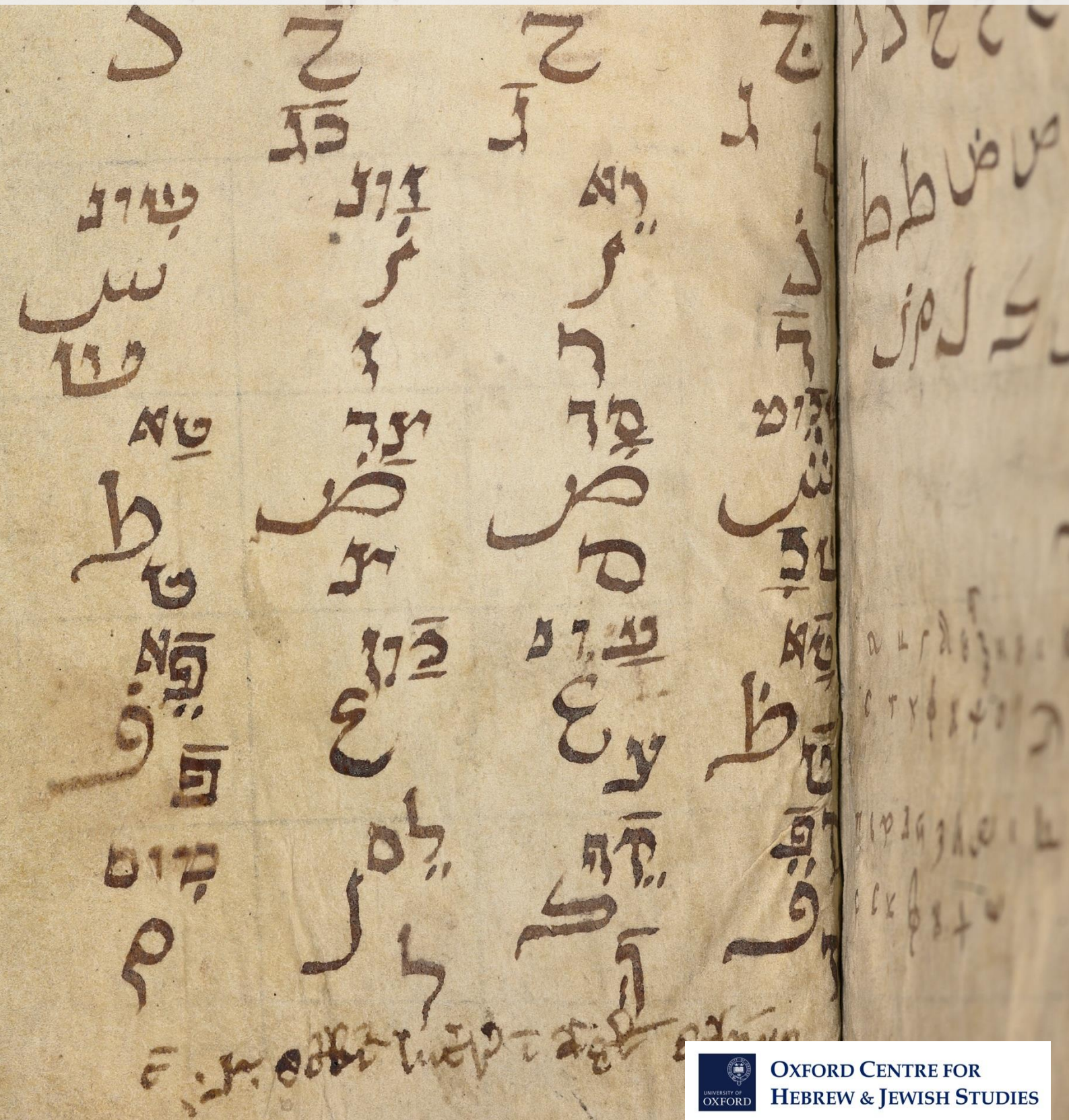




# Oxford School of Rare Jewish Languages

## IMPACT REPORT 2021-22





# Oxford School of Rare Jewish Languages

## Impact Report 2021–22

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This report was compiled, designed and edited by the Oxford School of Rare Jewish Languages (OSRJL) Coordinator, Madeleine Trivasse. Sections of the report were authored by Professor Judith Olszowy-Schlanger and Madeleine Trivasse respectively, whilst others were written by OSRJL students and teachers.

The data presented in this report reflect anonymised and/or non-personal information from and regarding student applications received by the OSRJL for the 2021–22 academic year; OSRJL class and lecture attendance records; responses to termly student and teacher surveys disseminated to all participating OSRJL students and teachers for their non-mandatory completion; as well as written communications between the OSRJL Coordinator, Madeleine Trivasse, and OSRJL students and teachers regarding feedback on the OSRJL programme. All processes of data collection were conducted during the 2021–22 academic year.

Images portraying and written materials produced by OSRJL students and/or teachers are published herein with the express written consent of said individuals. Names of individuals featured in this report have been eliminated upon request to preserve individuals' anonymity. Where relevant, citations and copyright notices are provided.

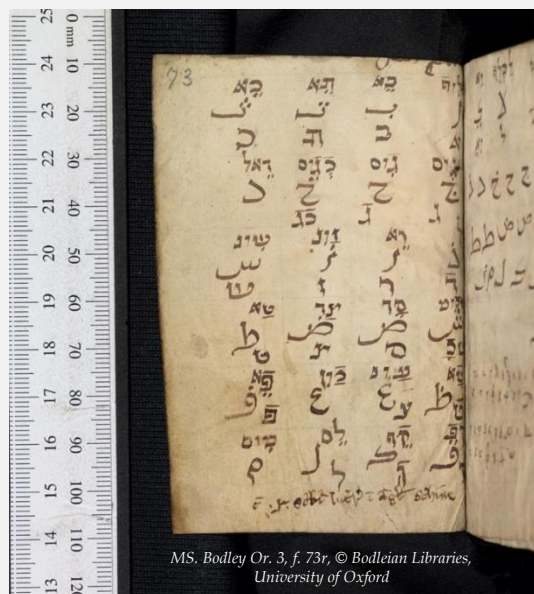
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# Table of Contents

Historical & Academic Context	4
Overview of the Programme	5
Year in Review	6
Monitoring, Evaluation & Reflection	14
Looking Forward	21
Thank You	24

## Historical & Academic Context



For nearly two thousand years in communities of the Diaspora, Jews have spoken the languages of their non-Jewish neighbours. While Hebrew and Aramaic were treasured as traditional languages of prayer, education and ‘high’ literary genres, these other vernacular languages were adopted as languages of communities, the languages mothers spoke to their children and means of expressing emotions and daily concerns. Different from one community to another, these dozens of ‘Judeo’ or ‘Jewish languages’ share common features—such as the use of Hebrew and Aramaic words to express specifically Jewish concepts. When Jews wrote

in these languages, they usually did so using Hebrew characters, thus endowing their writings with a unique Jewish identity.

