the tribes inhabiting the steppes of Syria and Mesopotamia (12th century BC). With the return to Jerusalem (538 BC), the Aramaic language became extended as a spoken language among the Jewish population. Some fragments of the books of Ezra and Daniel have been written in Aramaic language, as well as the explained translations of the bible (*targumim*).
The Hebrew language thus became reduced to a small territory around Jerusalem, until, towards the 4th century AC, **it became extinct as a spoken language**. Since then, it was used as a language for prayer and written communication among Jews all around the world, whereas the languages of everyday life were those of the countries where they lived. From the end of the 19th century on, it started to get recovered and to be consolidated, and currently it is the official language of the State of Israel.

The Man gave names...
(Genesis 2, 20)

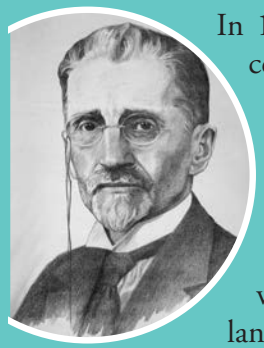
Hebrew is the official language of the State of Israel.
There are 5.300.000 people speaking Hebrew in the world.
In 1966, Shmuel Yosef Agnon, a writer of Ukrainian origin, was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature for his work written in Hebrew language.

the languages of Judaism

personalities

Eliezer Ben Yehuda

Born in 1858 in Luzhki (Belorussia), he was a Jewish journalist and philologist and author of the first great dictionary of Modern Hebrew language.



In 1879 he launched the idea of creating a Jewish cultural centre in Palestine, where the Hebrew language would be the spoken language of everyday life. He himself went to live there, and began to speak Hebrew in the realm of his family, while at the same time starting basic education in Hebrew language among the Jewish population who had emigrated from several different European countries. He was a great philologist who made it possible for the Hebrew language to become an active language again, spoken in all spheres, after many centuries of only being used as a language of prayer and writing. He died in Jerusalem in 1922.

Rahel (pen name of Rahel Bluwstein)



Born in 1890 in Saratov (Russia), she spent her childhood in Poltava (Ukraine). In 1909 she immigrated to Palestine, where she lived until she died, in 1931. She is one of the main Hebrew poets, and her poetry is marked by the clarity of her style, a simple lyricism and musicality, all of which have made her poems very popular.

Yiddish

mame loshn, "mother tongue"

The **Yiddish** language is based on medieval High German and elements of other languages, mainly Hebrew and Slavic languages. It is written in Hebrew letters, from the right to the left. It is supposed to have begun to develop around 1000 AC among the Jewish communities of the Rhineland region, then spreading eastwards to Poland, Lithuania, Belorussia, etc.

Affectionately called ***mame loshn*** ("mother tongue") by the Jews, it was the language spoken by most of the Jewish communities in eastern Europe, extinguished during the Holocaust.

I started to write, dear sons, after the death of your father. With the writing I have managed to live through many sleepless nights. Writing has helped me to dispel the sad thoughts which weighted me down.
(Glückel von Hameln, 1691)

The Yiddish language is currently spoken by 2.000.000 people all over the world.
In 1978, Isaac Bashevis Singer was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for his work written in Yiddish Language.

the languages of Judaism

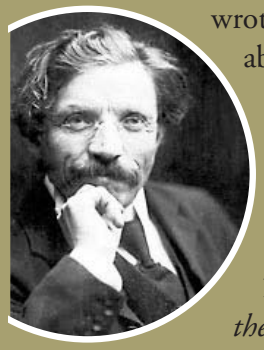
personalities

Glückel von Hameln *(Glikl bas Judah Leib)*



Born in Hamburg (Germany) in 1646, she was married to the Jewish merchant Hayyim of Hameln. Since his death in 1689, she took charge of their twelve children and took over the business of her late husband, conducting trades in Amsterdam, Vienna, Leipzig, Metz and Paris. In 1690 she started to write her diaries, seven notebooks of which are still preserved. In these she described the everyday life of the Jewish communities along the Rhine, as well as historical key aspects of her time.

Sholem Aleichem *(Sholem Yakov Rabinovitsh)*



Born in Pereyaslav, Ukraine, in 1859, he was fifteen years old when wrote his first work in Yiddish, a language he always defended above anything else. In 1889 he published *Die Yiddishe Folksbibliotek* ("The Yiddish Popular Library"). He lived in Odessa, Kiev and Geneva, until he immigrated to New York in 1914, where he died two years later. His literature is destined both to adults and children, and contains large amounts of humour. One of his most famous works is *Tevye the Dairyman*, which inspired the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. He published a great number of works in Yiddish, being considered the most important author in this language.

