

**A thousand
years**

מאור

Luminous

**of Hebrew
manuscripts**

Luminous: A thousand years of Hebrew manuscripts

The Hebrew written word has illuminated a long, lively and living tradition. For millennia, Jews have maintained strong community practices. Living in scattered communities across the world, Jewish people historically produced manuscripts that preserved and passed on their religion and culture. Jewish manuscripts were created for religious and secular purposes: to pray and learn, to tell stories and histories, to translate and extend knowledge. All texts containing the names of God were revered and retained, and manuscripts were valuable possessions closely held and easily moved.

In dispersed communities, Jews have always interacted with their neighbours, creating a mosaic of diverse traditions. Jews have lived in Australia since 1788, when the first were transported as convicts from England. Distinctive practices and identities developed in response to unique local landscapes and situations. Today, Jews in Australia continue to engage with handwritten and ancient texts. Hebrew manuscripts inform everyday lives, sometimes viewed through a contemporary local lens. This exhibition showcases the power of the written word to unite people across communities, generations and locations.

This exhibition will immerse you in the sounds of Australian Jews engaging with Hebrew texts in their lives today. Listen as the texts are recited, sung, celebrated, interpreted and inscribed. Hear the ancient words that are used to guide prayer, study, celebration and mourning. The soundscape features original music by local artists inspired by Hebrew texts and Jewish traditions.

Luminous: A thousand years of Hebrew manuscripts features items from the British Library, the David Hailperin Collection at State Library Victoria, the Jewish Museum of Australia and private lenders.

The Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew Bible is the foundational text of the Jewish religion, one of the world's oldest faiths. It is the basis of Jewish religious life. In many Christian circles, it is referred to as the Old Testament. It is also known as the TaNaKh, an acronym for its three divisions: Torah (first five books of the Bible), Nevi'im (prophetic and historical books) and Ketuvim (writings).

The Torah is the most sacred part of the Bible. According to Orthodox Jewish belief, it is the word of God communicated directly to Moses. For others, the Torah is regarded as a human document compiled over hundreds of years. In this section, discover biblical texts from around the world and the different ways they are used in worship and everyday life.

A MANUSCRIPT is a hand-written text, and a CODEX is a bound book with pages.

CANTILLATION is chanting or ritual reading from the Torah. Cantors and congregants read from the Torah every Sabbath.

PARCHMENT refers to a writing material made from the hide of a kosher animal and used to prepare Torah scrolls.

Yad

Russia, 19th century

On loan from the Jewish Museum of Australia, Melbourne

Donated by John Gandel

JMA 5109

A *yad* is a ritual object used by a Torah reader to follow the text in the scroll as it is recited during religious services. Meaning 'hand' in Hebrew, the *yad* protects the scroll from human touch. This pointer is designed, like many are, in the shape of a finger. It is inscribed with the name 'Libah Goldman Bat Mordechai', or Libah Goldman daughter of Mordechai, which is curious because women are not permitted to read from the Torah in front of men in most Orthodox congregations. No trace of Libah has been found to confirm why this object bears her name.

Hoshen

Lublin, Poland, 1843

On loan from the Jewish Museum of Australia, Melbourne

Donated by the Goldschlager family

JMA 6223

In the synagogue, the Torah is often dressed in rich fabrics and decorated with fine ornaments, such as this breastplate. Decorations are placed over the scroll to indicate its central and sacred place in communal life. Torah ornaments, often made of or plated with silver, indicate the wealth and influence of the congregation. This piece was made by self-taught artists at a time and place when Jews were not permitted to be apprenticed as artisans. The motifs depicted in such ornaments usually reference ritual objects, biblical stories or historical events. They help differentiate one Torah from another. In Sephardi communities originating on the Iberian Peninsula and in southern France, and Mizrahi communities from the Middle East and North Africa, the Torah is placed inside an elaborately decorated wooden case. The cases are shaped and decorated differently, according to community customs, but many are inscribed with biblical verses and dressed in colourful fabrics.

Torah

Kaifeng, China, 17th century

On loan from the British Library, London

ADD MS 19250

A Torah is the focus of Jewish observance and tradition. The scroll on which the Torah is inscribed is regarded as a sacred object and treated with great reverence. It is housed in a special place in the synagogue and removed with great ceremony for services. Torah scrolls are made from parchment and written upon by a specially trained *sofer*, or scribe, according to specific artistic and religious laws.

This scroll belonged to the Jewish community in Kaifeng, China. Around the 10th century, merchants arriving from the Middle East established the Kaifeng community. Christian missionaries visiting around 1850 met with members of the Jewish community; they mixed with the local population, including other minorities, and no longer kept Jewish traditions. They sold Torah scrolls and various prayer books from the crumbling synagogue.

The Torah mentions 613 *mitzvot*, or commandments, which are interpreted and observed differently. There are Jews who adhere to these commandments as a matter of religious obligation; others connect to them for cultural rather than religious reasons. The ritual objects in this case show how instructions from the Torah are put into practice.

Tallit

2008

Private collection

Jews are commanded to wear a four-cornered garment with fringes as a constant reminder to observe God's commandments. This is most commonly observed in the form of a *tallit*, a shawl worn during prayer. This child's *tallit* was used as a prop in the film *Adam's Tallit*, by Melbourne writer and director Justin Olstein. The film was based on the life of Olstein's beloved grandmother, a Holocaust survivor who settled in Melbourne and was famed for crafting beautiful prayer shawls.

Iris Saar Isaacs

(Born 1969)

Mezuzot

Melbourne, 2003

On loan from the Jewish Museum of Australia, Melbourne

JMA 12903

Jews are commanded to inscribe the words of God 'on the doorposts of your house'. To do this, they fix a decorative case to the doorposts containing a parchment on which verses from

the Torah are written. This symbolises the idea that one's home is dedicated to the service of God, and for many it is a marker of their Jewish identity. These three *mezuzot* were made by Melbourne artist Iris Saar Isaacs, using local materials, including feathers, to explore ideas of home.

Tefillin

Palestine, 1945

On loan from the Jewish Museum of Australia, Melbourne

Donated by Leon Jedwab

JMA 13777.2 AND 13777.3

Jews are commanded to 'bind' God's words 'as a sign upon your hand and as a symbol between your eyes', a reminder that the commandments should govern all thoughts and actions. *Tefillin*, a set of small black leather boxes with leather straps containing scrolls of parchment with biblical verses, are worn by observant Jews during daily morning prayers. For some people, putting on *tefillin* is a daily act of humility and a reminder of the vastness of the universe.

This set was sent by an aunt to Holocaust survivor Leon Jedwab at a displaced persons camp in Germany in 1945. Leon was born in a small Jewish town in Poland. His father and brothers migrated to Australia in 1939, but Leon, his mother, Shaina, and siblings Moshe and Riva remained in Poland and were caught in World War II. His mother and younger siblings were murdered, while Leon was deported to forced-labour and concentration camps, including Auschwitz-Birkenau and Buchenwald. He finally joined his father and older brothers in Melbourne in 1946.

Bernard Picard

(1673–1733)

Tallit and tefillin

Amsterdam, 1721

Etching print, reproduction

Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Australia

Donated by Mr and Mrs L Kushinsky

JMA 2188

This historical illustration by Bernard Picard, a French Protestant engraver who had a keen interest in religious life, represents a *tallit* and *tefillin*, as well as their use in daily Jewish practice.