Topics expressed in Judeo languages were often frivolous or mundane: wedding songs; lullabies; tales of knights, princesses and dragons; homemade medicinal recipes; and simplified rewritings of biblical stories for women and children. Progressively, however, these Judeo languages were used to write about sciences, philosophy and medicine. They even seeped through the walls of the synagogues and houses of study to help Jews understand the founding texts of Judaism and to facilitate religious teaching. Vernacular translations of the Bible were created from the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE onward in the Islamicate East and, later, in Europe. Bible and Talmud exegetes across the Diaspora used Judeo languages in school settings.

As such, the oral and written cultures of Judeo languages became rich repositories of family and community traditions. Unfortunately, the tragic events of Jewish history – persecutions and expulsions throughout the ages, but most notably the catastrophic events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which wiped out entire communities of Jewish-language speakers in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, as well as the later displacement and disappearance of Jewish communities from North Africa, the Near East, Yemen and Central Asia – threatened many of these languages with extinction.

Today, rescuing these Judeo languages from oblivion is a matter of great urgency, and universities and research institutions have an essential role to play in doing so. As such, the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies (OCHJS) summoned international language experts to create the Oxford School of Rare Jewish Languages (OSRJL), a unique venture through which students from across the world are instructed by leading teachers now in no fewer than fifteen Judeo languages.

*Professor Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, FBA*

## Overview of the Programme

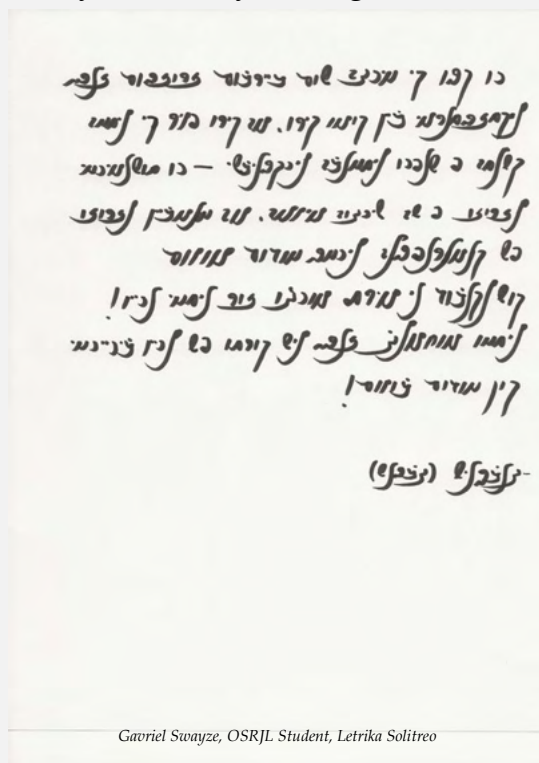
Jewish languages are essential and incorporeal parts of Jewish history, creativity, culture and identity. Most of these Jewish languages are currently in danger of extinction while others are already dead, known only from early writing.

While various research programmes stress the immense role of vernacular languages in Jewish life and culture as well as point to their fragility, universities offer very few learning opportunities for most of these rare Jewish languages.

Therefore, the OSRJL responds to a real need and is the first school of its kind. Created in August 2021 by the OCHJS in collaboration with the Institut des Langues Rares (ILARA) at Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (EPHE), Paris, the programme offers free, online teaching of rare Jewish languages and their cultural-historical contexts – along with a public lecture series, an academic blog, a Visiting Fellows programme and special Jewish music classes – accessible at no cost to accepted students and members of the general public around the globe. By doing so, the OSRJL aims to preserve, spark interest in, enable access to and reflect on the nature and role of Jewish languages as rich linguistic facets of Jewish life and history.

During its inaugural year, the OSRJL offered a range of classes on 12 vernacular languages spoken and/or written by Jews from the Middle Ages until today and taught by leading academics at universities in Europe and around the world. Classes were offered free of charge to their accepted students, who applied to the programme and were selected through a competitive process. Spaces were limited and priority was given to current university students studying at any university globally, but other members of the public were welcome to apply and, in many cases, were accepted. All accepted students were eligible for certificates of participation at the end of the academic year subject to attendance requirements.

Professor Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, FBA (President of the OCHJS; Director, Centre for Hebrew & Jewish Studies, Oxford; Professor of Hebrew Manuscript Studies, EPHE, Paris Science et Lettres [PSL]; and Fellow, Corpus Christi College, Oxford), envisioned and led the way in creating the OSRJL. She established the programme's Advisory Committee, consisting of: Dr Sarah Bunin Benor (Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion); Dr Yehudit Henshke (University of Haifa); Professor Lily Kahn (University College London); Professor Geoffrey Khan (University of Cambridge); Professor Laurent Mignon (University of Oxford); Professor Ofra Tirosh-Becker (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem); and Professor Dr Ronny Vollandt (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München).



Gavriel Swayze, OSRJL Student, Letrika Solitreo





Current OSRJL  
Administrative Staff  
(L-R):

Professor Judith  
Olszowy-Schlanger,  
President of the OCHJS

Madeleine Trivasse,  
OSRJL Coordinator &  
OCHJS Academic  
Registrar

Celeste Pan,  
OSRJL Administrator



Priscilla Lange,  
OCHJS Academic  
Administrator

Kerry Maciak,  
OCHJS Bursar

Jun Tong,  
OCHJS Accounts  
Assistant

Throughout the year, the OSRJL programme was developed and run by its Coordinator, Madeleine Trivasse (also OCHJS Academic Registrar), while day-to-day administration was carried out by Administrators Dr Toni Griffiths (in post October 2021–April 2022) and Celeste Pan (April 2022–present). Priscilla Lange (OCHJS Academic Administrator) assisted the programme greatly by organising its public lecture series as well as special Jewish music classes, offered in addition to the programme’s primary language classes. Furthermore, Kerry Maciak (OCHJS Bursar) and Jun Tong (OCHJS Accounts Assistant) skilfully arranged and executed all the programme’s financial components. The OSRJL was and continues to be funded by two generous foundations, which wish to remain anonymous at this time.

