

Abstracts

Joan Ferrer: **Babylonian Aramaic. A description of its basic grammar elements**

The article aims to offer a description of the basic elements of the Aramaic idiom of the Babylonian Talmud, the foundation on which the religious and cultural life of postbiblical Judaism is grounded. Aramaic belongs to the north-west branch of the semitic languages, together with Hebrew, Phenician and Ugaritic, among other less known dialects. Aramaic had a noticeable influence on the later phase of Biblical Hebrew and on the whole Mishnaic Hebrew. Moreover, it was the most widespread spoken language in the Land of Israel, Syria and Mesopotamia at the time of the birth of Christianity.

The article offers in broad outline a scheme of the evolution of the Aramaic group of dialects and a classification of its various components, which include the language of the biblical book of Daniel and that of the *Targumim*, as well as Samaritan, Syriac (which has its own alphabet and has been the language of oriental Christianity to this very day), etc. One of the best known Aramaic dialects is that of the Babylonian Talmud, which was the spoken language of the Jewish people in Babylonia and the language used by its sages to write down their interpretation of the Mishna. The compilation of that religious and literary achievement had apparently ended by the middle of the 8th century.

The description of the main morphological aspects of Babylonian Aramaic is followed by a wide bibliography of reference books and specific studies intended for the reader who may wish to go deeper into the knowledge of that

language, which was also used by medieval Catalan and Occitan Jews in their Talmudic commentaries and in some literary works.

Yom-Tov Assis: **The Jews of Barcelona in the maritime trade with the eastern Mediterranean**

The 13th century was the golden age of the Jews who lived in the Christian kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula. Apart from their far-reaching philosophical and scientific creations, which are not the aim of the present article, it should be pointed out that their involvement in the economic life of those kingdoms was of vast proportions. In lending, in tax-collecting, in home and foreign trade, Jews showed a strength that aroused wonderment and envy.

Towards the close of the 13th century, a remarkable increase in these activities took place in Catalonia, sparking off the opposition of the new urban class that dominated Barcelona's *Consell de Cent* (Council of One Hundred). Even though some steps were taken with the intention of hindering the activities of Jewish lenders, their activity continued for a long time, as it was beneficial to a society that was always in need of ready money. Jews met with success wherever and whenever the Christian authorities and society required their services and made a profit on their trading activities. Moreover, they contributed a huge revenue to the royal treasury

Further proof that the economic activities of the Jews were only possible if Christian authorities and societies allowed it is found in the participation of the Jews in the maritime trade with the eastern Mediterranean. Towards the end of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th century, Catalan Jewish merchants tried to win a share in the trade that was being carried out between Barcelona and Alexandria. This trade developed as the Crown of Catalonia-Aragon expanded its political and commercial power throughout the Mediterranean basin. The attempt had a fair chance of being successful. Jews had the capital, the contacts, the skill and the will to succeed in their endeavours. But the enterprise failed. One of the main obstacles that the Jewish initiative ran up against was the emergence of a new middle class that viewed maritime trade as an all-important way to develop and to strengthen its social status. This early middle class, typical of Catalonia, was probably an essential factor in the creation of the infrastructure necessary for the growth of commercial activities that ran parallel to, or rather sustained, the political expansion of the country. Catalan merchants established commercial settlements (called *Consulats de mar*, 'Sea Consulates') in the main towns of the Levant, both in Moslem and in Christian

countries — Egypt, Cyprus, Greece, Syria, and even the Crimean Peninsula. There was no reason why they should share with the Jews the profit they expected to make on that ramified trade... Town councils repeatedly voiced their hostility towards these Jewish merchants, because they were seen as dangerous competitors.

The article gives an overall picture of the Catalan politico-commercial expansion towards the eastern Mediterranean, the role played by the Jews in the development of that maritime trade, the commercial methods prevailing in the 13th century, the sea-lanes to the Levant, the difficulties put in the way of the Jews in this sector, the financing and capitalization systems, the taxes, the goods that were the object of the trade, and the various kinds of trading companies that were in existence at that time.