Megillat Esther

Netherlands, 19th century

On loan from the Jewish Museum of Australia, Melbourne

Donated by HM Lissauer

JMA 2643

Megillat Esther, or Esther Scroll, is read aloud in the synagogue during the festival of Purim. The scroll recalls the story of Esther, a Persian Jew who became Queen after marrying King Ahashverosh. Esther saved the Jews across the Persian Empire when the royal advisor, Haman, sought their destruction. On Purim, Jews commemorate this story of resistance and survival in joyous celebrations that include dressing up, feasting, exchanging gifts, donating to the poor, and lively musical comedy performances. Megillat Esther is one of five Hebrew Bible scrolls that are read in the synagogue on special festivals and fast days.

Gragger

Poland, 19th century

On loan from the Jewish Museum of Australia, Melbourne

Donated by John Gandel

JMA 5034

A *gragger* is used to drown out recitations of the name of Haman, the villain of the Purim story. During the ritual reading of the Megillat Esther, the scroll reader chants Haman's name and the congregants spin *graggers* and whoop to howl down his name. It is traditional to feast wildly, even to drink alcohol, until the name of Haman is no longer recognisable from that of the story's heroes: Esther and her uncle, Mordechai.

Eliezer ben Elijah Ashkenazi

(1512–1585)

Perush Megillat Esther

Venice, printed 1561

David Hailperin Collection, State Library Victoria

RARES 222.9ASH36C

This is an interpretation of the Esther Scroll and an example of Judaism's long-standing tradition of biblical commentary. The author, Rabbi Eliezer ben Elijah Ashkenazi, was a German Jewish scholar and a physician. He served as a rabbi in several 16th-century centres of Jewish life, including Egypt, Cyprus, Italy and Poland. Interpretation and teaching are central activities for congregational rabbis.

Micrography

Hebrew manuscripts of the Bible are often adorned with micrography, a unique Jewish scribal art that uses tiny Hebrew letters to form designs. Micrography is essentially crafted from the Masoretic notes accompanying the biblical text. The scribes worked the Masoretic notes into micrographic designs and shapes. In micrography, Jews are sometimes represented as hunted deer or rabbits, allowing the scribes and illustrators to tell contemporary stories, such as tales of persecution, as they illustrated biblical stories.

MASORAH are the rules and regulations for the reading, writing, pronunciation and chanting of the Hebrew text of the Bible. The role of Masorah is to ensure the correct transmission of the traditional text.

ILLUMINATIONS in some medieval Hebrew manuscripts were by non-Jewish artisans, suggesting cross-cultural ties between Jewish scribes and Christian illustrators.

PIGMENTS used to illustrate medieval manuscripts included paints from animals, vegetables and minerals. Rare and expensive inks, such as ultramarine blue made from the gemstone lapis lazuli, were often saved for sacred manuscripts.

First Gaster Bible

Probably Egypt, 10th century

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 9879

This manuscript is named after its last owner, Dr Moses Gaster (1856–1939). Gaster was spiritual leader of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation in London, the religious centre for Sephardi Jews in the Anglo-Jewish world. Sephardi Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal during the Inquisition, when their religious practices were forbidden under Catholic rule. In England, they continued to practice their distinct traditions. The floral and geometric patterns decorating this very ancient, fragmentary Hebrew Bible show the influence of Islamic art on Jewish manuscripts produced in Muslim cultures.

Harley Catalan Bible

Catalonia, Spain, 14th century

On loan from the British Library, London

HARLEY MS 1528

For centuries, the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem was the centre of a sacrificial system of worship. After the Romans destroyed it in 70 CE and exiled the Jewish people, the Temple continued to occupy a central place in Jewish imagination and memory. Indeed, among Spanish Jews, the Bible was referred to as Mikdash-ya, or Temple of God. This idea is captured in these illustrations from a 14th-century Spanish Bible, which reference the Temple and its place at the centre of Jewish observance in the Diaspora.

Duke of Sussex's German Pentateuch

Lake Constance, Germany, 14th century

On loan from the British Library, London

ADD MS 15282

In this 700-year-old Bible, the story of Abraham sacrificing a ram instead of his son Isaac is accompanied by micrographic Masorah in the shape of the ram. Masorah are margin annotations in a biblical manuscript, sometimes taking the form of distinctive figurative designs and geometric shapes, such as those in this manuscript. Masorah originated in the work of Jewish scribes between the 6th and 10th centuries, whose instructions for traditional pronunciation, spelling and chanting of the text provided for the correct reading and transmission of the Torah. Masorah included vowel markings, as biblical Hebrew had no vowels, and they formed the basis of what is known as the Masoretic text.

Jacob ben Isaac Ashkenazi

(1550–1625)

Tzenah Urenah

Amsterdam, printed 1732

David Hailperin Collection, State Library Victoria

RARESF 222.1 J15

First published in 16th-century Poland, the *Tzenah Urenah* (literally, 'go forth and see') brings together biblical passages with parables, legends, homilies and ethical instruction from Jewish tradition. This genre was originally intended to make the text accessible to readers who lacked a mastery of Hebrew, the language of the Torah. The title is a quote from a verse in the *Song of Songs*, 'Go forth and see, O ye daughters of Zion'. Over time, *Tzenah Urenah* came to be considered the principal religious reading matter for women, who generally had less religious education than men. Mostly written in Yiddish, a vernacular language developed by the Jews of Eastern Europe, the *Tzenah Urenah* was structured around and read as part of the weekly Sabbath Torah reading.

Ḥamishah Ḥumshei Torah

Amsterdam, printed 1726

David Hailperin Collection, State Library Victoria

RARES 222.1 SO4

Within Judaism, Torah study is considered a sacred obligation. In communities of traditional Jewish learning, biblical study is always accompanied by rabbinic commentaries that date back hundreds of years. *Ḥamishah Ḥumshei Torah* shows how commentaries on the biblical text are represented as conversations that stretch across time and place. This section of the Bible, from the beginning of the Book of Exodus, is printed in a larger font than the rest of the text. It is surrounded by rabbinic commentaries. The first layer is an early 2nd-century Aramaic translation of the Torah called *Targum Onkelos*. Later Hebrew commentaries from 11th-century France and early 18th-century Amsterdam feature at the bottom of the page.

Vidal ben Isaac ha-Tzarfati

(c. 1550–1620)

Tzuf Devash

Amsterdam, printed 1718

David Hailperin Collection, State Library Victoria

RARES F 221.1 V66

This work is an example of Judaism's long-standing tradition of biblical commentary. Rabbi Vidal ben Isaac ha-Tzarfati was chief rabbi of Fez, Morocco. *Tzuf Devash* contains a series of homilies on the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. The volume in which this work appears also contains commentaries by the same author on the Books of Esther and Ruth, Psalms and Proverbs.

Beyond the Bible: the legal foundations of Judaism

Jewish learning takes the form of conversations between learned teachers over and between generations. It is a tradition of ongoing interpretation. The Torah contains a vast collection of *mitzvot*, or commandments, covering many aspects of everyday life. For example, it forbids work on the Sabbath, but it does not define the meaning of 'work'. Accordingly, rabbis collated 39 major categories of prohibited activity, including carrying, cooking, burning and tearing.

These and other discussions had by Jewish religious scholars were collected in the Talmud (far left in the case to the left) from about 500 CE. The responsa literature (case centre right) contains answers to questions on matters of Jewish law, dating from the 7th century. All this material was eventually 'codified', or organised into a legal system for regulating daily life: public and private, personal and interpersonal, communal, commercial and agricultural. The earliest code is the *Mishneh Torah*, prepared by Maimonides during the 12th century (case centre left). During the 16th century, Joseph Karo compiled the *Shulhan Arukh*, the final authoritative code of Jewish law (case far right), which provides clear and practical instructions for specific situations. This system of Jewish law is known as Halakhah.