*Professor Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, FBA, & Madeleine Trivasse*

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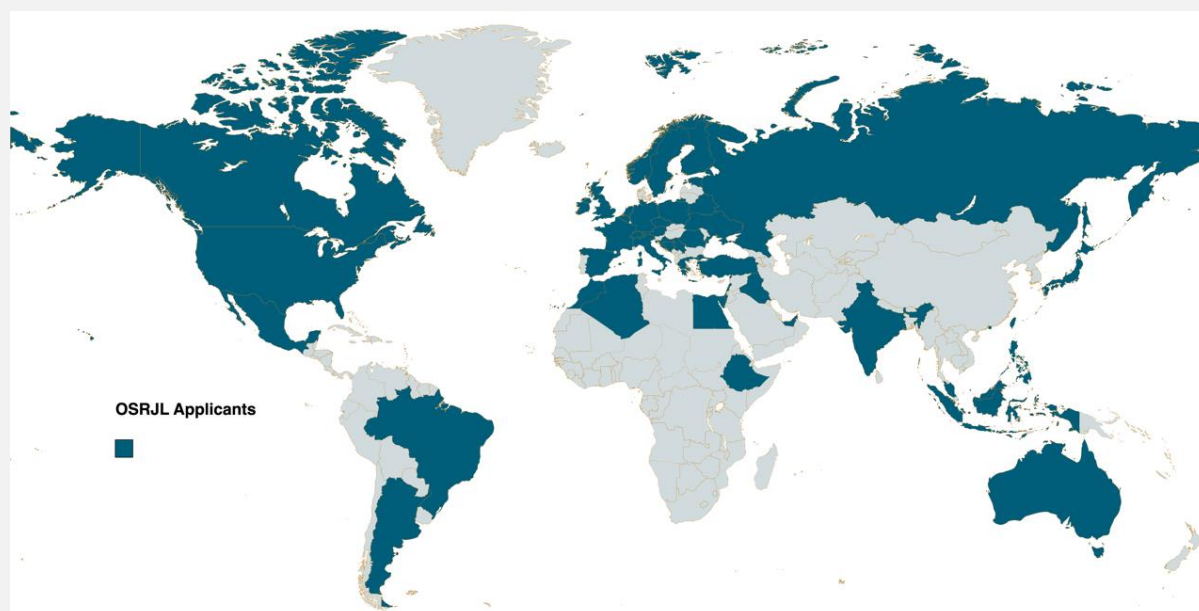
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## Year in Review

In August 2021, the OCHJS received funding for the OSRJL and then quickly began advertising classes—through the [OCHJS website](#) and email list, the Oxford Language Centre, various academic mailing lists across institutions, *The Jewish Chronicle*, etc. – before the start of the academic year in October. During this time, we were approached by several news agencies and journalists for interviews, examples of which may be found in [The Forward](#), [The Jewish Telegraphic Agency](#) and [Jüdische Allgemeine](#).

Our advertised array of **12 languages taught** through the programme during the 2021–22 academic year and their teachers included:

- Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic** *Dr Assaf Bar Moshe, Freie Universität Berlin*  
**Classical Judeo-Arabic** *Friederike Schmidt, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München*  
**Judeo-French** *Dr Sandra Hajek, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen*  
**Judeo-Greek** *Dr Julia G. Krivoruchko, University of Cambridge*  
**Judeo-Italian** *Dr Marilena Colasuonno, University of Naples*  
**Judeo-Neo-Aramaic** *Dr Dorota Molin, University of Oxford, University of Cambridge*  
**Judeo-Persian** *Dr Ofir Haim, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem*  
**Judeo-Tat** *Professor Gilles Authier & Dr Murad Suleymanov, EPHE, Paris*  
**Judeo-Turkish** *Professor Laurent Mignon, University of Oxford*  
**Karaim** *Professor Henryk Jankowski, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań*  
**Ladino** *Dr Ilil Baum, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, & Dr Carlos Yebra López, New York University*  
**Yiddish** *Dr Beruriah Wiegand, University of Oxford*



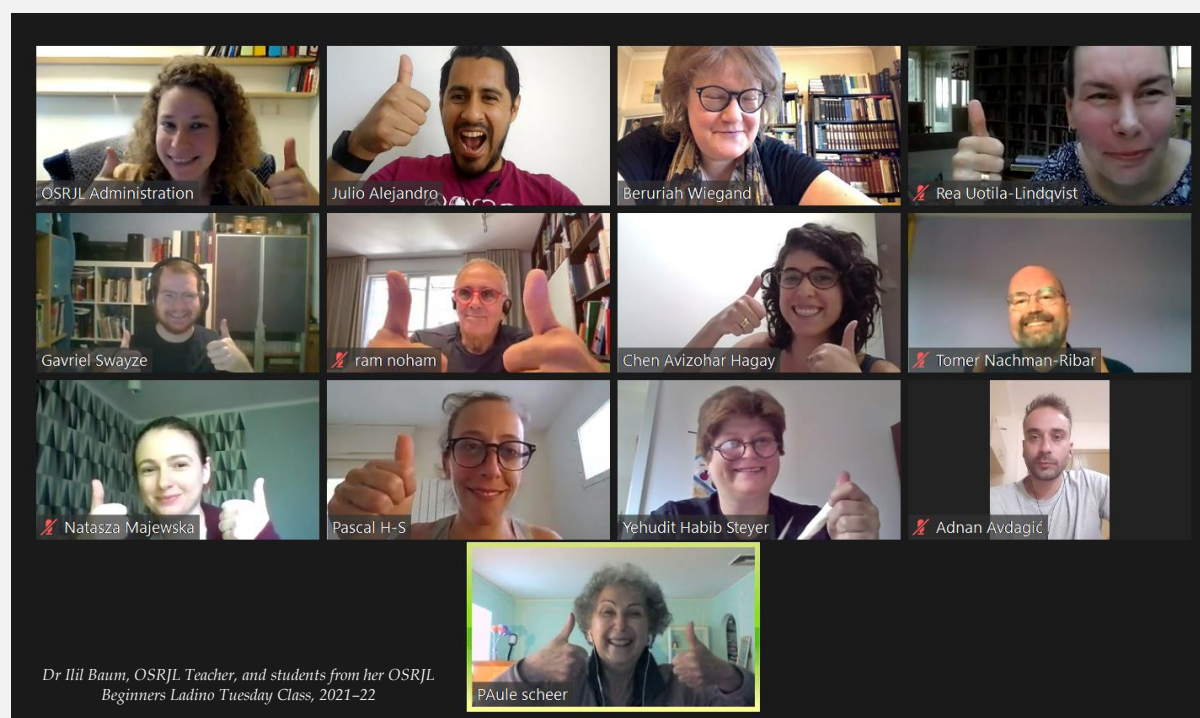
To our great surprise and delight, we received a deluge of **applications from 649 prospective students** around the globe (many of them applying for multiple language classes). Individuals applied from the following **47 countries**: Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, Croatia, Czechia, Egypt, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, the Netherlands, Norway, the Philippines, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Türkiye, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Applicants to the programme were diverse not only in terms of their home locations but also in terms of their fields of study, current roles (students, professors, members of the general public outside academia, etc.), knowledge of languages and more.

Though immensely pleased by such a high level of interest in rare Jewish languages and our programme as a whole, we quickly realised that we should both

offer further levels and sections of some languages and put an upper limit on the number of students accepted to each class so as to ensure a productive learning environment. While all the languages in our curriculum were offered at an entry level, we decided to offer several at higher levels, too. Thus the OSRJL provided both Beginners and Advanced Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic classes; Beginners and Advanced Judeo-Turkish classes; and two Beginners Yiddish classes alongside Advanced Beginners and Intermediate/Advanced Yiddish classes. Additionally, and due to high demand, two separate sections of Beginners Ladino classes were provided.