Judeo-Spanish

an ocean of words

The **Judeo-Spanish** language is the dialect spoken by the Spanish Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula, and by their descendants. It was spoken from the 15th century on until our days by the Sephardic communities in the territories of the former Ottoman Empire, in the Balkan region and Morocco.
Throughout the 16th century several Bible translations were made in this linguistic form. These were literal translations from Hebrew to Spanish, which resulted in a sort of language known as ***ladino***.
In 1730, the biblical comment *Me'am Lo'ez*, a sort of encyclopaedia of traditional Jewish knowledge, started to be published, containing entries about juridical, religious, legendary, historical, anecdotal, folkloric, moral and mystical matters.
The other great genre of Judeo-Spanish literature is the couplet, which is a poem with a usually narrative content, on Jewish or specifically Sephardic subjects.
The theatre is the third great genre, achieving a wide diffusion throughout the 19th century and during the first decades of the 20th century.

Oh qué mueves meses pasé d'estrechura
Me nació un hijo de cara de luna
Viva la parida con su criatura
Ya es buen simán esta alegría
Bendicho'l que mos dejo a ver este día
(Traditional oral poetry, Thessaloniki, end of the 19th century)

The Judeo-Spanish language is spoken within the family sphere.
There are 200.000 persons speaking it all over the world.
The Judeo-Spanish language has generated different variations depending on the geographic area where the community speaking it was established; one of the most characteristic variations, with its own name to it, is the *Haketia* (Judeo-Spanish with considerable Arabic influence, spoken in Morocco).

the languages of Judaism

personalities

Doña Graçia Mendes



Born in Portugal in 1510, she got married at the age of eighteen to Francisco Mendes, heir to a dynasty of Portuguese convert bankers. When she became a widow, she continued to conduct her late husband's bank business. In 1542 she immigrated with all her family to Antwerp, and from there, fleeing the Inquisition, she went to Venice. In 1594 she became established in Constantinople, taken in by the Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent. From this city she became the protector of Jews and converts, who found help and refuge with her. She founded synagogues and Jewish schools all over the Ottoman Empire, and died in 1569.

Yaakov Kuli



Rabbi, editor and initiator of the series of biblical comments in Judeo-Spanish, known as *Me'am Lo'ez*. A descendant of a distinguished dynasty of rabbis of Spanish origin, he was born in Safed (Palestine) around 1685. He became established in Constantinople in order to publish the works of his father. He died in 1732.

Catalan

in the streets of the Jewish quarters

There is historical, cultural and linguistic evidence imposing itself: the Jews living in the Catalan-spoken territories during the Middle Ages wrote in Hebrew language, but they spoke **Catalan**, like the rest of the population of this region.

There are thousands of pages written in the language of the Bible by authors born in Catalan territory which have been preserved.

In these texts, written in Hebrew by Catalan Jews, many words of the everyday language of these persons and their communities –the Catalan–, appear written in Hebrew letters.

The word penetrates what the needle does not penetrate
(Jafudà Bonsenyor, Barcelona, 13th century)

Girona, Barcelona and Perpignan are the most important communities in the whole medieval Catalonia, from the cultural point of view.
Great Jewish scholars who were born there wrote texts of the highest intellectual level in the language of the Bible, using sometimes words and phrases in the language of their everyday life, that is, the Catalan.

the languages of Judaism

personalities

Jafudà Bonsenyor



Physician, scribe and interpreter, son of Astruc Bonsenyor, scribe of Arabic of the King James I. He was born in the mid-13th century. Towards 1298, and by order of the king, he wrote the book *Paraules e dits de savis e de philosofs* ("Words and sayings of sages and philosophers") in Catalan language, a work that gave to the Catalan literature an anthology of concise key principles of different origins, mainly Arabic and Hebrew. A 15th century copy of those is kept at the Library of Catalonia (Barcelona).

Astruga, the wife of Mahir Vidal



In 1347, she appeared before the judge of Besalú, Arnau de Batet, in order to ask for her *ketubah* (Jewish marriage contract) to be put in Romance, which means in Catalan, language, so that it could be understood by the Christian authorities. Astruc Isaac and Salomó d'Alborns made a literal translation under oath: "*En tres de la setmana en XXVI dies a mes de Elul an de V milia e XC e VI a criament de segla a comta que nos comtans...*".

the languages of Judaism

Organised by:
Patronat Call de Girona – Jewish History Museum

Curators:
Joan Ferrer Costa and Patronat Call de Girona – Jewish History Museum

Design and production:
Mostra Comunicació

With the collaboration of:
Historical Archives of Girona and Network of Spanish Jewish Quarters

Jewish History Museum
Temporary Exhibitions Hall, ground floor
Tuesday-Saturday, 10 am to 6 pm; Sunday, Monday and public holidays, 10 am to 2 pm.
July/August: Monday-Saturday, 10 am to 8 pm; Sunday and public holidays, 10 am to 2 pm.

8, Força Street – 17004 Girona
Tel.: (+34) 972 216 761 – callgirona@ajgirona.cat
www.girona.cat/call – www.facebook.com/callgirona