SHABBAT, the Jewish Sabbath, begins at sunset on Friday and ends at sunset on Saturday.

PRINTING revolutionised the way Jews engage with Jewish texts, including the Bible.

The TALMUD is the central text of Rabbinic Judaism and one of the major sources of Jewish religious law. It brings together generations of commentators, who converse with and debate one another across time and place about the meaning and application of biblical law.

COMMENTARIES on Jewish religious texts explain their meaning and application to daily life.

The printed Talmud

Following the introduction of printing in Europe in the 15th century, text from the Talmud and various commentaries could appear on a single page, making study easier. Printed editions of the Talmud assembled the words of generations of commentators, conversing with and debating one another across time and place. Eventually, the 1886 Vilna edition, with its distinctive format (shown in the chart at left), became the most printed version of the Talmud. It is still used today. The central panel of this graphic shows the same text as the manuscript in the case below (far left), but surrounded by a range of later commentaries.

Talmud Beitzah

Berlin, c. 1682

David Hailperin Collection, State Library Victoria

RARES 091 H35 (VOLUME B)

Can an egg laid on the day of a Jewish sacred festival be eaten that same day? The seemingly strange question, posed at the beginning of this page, is connected to a wider discussion about activities prohibited on the Sabbath and sacred festival days. Questions relating to Jewish religious observance and numerous other matters are explored in the Talmud, the foundational text of Jewish religious law.

Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides)

(1138–1204)

Mishneh Torah

Amsterdam, printed 1702

David Hailperin Collection, State Library Victoria

RARESF 296 M85Y

Drawing on the Talmud and other Jewish texts, the great medieval legal scholar and philosopher Maimonides undertook the task of codifying the entire system of Jewish law in his 14-volume *Mishneh Torah* (*Repetition of the Torah*). This is the opening page of the first volume, *Book of Knowledge*. In the words of Maimonides, it contains ‘commandments that are the basic principles of the religion of Moses Our Teacher’. The volume also examines the fundamentals of Jewish faith.

Sha'arei Tzedek

Salonika, printed 1792

David Hailperin Collection, State Library Victoria

RARES 296 M72

Chief rabbis of the two leading academies of Jewish learning in Babylonia (present-day Iraq) were recognised throughout the Jewish world as the highest authorities on Jewish law. They began developing a body of writing known as Responsa, based on rabbinical interpretations of the Torah, which later rabbis referred to when making legal decisions. This book contains a collection of more than 500 Responsa. Responsa are the means through which Jewish legal decisions are still communicated today.

Joseph Karo

(1488–1575)

Shulḥan Arukh

Amsterdam, printed 1661–98

David Hailperin Collection, State Library Victoria

RARES 296 C22SH (1-4)

This is a practical and accessible guide to Jewish living. It offers clear instruction for every aspect of a religious Jew's daily behaviour, including observance of the Sabbath and festivals, dietary and dress laws, and marital and business relationships. Maimonides was the first to develop a code of Jewish law, but others followed. Rabbi Joseph Karo wrote the *Shulḥan Arukh* in Ottoman Palestine, and the work became a favoured text.

Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides)

(1138–1204)

Responsum

Fustat (Cairo), Egypt, 12th century

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 5519B

Maimonides was the greatest spiritual leader of the medieval Jewish world. He was a Spanish-born legal authority, philosopher and physician. Congregations around the world sought his opinion on matters of religious law. This responsum is a reply to a teacher who asked Maimonides if he could revoke a sacred oath not to teach the daughters of a particular individual. The oath, which had been prompted by slanderous remarks, resulted in a loss of earnings for the teacher and disruption to the girls' education. Maimonides succinctly rules that the teacher should rescind the oath in front of 'three Israelites' and then resume his work. Maimonides' reply occupies the last three lines and his signature, Moshe (Moses), is the very last word. This rare signature connects us with the esteemed scholar and his venerated opinions.

Living together, living apart

Residing in many countries around the world, Jews have always engaged with a range of languages, cultures and religions. In the pre-modern period, Jews lived under Christian or Muslim rule and were excluded from the wider societies of which they were part. Interactions with the dominant Christian and Muslim societies often involved violence and conflict. Even so, within their self-contained communities Jews created and maintained rich and vibrant cultures. When their relationships with neighbouring groups were harmonious, they exchanged ideas and influences. Jewish art from these times shows elements from the cultures around them, including language and literary and creative styles. This section displays manuscripts that reflect these varied situations.

Sephardi Jews originated in Spain and Portugal; Provence, in southern France, is also regarded as an area of Sephardi culture and influence. Mizrahi Jews are originally from the Middle East, and Ashkenazi Jews are from Germany and France.

Jewish languages of the Diaspora are hybrid dialects based on local languages and using the Hebrew alphabet. They include Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-Persian, Judeo-Urdu, Yiddish, Ladino and Aramaic.

Sloane Haggadah

Germany, 1740

On loan from the British Library, London

SLOANE MS 3173

A Haggadah is a collection of Jewish prayers and readings that accompany the Passover *seder*, a service at home that commemorates the liberation of the ancient Israelites from slavery, as described in the Book of Exodus. The ritual meal eaten on the eve of the Passover was formalised during the 2nd century, following the example of the Greeks, who combined food with philosophical debate. The literal meaning of the Hebrew word Haggadah is 'narration' or 'telling'. During the *seder*, the story of Exodus is retold, aspects of which are symbolically re-enacted. Passover is widely celebrated in Jewish communities across the world and is often a lively annual family gathering. The Haggadah remains one of the most cherished and frequently illustrated texts in Judaism, as is demonstrated by this lavishly decorated 18th-century text from Germany.

Haggadah shel Pesah

Amsterdam, 1781

David Hailperin Collection, State Library Victoria

RARES 296 PH

The Passover *seder* includes singing, discussion, wine and storytelling around the biblical story of the Exodus from Egypt. It includes the recitation of the 'ten plagues' that God inflicted on the Egyptians for refusing to free the ancient Israelites from slavery. As each plague is read out, guests dip a finger in their wine cup and leave a drop on a plate, a symbol of their sadness at the suffering of others. This page contains the text and an illustration of the ten plagues. The narrative is surrounded by commentaries that interpret the story.

The puppets displayed are one of many strategies used to help children engage with the story, as teaching each new generation about this journey from slavery to freedom is a central theme of Passover.

Sue Trytell

(Born 1943)

Matzah cover

Australia, 1991

On loan from the Jewish Museum of Australia, Melbourne

Purchased with the Sara Weis Acquisition Fund

JMA 2572

A decorative cover is used at the *seder* to wrap the *matzah*, a flatbread, that is eaten during the service and with the meal. Artist Sue Trytell used her interest in Australian Indigenous landscape and light to make a ceremonial cover that represents the Passover themes of freedom and renewal. The *matzah* is a reminder that the Israelites left Egypt in a hurry, without time to bake bread.

Victor Majzner

(Born 1945)

Andrew Majzner

(Born 1970)

The Australian Haggadah

Melbourne, 1992

On loan from the Jewish Museum of Australia, Melbourne

JMA 13889.1

This Haggadah is a limited-edition Australian version of the order of service for a Passover *seder*. The illustrations by father and son artists Victor and Andrew Majzner were inspired by local landscapes, particularly the desert. Drawings of Australian native flowers combined with Hebrew calligraphy express their experience and identity as Australian Jews. The *seder* allows for reflection on contemporary and personal meanings of Passover's main theme, freedom. Participation in a *seder* can be a joyful family occasion and a celebration of personal freedom. For some Jews, this ritual might be their only continuous connection to culture. For observant Jews, it is an acknowledgement of God's role in the story of the Exodus.