Staying true to the advertised criteria for the programme, we prioritised applicants who were currently studying in academic programmes anywhere in the world. That being said, we were pleased to be able to accept a portion of non-student applicants as well. Approximately 30 student places were offered for each class, with the exception of the Judeo-Italian one, in which having a larger cohort of 60 students was piloted. Ten applicants were placed on a waiting list for each class and were offered places if and when they became available. In total, **338 students were accepted** to and took up places in OSRJL language classes, with a number of students accepted to multiple classes.

Building upon experiences of teaching and learning online during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, each class met via Zoom for 1 hour every week during Oxford terms (each 8 weeks long). Due to the historical or contemporary spoken



prevalence and amount of written material preserved in each language—along with teacher availability—languages were offered for 1, 2 or 3 terms. Classes offered for multiple terms were contiguous ones in which the material built on itself term after term rather than restarting at the beginning each term. Those classes offered for 1 term included: Judeo-French, Judeo-Greek, Judeo-Persian, both levels of Judeo-Turkish and Karaim. Those offered for 2 terms included: Classical Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Neo-Aramaic. Those offered for 3 terms included: both levels of Baghdadi Judeo-



Arabic, Judeo-Italian, Judeo-Tat, both sections of Ladino and all levels and sections of Yiddish. In total, the OSRJL offered **320 hours of language teaching**.

*'The elementary [Judeo-Turkish] class was very much an experiment – teaching elementary Turkish with the Hebrew script. However, the advanced class . . . was an opportunity to look at Ottoman Jewish culture more broadly.*

*'Once students were familiar with the alphabet and the intricacies of writing Turkish with the Hebrew alphabet – no small feat, as Turkish is a language rich in vowels – we read and discussed*

*articles from the Judeo-Turkish Üstad newspaper in relation to the wider Ottoman publishing world. Hence, last academic year, we looked at some of the topics that made the headlines, such as the Paris World Fair of 1889, or at Ottoman hispanophilia. We also had the opportunity toward the end of the class to look at the Tevarih-i Âl-i Osman, an anonymous, sixteenth-century, Judeo-Turkish transliteration of an Ottoman historical work relating the early years of the Ottoman state.'*

**Professor Laurent Mignon, OSRJL Teacher**



Selection of slides from Professor Laurent Mignon on Judeo-Turkish

During class sessions and depending on the language being taught, a variety of teaching methods were used (ranging from conversational practice to reading manuscripts to lectures on historical and cultural contexts, linguistics and phonetics, etc.) and topics covered (grammatical and syntactical features, vocabulary, conversational phrases, etc.). The decision was made before classes began in autumn 2021 that the programme generally would not record class sessions so that a live and interactive learning environment would be preserved as much as possible and so that all students could feel comfortable participating and practicing in sessions. Teachers recommended resources to students for use outside and during classes and, in some cases, provided and shared resources digitally by email as well as via Slack, where students and teachers also could message the class with questions not addressed in sessions.

While OSRJL language classes were not marked or offered for credit through the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, all language students were eligible for electronic certificates of participation at the end of the academic year subject to the programme's attendance requirements (missing no more than the equivalent of 2 sessions per term of the class[es] taken). The OSRJL Administrators, Dr Toni Griffiths and Celeste Pan, kept weekly attendance records for each class throughout the year and then liaised with the Coordinator, Madeleine Trivasse, and Professor Judith Olszowy-Schlanger to issue certificates to those students who qualified. These certificates were not only a means to acknowledge and celebrate students' learning but also served as official documents for some students whose home universities chose to recognise their participation in the OSRJL as part of their courses of study.

In addition to the language classes offered as the principal focus of the OSRJL, several other forms of learning and engagement were hosted through the programme during the 2021–22 academic year.

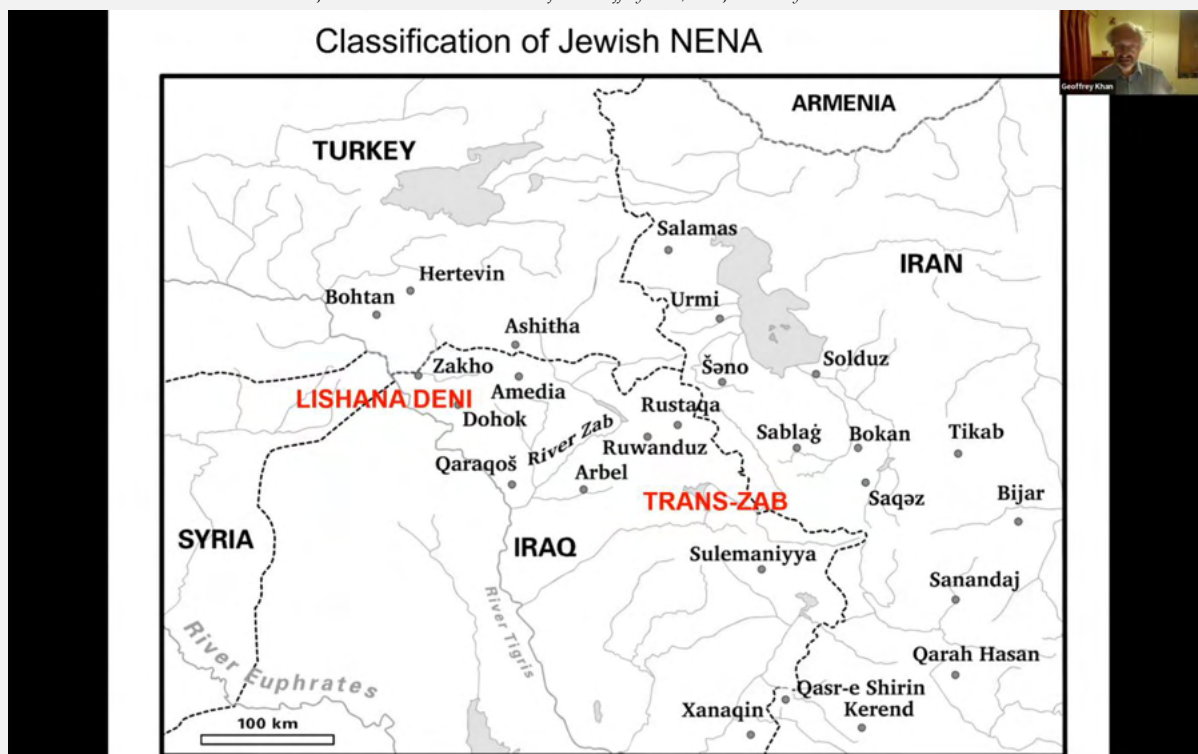
**OSRJL Tutorials Website:** To provide our language students with resources to practice their in-class learning outside class, we designed and commissioned the OSRJL Tutorials website, deftly developed by Michael Allaway (Software Engineer, University of Oxford) beginning in Michaelmas Term 2021. Through the site, our teachers can create and share with students a variety of types of self-correcting exercises in their respective rare Jewish languages. Additionally, other resources—including text, image, audio and video files—may be uploaded to the site for students to access alongside exercises. While the platform was under development throughout the 2021–22 academic year and piloted with only select classes, including the Modern Hebrew classes of the OCHJS (taught by Esther Yadgar and independent of the OSRJL), we are looking forward to its broader usage in the OSRJL programme during the 2022–23 academic year.