From this chapter of the history of the Jews in the Crown of Catalonia-Aragon, one cannot but draw a conclusion of considerable historical scope. In spite of the fact that Jews were always harshly criticized as moneylenders and subjected to many restrictions, they filled a gap and therefore their activities never stopped. Christians did not succeed in creating a substitute for the Jewish moneylender.

However, what happened in the maritime trade with Moslem countries was quite the contrary. Thanks to the skills of the Jews and to their being well-connected merchants, their participation in such a trade was initially possible. But as soon as Christians became aware of the possibility of holding sway over that trade without having to resort to the Jewish merchants and without having to share the profits with them, that participation was not only curbed but stopped altogether.

Josep M. Llobet i Portella: Historiographical texts concerning the Jews of Cervera (15th century)

The first volume of the *Llibre verd del racional*, which is kept at the *Arxiu Històric Comarcal* of Cervera and contains all the events that took place in that village from 1448 until 1735, includes several texts that cast a special light on the participation of the local Jewish community in the sociopolitical life of the village during the 15th century. According to these sources, at least three events prompted the Jews to take part in the activities of their Christian fellow citizens.

In May 1448 a meeting of the chapter of the Franciscan friars was held in Cervera. Around two hundred and fifty members of the order attended the

meeting, which lasted for five days. Both the town council and the guilds of Cervera presented the friars with food and gifts. The document shows that the secretaries of the *aljama*, accompanied by other leading members, also brought some food to the chapter (sixteen boxes filled with sweets, in addition to five florins) in the name of the Jews of Cervera.

In June 1458, king Alphonse IV of the Crown of Catalonia-Aragon died in Naples. When this sad piece of news reached Cervera, the village organized several ceremonies and church services to show the people's grief. One of these funeral rites was performed by the Jewish community. On August 1st, the Jews of Cervera betook themselves to the *Plaça del Blat* in funeral procession, carrying a symbolic catafalque (called *monument* in the document) on their shoulders. On arriving at that place, they laid down the catafalque and Jewish women mourned for the king. *Mestre* (rabbi) Cresques Adret made a funeral oration, exalting the deceased monarch, whom he had happened to know in Naples.

Twenty years later, in January 1479, another king of the Crown of Catalonia-Aragon, John II, passed away, and again the town council provided that some ceremonies should be held in the king's honour. On February 9th, the Jewish community came out of the *Call* and proceeded to the *Plaça del Blat*, carrying a symbolic catafalque draped with a black cloth bearing the royal arms. There, *Mestre* Cresques Cofen eulogized the deceased king. It is worth noting that while Hebrew was used in the religious service, songs were sung by Jews and Jewesses in Catalan (*romanç*) in praise of the king.

The article gives the complete transcription of these texts made directly from the original manuscript.

Jaume Badias i Mata and Oriol Saula i Briansó: The archaeological site of *Molí del Codina* in Tàrrrega as a possible location of the 14th-century synagogue

For some years now, several researchers, on various grounds, have proposed that one of the synagogues of Tàrrrega could have been located at the southern end of the town, very near the River Ondara, beside the gate known as Saint Augustine's Gate.

In 1997, the construction of a building on a plot of land known as *Molí del Codina* made it possible for an emergency archaeological operation to be carried out in order to document, on the one hand, the remains of the ancient medieval wall and, also, to locate within the same sector the structure corresponding to one of the town's synagogues during the Middle Ages. The excava-

tion has revealed some elements belonging to an old oil press dating from the end of the 18th century, some structural remains of a tannery dating from 16th-17th century, as well as an almost rectangular building constructed between the 13th and early 14th century. From the evidence at their disposal, the authors put forward the possibility that the archaeological remains on this final level correspond to the original synagogue, dating from the time when the local Jewish community or *aljama* was already constituted, but before its members were gathered together into a separate district of their own.

Jordi Casanovas: **Two notes on medieval Hebrew epigraphy**

The present article introduces two separate finds of objects bearing inscriptions in Hebrew: one is a personal seal about which almost nothing is known and the other is a tombstone which was re-used in a building in the city of Girona. Of course, any increase in the amount of archaeological material, as in the case of the seal, is always of great significance. However, the author feels that the discovery of a funeral inscription dating from the beginning of the 15th century is particularly interesting because of the formula and the specific characteristics and identification of other undated contemporary inscriptions.