Glenice Matthews

(1943–2011)

Miriam's cup

Australia, 2007

On loan from the Jewish Museum of Australia, Melbourne

JMA 12905

Sometimes an additional cup is used in the *seder* to highlight women's role in the Exodus. A Miriam's cup, into which water is poured, is placed at the centre of the *seder* table. It symbolises the important place of Miriam, Moses' sister, in the Passover story and it is also a contemporary feminist response to the central role of Elijah's cup in the *seder*. This Miriam's cup honours the biblical figure's close association with water and the vital role of women in Jewish tradition and history. Artist Glenice Matthews has set an Australian South Sea pearl in the bottom of the cup to ensure it is used for water rather than for wine, which would dissolve the pearl.

Elijah's cup

Jerusalem, c. 1856

On loan from the Jewish Museum of Australia, Melbourne

Donated by Miriam Sterling in memory of her husband, Julian Sterling

JMA 13776

The *kiddush*, or blessing cup, is central to Jewish ritual observance, including the Passover *seder*, at which four cups of wine are drunk, accompanied by a blessing. During the *seder*, participants drink wine while leaning to the left, an ancient Greek practice indicating freedom and security. An additional, fifth, cup of wine is poured for the biblical prophet Elijah, said to herald the arrival of the Messiah. This *kiddush* cup was given to the treasurer of the Hobart Synagogue by Rabbi Chaim Zvi Schneerson, who came to Australia from Jerusalem in 1856 to collect money for needy Jews.

David Ray

(Born 1972)

Seder plate

Australia, 2006

On loan from the Jewish Museum of Australia, Melbourne

JMA 12904

A *seder* plate holds ritual objects and ceremonial foods that feature in the Passover service: an egg, a shank bone, horseradish, a green vegetable, bitter herbs and *haroset* (a sweet paste of wine, cinnamon and fruit). Each element is symbolic in the retelling of the Passover story; for example, bitter herbs recall the suffering of slavery. Contemporary additions in some communities include an orange, symbolising inclusion of LGBTI Jews, and a block of ice to raise awareness about global warming. The design of artist David Ray's *seder* plate was inspired by the Passover story of Moses dividing the Red Sea.

Hebrew charter

England, 1280

On loan from the British Library, London

LANSDOWNE CH 667

This deed of sale for a house in Norwich, England, reveals a rare example of a medieval Jewish woman engaged in business in her own name. The deed shows that Miriam had rights to the property, which she had to release before it could be sold. From this charter we see that Jewish legal documents written in Hebrew were accepted in medieval England. Jews arrived in England shortly after the Norman Conquest in 1066, but they were expelled by Edward I in 1290. This house sale was made at a time when King Edward was already increasing restrictions on where Jews could live.

Shalom ben Joseph Shabazi

(1619–1686)

Divan

Tanam, Yemen, and Jerusalem, Land of Israel, 17th–18th century

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 4114

This collection of Yemeni Hebrew poetry was strongly influenced by Arabic verse. Shabazi, a revered 17th-century Yemeni rabbi and poet, wrote in Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic. His poems were written to be sung, hence the narrow format of this book, designed to be held in the singer's left hand during a feast. Shabazi's poems have gained a following since being republished and put to music by contemporary musicians.

Perek Shirah

Vienna, Austria, or Pressburg (Bratislava), Hungary (Slovakia), c. 1740

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 12983

Perek Shirah is an ancient hymn of praise in which every living thing – beginning with celestial beings and ending with dogs – gives thanks for its existence. The praises are mostly biblical verses, often taken from the Book of Psalms. This page, illustrated with 13 different animals, starts the chapter dedicated to the four-legged beasts. The style reflects 18th-century European art and the text is in Hebrew and Yiddish, a German dialect using Hebrew script. Some versions of *Perek Shirah* are associated with Sephardi and Mizrahi Jewish traditions and are written in other Hebrew vernacular languages.

Imrani of Shiraz

(1454–1536)

Fath Nama

Probably Isfahan, Persia, 17th–18th century

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 13704

This is a Judeo-Persian poetic text of rousing biblical tales from the Books of Joshua, Ruth and Samuel. The work, also known as Book of Conquest, is in the style of the Persian epic and draws on Jewish and Islamic literature. The manuscript features Persian-inspired miniatures and events from the Book of Joshua, including depictions of Joshua and the priests carrying the ark across the Jordan River, seven priests blowing the *shofar* before the walls of Jericho, and Joshua entering battle on a black horse. The Judeo-Persian dialect is written in Hebrew characters and combines Persian with Hebrew and Aramaic words. Using Hebrew script to write local languages preserved Jewish identity and cultural heritage in scattered Jewish communities.

Agha Hasan Amanat

(1815–1858)

Indar Sabha

Kolkata, India, 1887

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 13287

This 19th-century play in verse is about a romance between a prince and a fairy, authored by an Urdu poet of Iranian descent. The play opens with a sensuous depiction of the celestial court of Indra, home of the Hindu gods and of fairies with the names of jewels. Written in Judeo-Urdu, or Urdu in Hebrew script, the text's literary style draws on Persian epics and Urdu and Indian poetry. The settings reference the court of Wajid Ali Shah, the last king of Awadh and the author's patron. It was probably produced for an actor from the Baghdadi Jewish community in India and was first staged by the Persian theatre company in Bombay (Mumbai) in 1864. The Iraqi community of India included Jews from Baghdad and other Arabic-speaking areas of the Middle East who followed Mizrahi traditions.

Samson ben Zadok

(Died 1274)

Baruh ben Isaac

(c. 1140–1212)

Works on Halakhah

Sefer ha-Tashbets

Sefer ha-Terumah

Germany, 1307

On loan from the British Library, London

ADD MS 18424

Over many centuries, Jews and Christians engaged in debates about religion. This 700-year-old book contains two works on religious law by German Jewish scholars. By 1599, the manuscript was in Italy, where along with numerous other Jewish books it was repeatedly checked by the Catholic Church for anti-Christian content. There are four signatures here by censors, most of whom were converts from Judaism to Christianity.

Dominico Irosolimitano

(c. 1560–1620)

Sefer ha-Zikkuk

Modena, Italy, 17th-century copy

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 6639

The Catholic Church considered certain passages in Hebrew books morally harmful or blasphemous. Censors deleted words they suspected were anti-Christian. This guide, written in 1596, contains an alphabetised list of around 450 works considered blasphemous; it played a critical role in the censorship of Hebrew books in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. The author, born Samuel Vivas in Safed, became a physician and rabbi before converting to Christianity. He travelled to Venice and Mantua, where he taught Hebrew, translated the New Testament into Hebrew and censored 20,000 copies of Hebrew books and manuscripts. *Sefer ha-Zikkuk*, or the Book of Expurgation, is open at a page that lists *Sefer ha-Tashbets*, a work of Jewish religious law, displayed on the left.

Ishmael Ḥanina ben Mordeḥai of Valmontano

Sheva Ḥakiroṯ

Italy, 18th–19th century

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 10740

Jews living in Christian lands were sometimes forced by the authorities to justify Jewish views on Christianity. In 1568 in Bologna, a papal inquisition imprisoned, tortured and interrogated Rabbi Ishmael Ḥanina. This document is a copy of his account of the interrogation. It is a rare record of the mechanisms of the Inquisition of Bologna and the authority it held over the local Jewish population. The rabbi was forced to clarify the meaning of allegedly anti-Christian expressions in the Talmud, effectively being put on trial as a representative of his religion. Less than a year later, the Jewish community was expelled from Bologna.