*Examples of Judeo-Neo-Aramaic (above) and Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic (below) exercises developed by OSRJL Teachers Drs Dorota Molin and Assaf Bar Moshe respectively and as presented on the OSRJL Tutorials website*



**OSRJL Lectures:** As part of the OCHJS's public lecture offerings, we developed a new series of lectures focused on topics related to rare Jewish languages to provide both OSRJL students and the general public glimpses into the broader historical, cultural, literary and linguistic contexts of such languages. The following lectures – carefully organised and run by the OCHJS Academic Administrator, Priscilla Lange – took place online via Zoom throughout the year and were attended by a range of individuals globally in varying numbers. Six of the lectures were recorded and made available on the [OCHJS's Vimeo account](#), where other lectures of the OCHJS are also available for viewing.

*'The Jewish Neo-Aramaic Dialects'* Professor Geoffrey Khan, OSRJL Advisory Committee Member



#### Michaelmas Term 2021

[‘Varieties of Judeo-Italian and Their Characteristics’](#) Professor Aaron Rubin,  
Penn State University

‘The Digital Revitalization of Ladino in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’ Dr Carlos Yebra  
López, New York University

#### Hilary Term 2022

[‘The Jewish Neo-Aramaic Dialects’](#) Professor Geoffrey Khan, University of  
Cambridge

[‘Orlando Furiozo: A Judeo-Spanish Manuscript in Oxford’](#) Alla Markova,  
Brooklyn Public Library

‘Contemporary Hasidic Yiddish’ Professor Kriszta Eszter Szendroi,  
University College London

#### Trinity Term 2022

[‘Jewish Languages: Commonality and Diversity’](#) Dr Sarah Bunin Benor,  
Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion

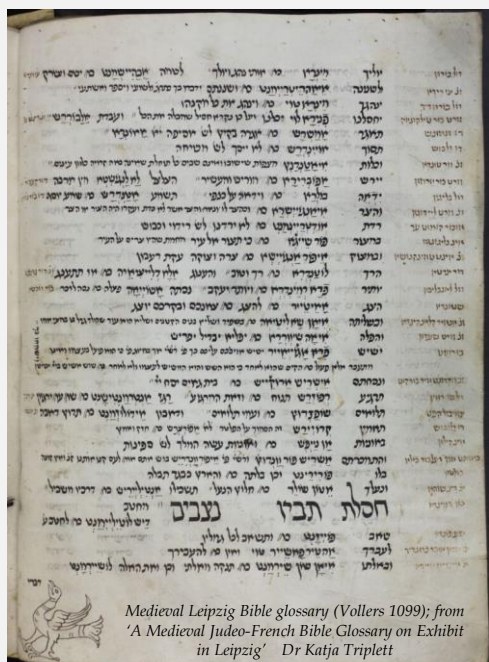
'Translating from and into Yiddish: A Conversation on *Der Ofgang* (The Disappearance) between Beruriah Wiegand and Ilan Stavans'

Professor Ilan Stavans, Amherst College, & Dr Beruriah Wiegand, OCHJS

'Translating the Bible in Old Yiddish: From Bilingual Glossaries to Adaptations with Commentaries' Dr Jean Baumgarten, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, France

'Judeo-Arabic Translations: From the Bible to *The Count of Monte Cristo*' Professor Ofra Tirosh-Becker, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

**Special Jewish Music Classes:** Dr Diana Matut (University Halle-Wittenberg) offered 3 classes on specific facets of Jewish music and related to the theme of Jewish languages throughout the year. The classes were titled: 'Between the Besht and Bulletproof Stockings: An Introduction to Hasidic Music' (Michaelmas Term 2021, 19 students), 'Yiddish Songs as Sources for the History of the Ashkenazim' (Hilary Term 2022, 16 students) and 'Between Synagogue and Court: Jewish Music from Renaissance and Baroque' (Trinity Term 2022, 18 students). During classes, Dr Matut provided insightful lectures on topics related to and relevant recordings representing different musical and historical themes. As with the OSRJL language classes, these music classes were offered once a week for 1 hour per session during the 8 weeks of each Oxford term. The music classes were designed to be less formal than our language classes and, therefore, attendance records were not kept and certificates of participation were not issued for them. Student feedback on the classes was extremely positive – so much so that Dr Matut will be offering more classes through the OSRJL on new Jewish musical topics in the 2022–23 academic year!



Medieval Leipzig Bible glossary (Vollers 1099); from 'A Medieval Judeo-French Bible Glossary on Exhibit in Leipzig' Dr Katja Triplett

**The Jewish Languages Bookshelf, An Academic Blog:**

In Michaelmas Term 2021, we launched an additional platform through which the contexts of rare Jewish languages could be explored: an academic blog titled The Jewish Languages Bookshelf, abbreviated *The Bookshelf*, to which 8 specialists from around the world contributed brief, accessible articles on particular pieces of material and book culture.

**'Inauguration of The Jewish Languages Bookshelf'**

Professor Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, OCHJS; University of Oxford; EPHE, PSL

**'MS. Canonici Oriental 6: A Judeo-Spanish Copy of an Italian Bestseller'**

Dr César Merchán-Hamann, OCHJS, Bodleian Library

**'Aki Yerushalayim: The Digital Revival of a Fascinating Ladino Magazine'** Dr Carlos Yebra López, New York University

**'A Rare Judeo-Italian Ledger of a Jewish Pawnshop in Medieval Bologna (MS. Oxford, Corpus Christi College Library 469)'** Dr Elena Lolli, OCHJS, University of Oxford