Magen Broshi and Yoram Nir-El: **On the authenticity of RaMBaN's seal found in the Plain of Acre**

The seal of Nahmanides was fortuitously found in 1972 at ground level in the Plain of Acre. As doubts were cast about its authenticity, the authors decided to submit it to an X-ray fluorescence comparative test in order to ascertain the composition of the copper of which it is made. The comparison was made with three Mameluk coins of the second half of the thirteenth century, that is to say, contemporaneous with Nahmanides' stay in the Land of Israel, and results showed a great similarity. Therefore, it is highly probable that the seal is authentic.

Gregorio del Olmo Lete: **Judaism**

From the point of view of the history of religions, *Judaism* may be considered to be another name for *Jewish religion*, although Judaism is, both in itself

and in its historical unfolding, more than a religion. After a short excursus on the origins of Judaism, attention is focused on the so-called *normative Judaism* and subsequently on the specific forms that it took throughout the centuries and in modern times. Despite the fact that the evolution of Judaism implies to a certain degree some historical perspectivism, the article approaches Judaism from an avowedly synchronic point of view, taking for granted that the Jewish religion is something definitely consolidated and trying to determine its main ideological and functional structures.

Historically Judaism is closely connected with the biblical religion as its normative frame of reference that provides it with the idea of God and its concomitant theological categories. Regarding the religious praxis and the social configuration of the religion imposed by historical circumstances, Judaism diverges a great deal from the biblical frame, to such an extent that one may even speak of two different religious magnitudes. The article shows the main lines of the biblical heritage and deals with the tension arising between an ancient tradition, which is accepted as normative and is condensed in a text (the Bible), and the need to adjust that tradition to new historical circumstances, which are also reflected in a text (the Talmud). The basic elements of normative Judaism are described in their three main aspects — faith, religious practice and ethics.

Since their first polemical contacts with other religions, Jews felt the urgent need to search after the specific nature of their religious personality. The Bible afforded them a «narrative» vision of God, which, although valid in the beginning, had to be confronted with the analytical discourse of the Greek civilization and its heirs. This unavoidably reductive search for the «essence», which is at the same time a clear way to self-assertion, has always been accompanied by a no less inevitable need to develop and to make explicit their own religious tradition. This is, as it were, the ideological task that Jewish theologians carried out in the Middle Ages and Jewish philosophers have addressed in modern times.

The most characteristic element of all religions is their system of rites. Here Judaism clearly differs from the biblical religion. In the biblical period the place of worship was basically the Temple, while postbiblical Judaism generated a new space for its new liturgy — the synagogue. The synagogue service is divided into a permanent (daily or weekly) system of rites and another one for festivals. Public prayer at the synagogue takes place three times a day — in the morning, in the afternoon, and in the evening; they correspond to the sacrifices in the Temple. The Sabbath, which is an anthropological space devoted to historical memory and man's inner liberation, as well as an access to divine «rest», became a distinctive element of Judaism as a religion (together with the

service in the synagogue and circumcision) starting from the time of Ezra's reformation.

Even though the whole liturgical organization is based on the biblical tradition, it was subsequently developed or supplemented by the rabbinical tradition. The written Law and the oral Law shaped the code of Judaism and had the same value as revelation, i.e., as God's word. Both are considered by orthodox Judaism as one single expression of divine will, containing the principles that should govern the behaviour of Jews. The observance and the interpretation of the Law have always been a basic concern in the religious thought of Judaism, much more than theological speculation. Judaism is thus an ethic, in which the concern for man, his dignity and his happiness play a central role, but an ethic that is religious in its origin. On the other hand, the Torah regulates the human sphere of the family; this fact is of fundamental importance in a religion such as Judaism, deprived of all political support for centuries. In the bosom of the Jewish family the contents of its historical faith are commemorated and transmitted in home liturgies. Finally the article examines the major religious trends within Judaism in our time and the difficulty to determine their orthodoxy in some cases. The existence of the State of Israel has made their differences more apparent, owing to the involvement of each religious movement in the fulfilment of the political project of the Jewish nation.