Ma'aseh Ra va-Mar

Probably North Africa, 17th-century copy

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 12368

This is an account of persecution that occurred in 1589 against the substantial community of Jews in Maghreb, or North Africa, then in the Ottoman Empire. A local Arab religious leader, Yahya ibn Yahya, revolted and took control of the area. He forced the local Jewish population to choose between conversion and death. Eventually the Ottoman sultan's army defeated him and overturned the decrees against the Jews.

Ketubah

Morocco, 1886

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 16520

This *ketubah*, or marriage contract, from Morocco integrates motifs that are common in Islamic cultures. The *ketubah* has been at the heart of Jewish wedding ceremonies for more than 2000 years. While the traditional text is fixed, decorative elements often reflect the country in which it is produced. The *ketubah* is written in Aramaic, the local language in Babylon, where the tradition was first developed.

A *ketubah* is a legal rather than a ceremonial or religious document. It specifies the groom's obligations to the bride and details the bride's dowry. The bride 'will be a wife according to the laws of Moses'; in return, her husband will 'serve, cherish, sustain, feed, provide income and clothe' her in the way of 'Jewish husbands'. Women are granted legal and financial rights if their marriage ends through divorce or death. Jewish marriage contracts were likely one of the earliest documents to grant women specific legal and financial rights. Following a marriage, the *ketubah* is the bride's possession and guarantee.

Ketubot

Private loans

The *ketubah* (plural *ketubot*) is a handwritten, personalised manuscript that continues to feature in Jewish weddings. In contemporary Jewish communities, not bound by religious law, this marriage certificate has become an egalitarian document that frames marriage as a partnership rather than a legal contract.

Clockwise from top left

***Ketubah* of Susan Goodman and Matthew Ostridge**

Illustrated by Adriana Saipe

In this civil inter-faith marriage contract, the Australian location has clearly influenced the personalised design and contemporary text.

***Ketubah* of Naomi Wise Green and Anthony Green**

Illustrated by Anthony's sister, Nikki Green

This *ketubah* includes the names of the nuptials' mothers, not just their fathers. The design was inspired by the landscape around Greensborough, Victoria.

***Ketubah* of Jacqui Majzner and David Mileikowski**

Illustrated by Victor Majzner

This is a secular humanist text, without references to God. The illustrations, made by the bride's father, were inspired by the Australian landscape.

***Ketubah* of Romi Kupfer Yemini and Edden Kupfer Yemini**

Illustrated by Ryan Abramowitz

This *ketubah* has traditional wording, with the text handwritten by David Lindell.

***Ketubah* of Nomi Blum and Emma Harrison**

Illustrated by Nomi's sister, Ariella Blum

This contract for a same-sex union reflects the commitments and ideals of Nomi and Emma's partnership.

Jacob Rafael of Modena

(1500s)

Reply regarding the biblical 'law of levirate marriage'

Italy, 1530

On loan from the British Library, London

ARUNDEL MS 151

This is a rabbinical response to a question about the marital status of England's King Henry VIII. Henry famously had six wives, and he created the Protestant Church of England to allow him to divorce and remarry.

When Henry sought to annul his first marriage, to Catherine of Aragon, on biblical grounds, his advisers consulted Jewish scholars. Because Jews had been expelled from England in 1290, they turned to Italian rabbis. In this reply, Rabbi Jacob Rafael does not support Henry's position. When the pope refused to grant an annulment, Henry broke with the papacy in Rome in order to end his marriage.

The power of letters and words

Mysticism uses the power of Hebrew letters and words to bridge the gap between the human and the Divine. The beginnings of mysticism in Judaism date back to the 1st century CE. A branch of Jewish mysticism called Kabbalah, meaning received tradition, emerged in 13th-century southern France and Spain. It spread to other Jewish communities and continues to occupy an important place in Judaism. Kabbalah draws on ancient secret wisdom to better understand the human and Divine realms. Kabbalists sought to use their secret knowledge to connect these two worlds. In this section, discover the power of Hebrew letters and words at the centre of kabbalistic theory and practice.

KABBALAH is a branch of Jewish mysticism.

SEFIROT, or emanations, are the ten attributes of the Divine according to Kabbalah.

Abraham Abulafia

(1240–1290)

Ḥaye ha-Olam ha-Ba

Italy, 15th-century copy

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 4596

Prophetic or ecstatic Kabbalah is a unique mystical method for reaching a state of union with the Divine. It was founded by Abulafia, a kabbalist from Spain. The circles on this open page contain instructions for mystical meditation, reminiscent of practices in Buddhism and Hinduism. The techniques included combining letters, reciting and visualising names for the Divine, breathing exercises and poses. The focus is on achieving an ecstatic experience, but it includes remarks about the Jewish perspective on the 'after world'. The person using these meditative techniques is meant to achieve a state of enlightenment, which opens the gates to a new world – a 'world to come' or 'next world'. Latin translations of Abulafia's writings influenced many Renaissance Christian kabbalists.

Joseph Gikatilla

(1248–c. 1305)

Paulus Ricius, *translator*

(1480–1541)

Portae Lucis

Augsburg, Germany, 1516

On loan from the British Library, London

4033.CC.33

This abbreviated Latin translation of *Sha'are Orah* (*Gates of Light*) explains important kabbalistic concepts such as the ten *sefirot*, or emanations, which symbolise different attributes of the Divine, including wisdom, understanding and kindness. The title page of this first Latin edition shows Joseph Gikatilla, the author of *Sha'are Orah*, holding the tree of life. He was a noted Spanish mystic and prolific writer on spiritual subjects, who also had significant knowledge of secular sciences. The translation, which influenced Christian kabbalists, was published in print and circulated several decades before the original Hebrew text.

Treatise on palmistry

Tunis, Tunisia, 1775

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 10357

Palm reading became a widespread practice in Judaism in the 13th century, popularised by Kabbalah. One of the oldest forms of divination, palmistry is believed to reveal your personality and tell your future. This treatise is very short, occupying just two pages, and is located at the end of a medical work by physician Isaac Ḥaim Cantarini. It was perhaps placed here because palmistry was often considered a useful supplement to medicine. This work discusses six major lines of the palm and is accompanied by a full-page diagram. Palmistry was believed to predict a person's level of influence, wisdom, honour, fortune and wealth, as well as their lifespan.

Elisha ben Gad Ankonah

(1500s)

Etz ha-Da'at

Safed, Land of Israel, 1535–36

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 12362

This page of *Etz ha-Da'at* (*The Tree of Knowledge*) shows love potions and spells. Before the end of the 18th century, works on folk medicine often embraced both magical and medical elements. There are 125 recipes in this Jewish book, including spells or medicines for fever, safe travel, love, pregnant women, escaping from demons, diarrhoea and catching thieves. In a rare and intriguing introduction, the author says that he copied these secret spells from a hidden book in the library of 'wise and knowledgeable sages' in Venice. He later collected additional material in Safed, where he went to do further study. The spells include amulets for protection. The first of these is a spell against fevers that features an early reference to the well-known magic word, 'abracadabra'.