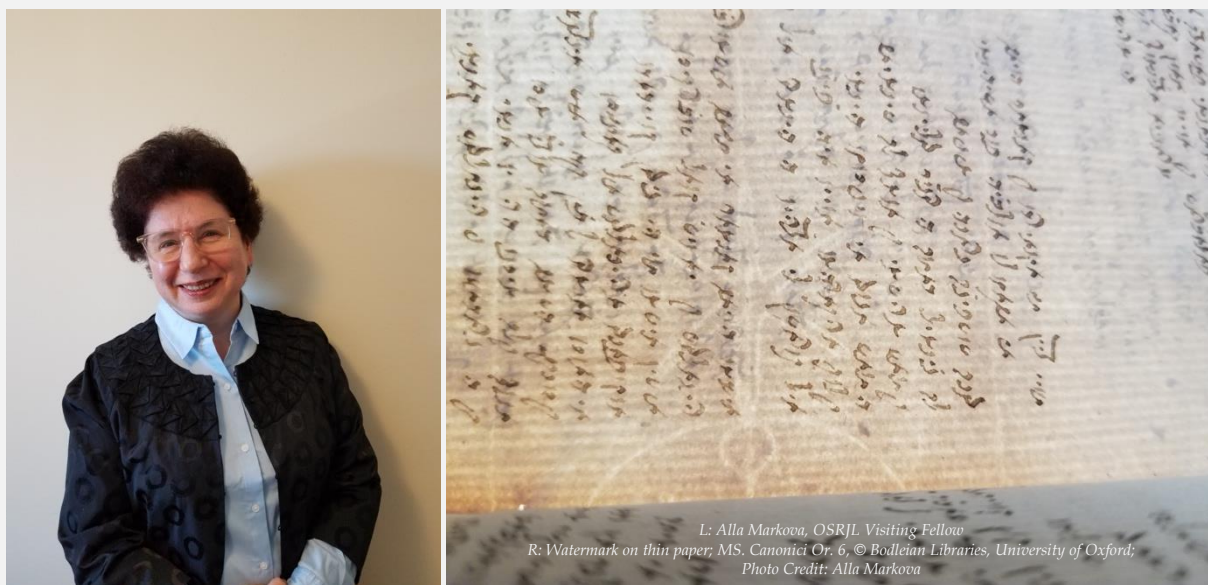
**'A Medieval Judeo-French Bible Glossary on Exhibit in Leipzig'** Dr Katja Triplett, Leipzig University, Marburg University

**'Orlando Furioso: Examining a Judeo-Spanish Manuscript in Oxford'** Alla Markova, Brooklyn Public Library

**'Jewish English Texts: Camp Hebraized English Online and Hebrew-Letter Campaign Gear'** Dr Sarah Bunin Benor, Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion

**'Clothes Make People, Scripts Shape Communities'** Professor Gregor Schwarb, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

**OSRJL Visiting Fellowship:** The OCHJS was delighted to host its first OSRJL Visiting Fellow, Alla Markova (Brooklyn Public Library), during Hilary Term 2022. Throughout her time in Oxford, Alla closely studied MS. Canonici Or. 6, a manuscript of *Orlando Furioso*, in the Bodleian Library and made multiple fascinating discoveries as detailed in both her [blog post on \*The Bookshelf\*](#) as well as in her [OSRJL Lecture](#). In addition to conducting her research activities, Alla also quickly became a welcome presence at the premises of the OCHJS, the Clarendon Institute, where she regularly engaged in fruitful conversations with Fellows, staff, Visiting Scholars and other Visiting Fellows.



L: Alla Markova, OSRJL Visiting Fellow  
R: Watermark on thin paper; MS. Canonici Or. 6. © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford;  
Photo Credit: Alla Markova

In addition to the formal components of the OSRJL programme as described above, it is worth highlighting that our language students initiated several WhatsApp and Facebook groups as well as a LinkedIn page to further their connections and conversations with one another outside class sessions and around the globe. We hope this network of individuals engaging with rare Jewish languages will continue to grow and flourish in years to come.

*Madeleine Trivasse*

## Monitoring, Evaluation & Reflection

Being the inaugural year of the OSRJL, 2021–22 witnessed a myriad of ways in which our programme developed, evolved and grew. From the overwhelming number of applications received to the resultant expanding of our class offerings and honing of our application process to the creation of the OSRJL Coordinator role and staff changeover in the OSRJL Administrator role to numerous lectures and blog posts to the creation of the OSRJL Tutorials website and beyond, the year was full to say the least.

Particularly in light of the rapidity with which the OSRJL developed as well as the unexpected size of the programme, it was especially important to us that we take time to receive and consider feedback from all stakeholders at different points throughout the year. To do so, we first relied on the advice and expertise of our Advisory Committee to



help steer the academic course of the programme. But to hear from our students and teachers directly as the programme unfolded, we also released surveys to all our students and teachers following each term. Our administrative staff then analysed the results and made relevant changes in real time as the year progressed, as well as used such analysis to plan and prepare for how we might continue to expand and refine the programme in future. Themes from our students' feedback were not only discussed amongst our administrative staff but also shared in an anonymous and constructive fashion with relevant teachers for their consideration. Several key ideas raised in both the student and teacher survey responses are reflected in the 'Looking Forward' section of this report.

Beyond the student and teacher surveys sent out to all, several of our students and teachers kindly shared with us their free-form reflections on the programme as presented below, along with a selection of written exercises and pieces by some of our students.

*Madeleine Trivasse*

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In 2020, I made the jump and left my job at the BBC to read for a DPhil in modern Iranian Jewish history at Oxford. A major pull for me in returning to Oxford's Oriental Institute for the doctorate was being surrounded by people working on everything from Biblical Hebrew to Classical Mongolian and Armenian under one roof. As an undergraduate I had spent time studying Persian and Urdu and living abroad in



Istanbul and Jerusalem. I was looking forward to recapturing some of that variety once I was back at university.

**But for a serial language learner like me, I imagined that beginning a DPhil in the middle of a pandemic would be an obstacle to this. I feared that Zoom might lack a sense of classroom community and motivation, or that opportunities to dip into new interests alongside my thesis research would be hard to find. Then, in a rare bolt from the blue, the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies (OCHJS) announced it would be launching the Oxford School of Rare Jewish Languages (OSRJL). Reading the announcement on Twitter last year, I could barely contain myself. In academia, you sometimes get used to few people sharing your enthusiasm for niche topics, so when the OCHJS said it would be offering classes in more than ten rare Jewish languages, from Ladino to Judeo-Tat, I felt like a child in a sweet shop!**

Many of the languages on offer are endangered or in decline. Speakers of Judeo-Neo-Aramaic (of which my family speaks a dialect) are massively reduced in my generation. After migrating out of Iran, Iraq or further afield, many in the community were made to feel ashamed of their language identities and chose to speak a different language with their children. Others among these languages, like Yiddish or Ladino, are enjoying a boom in learning by people of all ages keen to reconnect with or popularise languages that allow them to connect with their own Jewish heritage, past and present. Yiddish especially has been buoyed by a whole new level of accessibility with the launch of a course on the popular platform Duolingo.

**This very accessibility has been key to the success of the programme at the OCHJS. Although the OSRJL is a university-level programme, one of its great benefits has been attracting a mix of academics, heritage speakers and curious people from different backgrounds to connect around a common interest. This slightly less formal – but still focused – atmosphere has been so spiriting. Even on Zoom, it's been fascinating to hear people's different journeys to the languages or their past experiences of them. For some, the classes have allowed them to access new sources in an existing area of expertise, for others, perhaps, to communicate with their grandparents in their mother tongues. In my own case both are true, and there is no better spark than working on your academic and personal passions in one go.**

Past any individual language among those on offer, there is a huge significance to the programme as a whole. If, like me, you've been gluttonous and chosen to take on more than one language with the OSRJL, you inevitably notice a common thread of dynamism and creativity that runs through the texts you read. Writers and speakers are drawing on their own colourful heritage or religious backgrounds in tandem with local styles and mythologies. Though often writing within their own communities, they are in dialogue with the predominant culture around them: they deserve to be visible in those spaces and to enrich our understandings of them. Offering the necessary language skills to a broader public is the foundation to sparking or nurturing people's interests. It is key to creating a popular awareness of this immense cultural and linguistic heritage, inside and outside a university framework.