Manel Forcano: **Ronny Someck: Um Kulzum's music in Tel-Aviv**

Without breaking away from the preceding generation (the one that was born to poetic life in the first years after the establishment of the State of Israel) as far as the tone of their speech is concerned, but showing a radical change in their aesthetics and in their reasons for writing poetry, the present generation of Israeli poets has given a new direction to Hebrew poetry. Pop culture, cinema, modern art, in addition to science and philosophy, are the new elements being used by Israeli poets in their poetic tasks.

Ronny Someck is outstanding among these writers. He was born in Baghdad in 1951 and emigrated to Israel when he was scarcely two years old because of the prevailing political conditions at that time. Indeed, more than 130,000 Jews left ancient Babylon between 1950 and 1953. Someck's childhood, spent in temporary tents and precarious housing around Tel-Aviv, is reflected in many of his poems, which also abound in social criticism and plaintive memories of his family's uprooting. Baghdad and the palm-groves on the

banks of the Euphrates stand in the rather distant background of many of his poems.

Ronny Someck studied Hebrew literature and philosophy at Tel-Aviv University. He lives in Tel-Aviv and teaches at a secondary school. In 1989 he was awarded the prestigious Prime Minister's Prize for poetic excellence. Someck's poetic development fully justifies this award. His poems have been translated into a number of European languages, as well as into Arabic, and they have been included in some anthologies published in Europe and America as one of the finest specimens of present-day Israeli poetry.

Someck's style is characterized by a concise expression and a resourceful language that draws on the pop culture that prevailed in the Tel-Aviv of his youth. Actors and actresses, rock singers, sportsmen, cowboys, gunmen, motorcyclists, wild beasts recur in his poems, in which all shades of his past landscapes mix with those of his fantasy, making a blend of vivid colours.

The article presents the Catalan translation of a selection of poems from amongst the various books published by Ronny Someck.

Eduard Feliu: Four scattered notes on medieval Judaism

1. *On the name Sepharad in relation to Catalonia*

Even though Catalonia is today considered a part of the political entity called *Sepharad*, when one speaks or writes in Hebrew (as this is the name used in Hebrew to designate the group of territories and ancient kingdoms making up the present-day Spanish state), historians should bear in mind that Catalonia was not comprised within that denomination in medieval Hebrew usage. The name *Sepharad* did not bear any relation to Catalonia. By ascribing the modern meaning of the name *Sepharad* to lands such as medieval Catalonia, scholars get a mistaken picture of the political situation in the Iberian peninsula in those times, since *Sepharad* was then the Hebrew equivalent to the Arabic Al-Andalus, that is to say, the Moslem territories. Many prominent Jewish figures of medieval Catalonia, such as Moses ben Nahman, Jonah ben Abraham or Solomon ben Adret bear witness to that situation when they praise the Hebrew books coming from *Sepharad* and the accuracy of their writing. Apparently the name *Sepharad* was not applied to Catalonia until the 15th-16th centuries, particularly after the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian peninsula. Scholars should be mindful of the risk of falling into this confusing anachronism.

2. *On the restoration of the Hebrew language in the Middle Ages*

There can be no doubt that the interest shown by the Arabs of Al-Andalus in linguistic matters and in the purity of their language aroused the interest of the Jews in the restoration of Hebrew as a cultural language for all purposes. According to Abraham ibn Daud, it was Judah ben David Hayyuj (died around the year 1000) who restored the Hebrew language inasmuch as its use had been neglected throughout the Diaspora. In Catalonia, Jews spoke the Romance language of the country as early as the High Middle Ages, when they inhabited the main towns only, and it continued to be their language until their expulsion in 1492. Catalan, and not Spanish, was the language of Moses ben Nahman, Solomon ben Adret, Hasday Crescas, Nissim ben Reuben, Isaac ben Sheshet Perfet, Menahem ha-Meiri, Shimon ben Semah, etc. However, Catalan Jews acquired an excellent command of literary Hebrew at an early stage of its restoration, as proved by the works of Isaac ben Reuben of Barcelona (11th century) and Abraham bar Hiyya (12th century). Hebrew was the language used for books of paramount importance in medieval Hebrew literature originating in Catalonia. The present article contains a translation of chapters VII and XXXIII of Profiat Duran's grammar, *Ma'ase Efad*, which was written towards the end of the 14th century.