Bridal amulet necklace

Yemen, 19th century

On loan from the Jewish Museum of Australia, Melbourne

Donated by HM Lissauer

JMA 8593

A bridal amulet necklace was often gifted to a woman from Yemen to wear at her wedding. This was one of many items of jewellery a bride would usually wear to ward off the 'evil eye'. Engraved silver amulet boxes, such as the central silver tube of this necklace, held verses of Hebrew text on parchment that were believed to protect the wearer from bad luck. Red coral beads were also thought to repel evil. The beading technique used in this necklace was brought to Morocco by Jewish silversmiths exiled during the Spanish Inquisition.

Ḥamsa

Private loan

The *ḥamsa* is a palm-shaped amulet named for the five fingers of the hand, a traditional design used by Muslims and Jews to protect the wearer from harm. *ḥamsa* is the Arabic and *ḥamsa* is the Hebrew for the English word 'five'. The shape also represents the five books of the Torah. Some *ḥamsa* are engraved with a biblical verse; others are decorated with an image of an eye, designed to ward off bad luck or the 'evil eye'. Today, a *ḥamsa* is sometimes worn as a symbol of identity and cultural affiliation.

Hebrew amulet

18th–19th century

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 16206

This amulet, written for Esther bat Miriam, was intended to protect her from all possible misfortunes. Amulets are thought to have magical powers, to bring good luck and to guard against evil, sickness and other disasters. They have been carried or worn for centuries and are mentioned in the Talmud. The most common of them offered protection during childbirth or illness. For Jews, special powers were believed to come from the name of God, the words and phrases spoken by God and the letters of the Hebrew alphabet itself. Magic amulets featuring Hebrew writing – such as this one, which evokes the names of the angels Michael, Tuviel, Hasdiel, Zakhriel and Gabriel, and God – were believed to be especially powerful against evil.

A wheel of prediction

18th century

David Hailperin Collection, State Library Victoria

RARES 091 H35 (VOLUME E)

The diagram on the wall predicts what will happen to people who go to war or undertake a journey. The prediction considers the number of days until the new moon, the name of the person seeking the forecast and the number of letters in their name. The outcome depends on whether the calculation ends up in the upper or lower section of the wheel. The Hebrew manuscript from which this diagram comes has various magic spells, divinations, amulets and folk medicines.

Attributed to Abraham ibn Ezra

(c. 1089–c. 1167)

Goralot ha-Hol

Probably North Africa or Middle East, 16th- or 17th-century copy

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 10659

This is a work on geomancy, a technique that interprets patterns formed by markings on the ground or by tossing random handfuls of soil and rocks. Jews learned this technique from their Muslim neighbours and used it from the Middle Ages. When life was particularly dangerous, some people were comforted by predictions based on geomancy or astrology, another method considered in this manuscript. Many Hebrew manuscripts in the British Library collection have geomantic figures in the margins.

Mafteah Shelomoh

Amsterdam, Netherlands, c. 1700

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 14759

The drawing on this page illustrates how to use magic to escape from prison: 'Draw a boat on the floor, step into it and spirits will appear and carry you out'. Other spells on these pages will make one invisible or frighten away enemies. This manual is a compilation of several magical works that were translated into Hebrew from Latin or Italian, and it contains Christian, Jewish and Arabic elements.

Ilan

Morocco, 18th century

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 6996

This parchment represents the mystical world view of Isaac Luria, a 16th-century kabbalist whose views became almost universally accepted in the Jewish theological world. Luria's Kabbalah describes creation in new ways, based on existing beliefs in medieval Kabbalah. According to this understanding, the Divine created space for the physical world by withdrawing the infinite light that filled the cosmos at the time of creation. Aspects of divinity – known as *sefirot* – were projected in a descending chain that ultimately created the physical realm. This great chain of creation is shown here as a sequence of interlocking tree-like diagrams.

Victor Majzner

(Born 1943)

Chapter 12 From Images of Tanya series

Melbourne, 2001

On loan from Victor Majzner

According to some Jewish mystical writings, the world was created through the process of naming. Because the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet are believed to contain divinity, the spark of God is seen to rest even in objects through their names. In Jewish mystical tradition, there is a direct link between a name and the object it refers to, and the name reflects the nature of the object. These complex ideas are the basis for the tree of life, representing the connections between ten aspects of existence, humanity and divinity. Australian Jewish artist Victor Majzner has drawn on these ideas in this screenprint, part of a series that seeks to illuminate the *Tanya*, a late 18th-century work of Jewish mystical thought.

David Hailperin Collection

Rabbi Dr David Hailperin (1814–1860) was a mysterious and eccentric man whose fascinating life reveals something of Jewish migration patterns during the 19th century. He was probably born and married in Romania, where he also trained as a rabbi. He travelled to Turkey and obtained medical qualifications. In England, he worked as a merchant and mystic before migrating to Australia in 1855. He practised as a physician in Melbourne and Bendigo, where he was celebrated and then shunned by the local Jewish community. During his eventful life, Hailperin assembled a remarkable collection of around 160 volumes on Jewish religious law, Kabbalah and mysticism. The collection suggests an intelligent collector with broad interests. Before his death, Hailperin supposedly deposited his books with a pawnbroker to secure a loan of £10. The collection was discovered by Jewish Reverend Isaac Pulver, who recognised its significance and sold the collection to State Library Victoria.

‘I had some interesting talks with a rabbi who arrived from Poland via Istanbul. He was rather condescending in his manner and as one of my Jewish friends said to me: He is so clever that when he talks nobody can understand a thing. The rabbi announced that he had the power to find the mother lode of gold. He was kept in the best of everything by the Jewish Melbourne community and finally announced that the location of the lode was in Bendigo. Eventually a suitable spot was selected and the rabbi demanded that a tent stitched by the hand of a virgin be prepared and a young mother be placed in the middle of it on a chair. He rubbed some black shiny substance into the woman’s hand,

saying incantations all the time, and when the reflected sunlight from her palm struck the ground it indicated the place where to dig. Dig they did, far below the pipeclay, but did not find any gold. This I think was the demise of the rabbi's name, because soon after someone else was elected to the position of Chief Rabbi.' Seweryng Korzelinsky, *Memoirs of Gold-Digging in Australia*

Hebrew magic, amulets and spells

18th century

David Hailperin Collection, State Library of Victoria

RARES 091 H35 (VOLUME E)

This Hebrew manuscript contains material that belongs to a tradition of Jewish magic, originating in Egypt as early as 100 BCE. Some of the magical spells and recipes included went against Jewish law. Nevertheless, this tradition continued to be practised secretly. Some of these Hebrew spells, translated by Dr Merav Carmeli and illustrated by John Henry, are displayed on the screen to your right.

Science and scholarship

Scattered around the world and living among people who spoke many languages, Jewish scholars were usually multilingual. Those who studied sciences such as astronomy, medicine, philosophy and law had unique opportunities to share diverse ideas with other communities. At the crossroads of cultures, they translated works between Arabic, Latin and Hebrew. An important contribution made by Jewish scholars was communicating Greek and Arabic ideas to Christian Europe. In this section of the exhibition, explore how Jewish thinkers have spread knowledge and contributed new ideas to scholarship.

HEBREW was not spoken during the Middle Ages, but was the language of Jewish prayer and much literature.

COMMON ERA (CE) and Before the Common Era (BCE) are inclusive alternatives to the Christian terms Anno Domini (AD) and Before Christ (BC).