Thinking about how minority groups shape their senses of self is a major part of my DPhil research. My OSRJL classes have given me the chance to flit between

different communities and ask similar questions – questions clearly as pertinent now as they were for the Judeo-Persian poets of 14<sup>th</sup>-century Iran or the Yiddish novelists of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Eastern Europe. By bringing together classmates and teachers from different places and time zones to work with these languages and cultures together, the OSRJL has opened up exactly the variety and community that I thought I might miss – and done so even in a pandemic.

*Daniel Amir, OSRJL Student*

As a researcher in Jewish Studies and being passionate about languages, I consider the OSRJL's program a dream come true. It allowed me to pursue my project and study further Jewish languages in a focused manner. During 2021–2022, I took the Judeo-French and the Judeo-Italian classes. Having previously studied three Jewish languages, this new learning allowed me to develop a comparative thinking on this language family, one that has enriched my research and my own writing. My favourite topics were the sociolinguistics of Judeo-French and Judeo-Italian. I also appreciated the opportunity to read ancient texts in their original languages and, when possible, carry out the examination of inter-linguistic relations. Since some of these languages are already in a post-vernacular phase, I believe that learning Jewish languages and trying to transmit them, even if partially, is a responsibility one should take if we value Jewish legacies.

*Dr Cynthia Gabbay, OSRJL Student*

I signed up for the OSRJL classes because, as a linguistics and languages student, as well as a Jew, I was curious about the variety of languages from my people's history. In my case, I

signed up for Yiddish, Ladino and Judeo-Neo-Aramaic. Yiddish was important to me as part of my Ashkenazi ancestry; Ladino because of the rich cultural variety, especially with music, from the Sephardi community to which I was lucky enough to have some exposure growing up; and Aramaic because of its prevalence still in elements of Jewish culture and its similarity to Hebrew. The teaching of each of these classes was unique, utilising tools such as song, history and testimony, as well as more conventional educational resources, such as textbooks, PowerPoints and worksheets. **The classes had an impact on my life and learning in a positive way – I felt more connected to my heritage; I was passionate about sharing my learning with others;**

**JUDEO-TAT (JUHURI):  
EXPRESSING THE IMPERATIVE, THE PROHIBITIVE, THE  
SUBJUNCTIVE, AND THE FUTURE**

General instructions:

- Do not translate the words in brackets: they are only meant to provide context
- The shaded verbs have irregular stems: look them up in the texts

1. Use the imperative ('do!') or the prohibitive ('don't!') to translate the following sentences into Juhuri:

<i>omore</i>	<i>nūšde</i>	<i>munde</i>	<i>kūšde</i>	<i>xisire</i>	<i>pūrsire</i>	<i>pāhni soxde</i>	<i>bovor soxde</i>
'to come'	'to sit'	'to stay'	'to kill'	'to sleep'	'to ask'	'to hide'	'to believe'

1. Come! Sit next to David.  
**Бие(йт)! Эки Давид нуш(ит)!**
2. Don't stay alone (*tāhno* тэхно 'alone') in the house.  
**Э хунэ тэхно мемун(ит)!**
3. Girls, turn off (translate as: 'kill') the light and [go to] sleep!  
**(Э / Ой) Духдэргьо, товуше кушит хисит!**
4. Don't ask me. I wasn't with them.  
**Эз ме мепурс(ит)! Ме э угьоревоз небируьм.**
5. Hide this tablecloth!  
**И суфрере пэхьни сох(ит)!**
6. People, don't believe him, he's a very wily man.  
**(Э / Ой) Одомигьо/Хэлгь, э у бовор месох(ит), у е яан омбор глэмелдане мерди.**

*Pål Johansen, OSRJL Student*



**I was enlightened regarding some fascinating, lesser-known history; and I gained some new and valuable language skills.** I feel very fortunate to have participated in this inaugural programme.

*Miriam Itzkowitz, OSRJL Student*

My experience teaching Ladino online has been extremely rewarding and efficient. **First, it has been so fulfilling because students come from all over the world and have myriad intellectual, linguistic and religious backgrounds, which means everybody can and does learn a lot from each other.** Students were often in touch before and after class, creating their own WhatsApp group and posing fascinating questions on all things Ladino. **As a result, since I began Ladino for beginners, I have developed a much greater understanding and awareness of the full complexity of the language and have produced new materials and perfected old ones to make them more accessible to a broad audience. Co-teaching my class with Dr Ilil Baum, who specialises in a different period, has also granted me the opportunity to receive extremely useful feedback on my theoretical and pedagogical understanding.** Finally, teaching Ladino with the OSRJL has been efficient because teaching languages on Zoom is fun, interactive and user-friendly, particularly when the entire repertoire of functions is available (e.g., breakout rooms) and troubleshooting is handled promptly. In this regard, I am very grateful to the Administrators and Coordinator of the OSRJL, whose diligent work has greatly facilitated mine.

*Dr Carlos Yebra López, OSRJL Teacher*

Before starting Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Persian, I had only heard the names of these languages and had some basic encounter with Judeo-Persian history when I was reading Habib's monumental *History of Jews of Iran* and a handbook of Jewish languages. **In my wildest dreams, I never thought of having any opportunity to learn these languages,** despite a very strong but suppressed desire that remained buried somewhere in my subconscious. Even taking classes on Yiddish, about which there are some very good textbooks available (and from which I started learning), was an elusive dream. But, as they say, every catastrophe has a silver lining – the horrors of COVID brought with them some unique opportunities. Many universities and institutions converted to online mode during the pandemic, and this provided some very pleasant and surprising opportunities.

I received a notification from the Oxford Twitter handle regarding enrolment for rare Jewish languages classes. With a throbbing heart, **I opened their webpage and was awestruck by the list of classes they were offering: Judeo-Persian, Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic, Yiddish, Ladino and Judeo-Neo-Aramaic, just to name a few.** I immediately downloaded the application form, filled it out, and submitted it – and

was eventually accepted to the Judeo-Persian, Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic and Advanced Beginners Yiddish classes!

**The teachers of these three languages each had their own unique pedagogical approaches.** After a few initial lectures by Dr Ofir Haim in the Judeo-Persian class, we all were translating the original sources and manuscripts (converted to standard Hebrew). This activity introduced me to original manuscripts and to the real work of an ancient language researcher. Dr Assaf Bar Moshe's lectures on Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic were wonderful. He started from the very basics and gradually, bit by bit, built on the students' existing knowledge at each step. His lectures were complemented by dialogues, followed by vocabulary and grammatical explanations, and, finally, exercises and drills. Then, in my Yiddish classes, Dr Beruriah Wiegand would begin every lesson with a *shmues* that was interactive and interesting. Participation in every lecture was rewarded at the end with a song by our beloved professor.