3. *On the organization of the Jewish communities in the time of Solomon ben Adret of Barcelona*

In the 13th century, Jewish communities succeeded in being governed by a sort of statute of autonomy. They administered justice in accordance with Jewish law, implemented their own educational system, which included the teaching of the Hebrew language and culture, and made use of traditional Jewish institutions to manage the activities of the community. As early as 1241, James I granted ample privileges to the Jewish community in Barcelona. Moreover, at the beginning of the 13th century, an incipient kind of municipal régime appeared in the Catalan towns, which developed and became perfectly structured during the second half of the 13th century. It is now clear that the *aljames* responded to similar political and social conditions, developing their governing bodies along the same lines as the Christian *universitas*. Later, Jewish communities linked up in the form of federations, known as *collites* or *col·lectes*, with a view to jointly tackling the payment of taxes. The quarter where Jews used to live was called *call juïc* or simply *call* (the word *call* has nothing to do with the Hebrew *qahal*, but comes from the Latin *callis* as shown in note 103). One of

the most outstanding features of that transformation was the setting-up of a democratic electoral system, which replaced the hereditary transmission of power through *nesi'im*. This section contains a short description of the name and the characteristics of the various offices filled by the community leaders in accordance with the data drawn from Solomon ben Adret's *responsa*.

4. *On the distinctive signs that Jews had to bear on their garments in the 13th century*

Although Jews had in ancient times voluntarily distinguished themselves from other peoples as regards their clothing or in the way they cut their hair, just as other social or ethno-religious groups used to do in most European countries, the truth is that towards the beginning of the 13th century these differences had apparently faded away and Jews were easily mistaken for Christians. The Church looked upon this possibility of confusion with profound distrust. The Fourth Lateran Council, held in 1215, tried to control the relations between Jews and Christians in several aspects of their daily life, including clothing. In spite of the fact that the Conciliar document refers to clothing only, later documents make it clear that the Church intended to impose a distinctive sign or badge on the outer garments of the Jews. But Jews did not easily accept that decree and even started to abandon some Christian lands because of it. Kings were on various grounds compelled to implement that legislation as leniently as possible. In 1234, Gregorius IX explained the characteristics of that distinctive sign to the king of Navarre in clear-cut terms: «One round patch of yellow cloth or linen, to be worn on the uppermost garment, stitched over the heart [...]. The full size of this sign shall be four digits in circumference». This notwithstanding, it seems that neither the insistence of the provincial councils nor the recriminations of the Popes to both bishops and kings succeeded in having the use of the badge (called *rodella* in Catalan) accepted by Jews without many protests and exceptions. Kings granted not only many individual privileges but also collective exceptions, such as the one granted by James I to the Jewish community in Barcelona and to other communities of the crown of Catalonia-Aragon in 1268.

Bibliographical notes

I. *Addenda* (and a few *corrigenda*) to the article: Eduard Feliu and Pere Casanellas, «Bibliography on the history of the Jews in the Crown of Catalonia-Aragon and Provence: 1985-1994», *Tamid* 1 (1997), p. 157-265.

II. *A bibliography on medieval inventories, wills, lists, and news about Hebrew books.* This is a list of seventy-five articles dealing with documents that contain inventories and lists of Hebrew books from the Middle Ages. Each item is provided with a short comment on the origin of the document discussed. It includes a classification by territories.

III. *An inventory of books belonging to Abraham Samuel of Peralada (1389).* This section includes the edition of a list of more than eighty Hebrew books extracted from a protocol of the notary public Jaume Hospital (second half of the 14th century) that lists the property of Abraham Samuel of Peralada. The books are identified, with short comments.

IV. *A list of publications containing the bibliography of scholars whose works have had some bearing on the history of the life and the culture of the Jews in the Middle Ages.*