Ibn Sina (Avicenna)

(980–1037)

Nathan ha-Méati, *translator*

(1200s)

***The Canon of Medicine* [Hebrew translation of Books III and V]**

Spain or Italy, 1479

On loan from the British Library, London

HARLEY MS 5680

Jewish scholars from southern France, Spain and Italy translated many scientific works from Arabic to Hebrew, introducing new ideas into Europe. In 1279, Italian Jew Nathan ha-Méati translated the 11th-century text *The Canon of Medicine* by Ibn Sina (known as Avicenna) from the original Arabic. *The Canon* was an encyclopaedia of medicine based on empirical observation and was an influential medieval work. The translation created a new Hebrew medical vocabulary. This page from a 15th-century copy shows the end of Book V, which lists 650 remedies. Avicenna recommended sesame to make hair and nails grow, zucchini to improve eye health and reduce aging, cauliflower to clean the liver and almonds for respiratory diseases.

Toviyah Cohen

(1652–1729)

Ma'aseh Toviyah

Venice, printed 1708

David Hailperin Collection, State Library Victoria

RARES 181.3 T55

This treatise and reference work on the natural sciences contains material on all the disciplines of the day: theology, astronomy, hygiene, botany, cosmology and medicine. It was the first work of its kind in Hebrew. The image is a representation of a uterus, with a key identifying the anatomy to the right of the illustration. Born in Metz in north-eastern France, author Toviyah Cohen began his medical studies in Frankfurt, Germany, and completed them at the University of Padua, in Italy. He practised in Adrianople (present-day Edirne, Turkey) under five Ottoman sultans and eventually migrated to Jerusalem. He exemplifies the mobility of Jews at that time.

Toviyah Cohen

(1652–1729)

Ma'aseh Toviyah

Wellcome Collection

ATTRIBUTION 4.0 INTERNATIONAL (CC BY 4.0)

This illustration is from a different edition of the Hebrew scientific encyclopaedia displayed in the case below. It compares different parts of the human body to chambers of a house. Bizarre as it seems today, this was cutting-edge science at a time when very little was known about the human body.

Kitab al-Misaḥah

Yemen, 15th century

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 4104

Many Jewish scientific works from Muslim countries were written in Judeo-Arabic, such as this work of mathematics, the title of which translates as Book of Measuring. Jews in Muslim countries frequently spoke Arabic and could consult Arabic scientific works directly, encouraging a free exchange of ideas. These diagrams illustrate work on geometry. The notes in the right-hand margin are in Arabic, written in a mixture of Arabic and Hebrew scripts.

David Frizenhoizen

(1758–1828)

Sefer Kelil ha-Heshbon

Berlin, printed 1797

David Hailperin Collection, State Library Victoria

RARES 512 F91

This is a book on algebra and trigonometry, which made mathematics available to those who could read Hebrew. *Sefer Kelil ha-Heshbon* followed the general pattern of Hebrew works on mathematics at that time, using mathematics to address problems connected to Jewish religious life and thought. On this page, the author uses algebra and geometry to clarify a highly complex discussion in the Talmud regarding a matter of Jewish law that involves questions about the measurement and dimensions of a circular window. From the book's title page, it is clear that the author's goal is to make use of mathematical principles and processes to explain the meaning of particular issues in Jewish religious sources.

Alchemical writings

Probably Morocco, 1690

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 10289

This manuscript includes recipes to make gold and shows diagrams of equipment for this purpose. Alchemists searched for the elixir of life, the secret to immortality. To do this, they attempted to turn base metals like copper and lead into silver and gold. One section of the manuscript provides a comprehensive index of Greek, Arab and Latin alchemists and their writings. Alchemy was developed by medieval Christian scholars who incorporated Jewish kabbalistic ideas. There were few Jewish alchemists, and even fewer Hebrew works on alchemy have survived.

Nikki Green

(Born 1965)

Preifah

Western Australia, 2013

On loan from the Jewish Museum of Australia, Melbourne

JMA 13817

This manuscript by Australian Jewish artist Nikki Green contains images that depict the mystical significance and attributes of Hebrew letters. With a title that translates as Blossoming, it references the healing properties of Australian indigenous plants and flowers that match the qualities of the Hebrew letters. It also compares Jewish reverence for the book with Aboriginal connections to country. Each page was printed from a carved lino block onto hand-dyed paper using dyes extracted from native plants near her home in Denmark, south-west Western Australia.

Menaḥem ben Saruq

(c. 920–c. 970)

Maḥberet

Germany or France, 1189 copy

On loan from the British Library, London

ARUNDEL OR 51

This exceptionally rare manuscript is the earliest-known dated copy of the dictionary of biblical Hebrew. It was compiled by 10th-century Spanish Jewish grammarian Menaḥem ben Saruq. In it, he tests his theory that biblical Hebrew words have one or two root letters. Soon after, this was disproved by one of his students, who correctly suggested Hebrew words have three root letters. Despite its errors, the dictionary remained in use for many years and paved the way for research on the Hebrew language.

Petrus Martinius

(1530–1594)

Grammatica Hebraea

Amsterdam, printed 1621

David Hailperin Collection, State Library Victoria

RARES 492.4 M36

This is a grammar of the Hebrew language written in Latin, for the benefit of a scholarly Christian audience. During the 16th and 17th centuries, 'Hebraism' – Christian interest in post-biblical Hebrew language and culture – began to gain popularity in the Netherlands and Britain. This was perhaps due to an increase in Jewish settlement in these places following the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492. Amsterdam became a thriving centre of Sephardi (Spanish and Portuguese) Jewish life.

Wilhelm Gesenius

(1786–1842)

AE Cowley, *translator*

(1861–1931)

Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar

Oxford, printed 1910

State Library Victoria

S 492.4 G33H

This table of early Semitic and Hebrew alphabets appears in the English edition of Gesenius's grammar of biblical Hebrew. First published by Wilhelm Gesenius in 1813, it was revised many times by E Kautzsch (1841–1910), a German Protestant biblical scholar. Gesenius's grammar was an invaluable reference for serious Bible scholars for almost two centuries. This 1910 English translation is based on Kautzsch's 28th edition and is still widely used today.

Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides)

(1138–1204)

Samuel ibn Tibbon, *translator*

(c. 1165–1232)

Moreh Nevukhim

Catalonia, Spain, 14th century

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 14061

Jews in Europe turned to the great sage Maimonides when searching for answers to big questions. But they could not read his original Judeo-Arabic text, so Jewish scholars in southern France asked him to translate his work into Hebrew. Maimonides was too busy but recommended a French Jewish philosopher and translator, Samuel ibn Tibbon, who corresponded with him throughout the translation and finished the work just weeks before Maimonides died. This luxurious copy of *Guide for the Perplexed* contains several images of a lion, which suggest it may have been commissioned by a royal court. It was a collaboration between a Jewish *sofer*, or scribe, and a Christian court painter.

Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides)

(1138–1204)

Dalalat al-Ḥairin

Tawila, Yemen, 1380

On loan from the British Library, London

IO ISLAMIC 3679

Wrestling with big questions, the philosopher Maimonides attempted to reconcile Judaism with Aristotelian rationalism in this *Guide for the Perplexed* completed in 1190. This manuscript is the earliest-known copy, dated by the scribe and in the original Judeo-Arabic. Jews in Yemen were extremely interested in Maimonides' ideas, and this manuscript was regularly consulted for more than 500 years. Maimonides' ideas reached beyond the Jewish world, having a profound impact on non-Jewish philosophers from his time forward.

Al-Farghani

(c. 800–870)

Jacob Anatoli, *translator*

(1194–1256)

Sefer Al Fargani be-Hokhmat ha-Tekhunah

Probably North Africa, 16th–17th century

On loan from the British Library, London

ADD MS 27107

Al-Farghani's text played a key role in spreading Greek astronomical knowledge in medieval Europe. In 13th-century Naples, multilingual scholar Jacob Anatoli translated it into Hebrew, using both the original Arabic text and a Latin translation. It was an Arabic summary of Ptolemy's *Almagest*, a 2nd-century Greek-language mathematical and astronomical treatise on the motions of the stars and planets. These diagrams illustrate Ptolemy's understanding of the planets and stars, and their relationship to each other.

Barukh ben Jacob Schick

(1744–1464)

Amudei ha-Shamayim

Berlin, printed 1777

David Hailperin Collection, State Library Victoria

RARES 520 B28

This treatise on the planets and stars is a scientific commentary on Maimonides' laws for sanctifying the new moon. This is significant because the Jewish lunar calendar system sets the timing for observance of religious festivals. Barukh Schick was an 18th-century Polish-Lithuanian rabbi, who developed a fascination with the sciences. In his commentary, *The Heavenly Bodies*, Schick reflects a traditional medieval view of the cosmos; that is, he describes a Ptolemaic cosmology of an Earth-centred universe and shows absolutely no awareness of Copernicus or his model of the heliocentric system, which placed the sun at the centre of the universe. Copernicus' model was first published in 1543, so it is surprising that a scholar writing in 1777 didn't know of it.

Johannes de Sacrobosco (John of Holywood)

(c. 1195–c. 1256)

Solomon Avigdor, *translator*

(1384–?)

Mareh ha-Ofanim [Hebrew translation of *De Sphaera Mundi*]

Italy, 16th-century copy

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 10661

In 1399, Solomon Avigdor, a precocious 15-year-old living in Provence, translated Johannes de Sacrobosco's *De Sphaera Mundi*, the core Latin textbook on astronomy in Europe, into Hebrew. This page shows a Ptolemaic armillary sphere (a model of celestial objects), with the Earth at its centre. Astronomers used armillary spheres to model the universe. Images of this sphere were often included in Latin-printed editions of the text. Illustrations in this manuscript were strongly influenced by these Latin editions.

Abraham bar Ḥiyya

(c. 1070–1136 or 1145)

Tsurat ha-Arets

Byzantium (now parts of Turkey and Greece), 15th-century copy

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 10721

Abraham bar Ḥiyya was one of the greatest Jewish astronomers, and possibly the first to introduce Arabic algebra to Christian Europe. He wrote in Hebrew and pioneered the language's use for science. Writing in 12th-century Spain, he produced original works of astronomy, astrology and the Hebrew calendar. In *Tsurat ha-Arets (Shape of the Earth)*, he explores the creation of the Earth, heavens, moon and stars. He was also the most prominent translator of Arabic scientific works into Latin and Hebrew, helping to spread new learning to European Jews and non-Jews.

Calendrical and astronomical tables

Southern France or Spain, 15th century

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 11796

In ancient and medieval times, astronomy was important to Jews for both navigation and setting the Hebrew calendar. Medieval Jewish thinkers compiled astronomical tables that predicted the movements of the sun, moon and planets, and their relation to the fixed stars. This chart was produced as an educational tool to show how the sky looks in different geographic areas and at different times by mapping the zodiac against the ancient Greek concept of the seven climatic zones.

Joseph ben Shem Tov Ben Yeshuah Hai

(Died 1480)

She'erit Yosef

Tlemcen, Algeria, 1804

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 9782

Calendars are essential for determining the correct dates of religious festivals, especially when 39 categories of labour are forbidden by Jewish law, including planting and ploughing, baking and slaughter. This manuscript, *Joseph's Legacy*, about calendrical calculations is written in verse so that it is easy to remember. It also provides a visual aid, the human hand. It can be used to perform calendrical and astronomical calculations by assigning dates and numerical values to the bones and joints of the fingers.

Treatise on music and other scientific works

Probably Northern Italy, 15th century

On loan from the British Library, London

OR 10878

This manuscript contains one of the few medieval Jewish sources on music and shows the influence of European Christian music theory on Jewish practice. It includes the Guidonian hand, an aid for teaching singers to sight read, named after Guido d'Arezzo, an 11th-century monk and music theorist. Different parts of the hand represent different notes. Cantillating, or chanting, the Torah guided by notations in the scroll is central to synagogue services and is like the Guidonian hand system. Underneath the hand is a diagram of the medieval hexachord system, a form of scale with six notes: ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la.

A living tradition

The medieval Hebrew manuscripts on display are the foundations for a living tradition. Although the text of the Torah does not change, the way it is received and interpreted continues to evolve. The interpretation of texts is part of everyday life, and manifest in the daily decisions Jews make about how they observe the religion and identify with the culture. This tradition of interpretation is also evident at events such as weddings, synagogue services, weekly discussion classes, family Sabbath and Passover meals. Just a few of the ways that Australians engage with Hebrew texts is captured in *People of the Book*, a series of video portraits featured in this section. And just as study partners sit face to face across a table closely studying the Talmud, you can sit and explore some Jewish texts in this nook.

AUDIO accompanying this exhibition features the sounds of contemporary Australians engaging with Hebrew texts and practices. Listen as the texts are recited, sung, celebrated, interpreted and inscribed. Hear these ancient words used to guide prayer, study, celebration and mourning. The audio features original music by local artists, inspired by Hebrew texts and Jewish traditions.

BOOKS in this section are for reading in the library. They offer opportunities to immerse yourself in the texts of the Jewish tradition. Please feel free to sit and read, and then leave them for others to explore.

The *People of the Book* VIDEO PORTRAITS explore some of the many ways that Australians engage with and are guided by ancient texts in their daily lives.

Jaye Kranz

(Born 1973)

Exhibition audio

Featuring interviews with Rabbi Eli Gutnick, Klara Herz and Merav Carmeli.

Featuring recordings from St Kilda Hebrew Congregation; The Ark Centre; Micah Sapir & Talia Lakritz for Shira Melbourne; Grozinger/Berger family Passover 2022; Kranz-Moshinsky family Passover and Hannukah; Minyan for Danielle Charak OAM officiated by Rabbi Philip Heilbrunn OAM; Danita Moshinsky for Kehilat Kolenu; UJEB at Gardenvale Primary; Beit Chabad Melbourne Torah completion; and Ariele and Will Prinman wedding.

Featuring the music of Yuval Ashkar's trio Camoon; The Bashevis Singers; YID!; Gideon Preiss live at Melbourne Jewish Book Week 2022; and Lior.

Esther Takac

(Born 1962)

People of the Book

Video series featuring interviews with Joel Lazer, Victor Majzner, Ellyse Borghi, Rabbi Ya'akov Glasman, Ronnie Figdor, Frances Prince and Alice Chipkin.

Editing by Rosie Jones and Irene Metter.

Cinematography and sound recording by Tim O'Keefe and Zev Howley.

With thanks for animations: *The Healer*, produced by Estelle Rozinski, animation by David Asher Brook.

The Seder, produced by Estelle Rozinski, animation by Steven Durbach, music by Fem Belling.

And He Taught the Canaries to Sing, produced by Estelle Rozinski, animation by David Asher Brook, music by David Asher and Hanna Brook.

Birds of Us, produced by Estelle Rozinski, animation by Steven Durbach, music by Fem Belling.

Farbers Yard, produced by Estelle Rozinski, animation by Steven Durbach, music by Fem Belling.

Luminous: A thousand years of Hebrew Manuscripts

A State Library Victoria and British Library exhibition

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For full list of credits go to www.slv.vic.gov.au/luminous

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