I have plans to continue both Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic and Yiddish in the next academic year and possibly will apply for Judeo-Neo-Aramaic as well. The Oxford School of Rare Jewish Languages has done a wonderful job.

*Dr Adnan Khan, OSRJL Student*

**The Oxford School of Rare Jewish Languages is a superb school with astonishing, knowledgeable teachers of rare Jewish languages, which unfortunately are vanishing.** I was enrolled in the Ladino class throughout this past year. Dr Carlos Yebra López was great in facilitating simple, first-stage conversations, correcting syntax and responding to questions while enriching the students' vocabulary. Dr Ilil Baum was a phenomenal, warm, encouraging teacher who moved the students at a good pace through not only vocabulary, syntax and regular as well as irregular verb conjugations but also Rashi reading of Ladino. There should be no fear in tackling this language, especially if you have experience with Spanish, French or Hebrew. Both Carlos and Ilil are spectacular.

**Why was I excited about benefiting from the OSRJL Ladino classes? My family came from Salonika and, though they were multilingual outside the home, they spoke Ladino amongst family members. I heard Ladino spoken throughout my childhood up to age six, though with me my family only spoke in French.** I regret that my incomparable, valiant, articulate mother, who was fluent in Ladino as well as six other languages, is no longer in this world, as she would have relished these classes and would have been so proud that I cared enough about maintaining the Ladino tradition that I woke up at 4:45AM once a week on the East Coast of the USA to participate in a Ladino class which had students from all over the world. You will be truly fortunate if you can secure a spot in any of the OSRJL classes, especially the Ladino class. It is critical to have the next generation keep the language alive. I was so very happy to see that there were many students in their 20s and 30s in the classes!

*Paule-Lily Scheer, OSRJL Student*

este paisaje  
todo un poko apoyado  
kontr'el syelo

this landscape  
everything slightly leaning  
heavenwards

una a una  
olas yegan a l'oriya  
mi guerta de pyedras

one by one  
waves come to the shore  
my rock garden

meza para uno  
gotikas de plata kaen  
al lago

a table for one  
silver drops falling  
on the lake

kontraventanas!  
- un pashariko d'enverano  
me responde

window shutters!  
the song of a summer bird  
answers me

una gota de tinta  
antes k'el grizo se instalara  
esperando

a drop of ink  
before greyness falls  
waiting

en la ventana  
una monstera grita kozas  
muy sinyifikativas

at the window  
a monstera plant cries out  
meaningful things

novembre  
todas las luzes i boyas  
tornan a kaza

November  
all the lights and colours  
come home

la luna yena  
inonda el mi korason  
dal senyo

full moon  
floods into my heart  
from sign to end

una flecha afilada  
kontr'el kristal de ventana  
mi refleksyon

a keen arrow  
against the windowpane  
my own reflection

la luna  
reflektada en fener de vidro  
- una nube blanka

the moon  
reflected on a glass lantern  
- a small white cloud

ayre frio  
a traves de la pajina  
firmada, Tuyo

cool breeze  
across the page  
signed  
Yours

televiziyon  
subtitulos sin sonido  
nieve kayendose

tv  
muted with subtitles  
falling snow

despues de vos  
los papiyones retornan  
a su pista

after you  
butterflies flutter  
back to track

yerva konjelada  
se rompe debasho de los  
pies  
- la guerta de mi Madre

frosty grass  
keeps snapping under my feet  
mother's garden

silensyo  
antes ke kanten los pasharos  
kamina solo, adelante

silence  
before birdsong  
he walks on

nuves andan mas presto  
una formiga me mezura de  
kavesa al pie

clouds move faster  
an ant measures me from head to toe

en el ekran  
las otras sesh estreyas  
se aparesen

on the screen  
the other six  
stars appear

yerva freskamente kortada,  
una bozezika en el horizonte -  
verso el blu

freshly cut grass  
a small sound on the horizon  
into the blue

Rea Uotila-Lindqvist, OSRJL Student

I greatly enjoyed teaching Judeo-Italian, and I was surprised that there were so many engaged participants. **I also learned a great deal thanks to their intriguing questions. During our classes, it was fascinating to hear Judeo-Italian pronounced by such a range of international students!**

*Dr Marilena Colasuonno, OSRJL Teacher*



As a Jewish person living in Israel, I signed up for OSRJL classes out of interest in different Jewish languages and dialects around the globe, as well as the cultures of their speakers. **My expectations were fully met during the different classes. While every lecturer has their own style and focuses on different aspects of language teaching, they all put emphasis on teaching the language along with history, traditions and folklore. For this reason, I would recommend the OSRJL to anyone who is interested not only in learning new languages but also in deepening their knowledge of different cultures.**

*O. B., OSRJL Student*

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**The OSRJL has been my best choice ever for learning something new about Jewish languages.** I had studied Persian and Arabic separately, without any Jewish component, and only after that did I use them in my research and try to apply my knowledge to Judeo-Persian or Judeo-Arabic. This year, I had a great opportunity to study Judeo-Persian systematically and properly, focusing only on Jewish ‘perception’ of the Persian language. While sometimes I got proof that my ideas of what Judeo-Persian is had been right, I learned a lot about the language and paid attention to linguistic details which I’d never noticed previously.

**It was also a good opportunity to get acquainted with other experts and students, to find out that there are many people who find Jewish languages interesting and worth studying (you are not alone!).**

I would like to continue next year and the following years with different languages and different teachers. I already have told all my colleagues about the OSRJL and hope that I made them ‘jealous’ that they can begin studying only next autumn, not before!

*Ekaterina Belkina, OSRJL Student*

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As a child, I grew up hearing the Jewish Arabic dialect of Baghdad. I did not realize that it was endangered, and I never imagined that anyone would ever be interested in learning it. **The OSRJL’s online teaching program has put Jewish languages in the spotlight. It gave me the opportunity to meet and share my knowledge with students from all over the world who are enthusiastic about the dialect, the Judeo-Iraqi culture and languages in general.**

*Dr Assaf Bar Moshe, OSRJL Teacher*

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I signed up for the OSRJL classes in Ladino and Judeo-Italian due to my interest in linguistics and minority languages. Jewish languages interest me linguistically

since they are curious examples of language contact, in that Jewish communities have incorporated Hebrew elements into the languages of their host countries.

**I have greatly enjoyed the classes as they were very interactive. Chances were given for us to practise pronunciation, handwriting and grammar. The active participation of my classmates created a great atmosphere for learning.**

**After taking the classes, I now find Jewish languages a starting point from which to embark on a journey to learn about Jewish history.** For example, how Ladino has preserved features of the Castilian language as spoken in the Middle Ages fascinatingly reflects the history of the Sephardic Jews.

I would like to thank the OSRJL for providing me the opportunity to learn about the charms of Jewish languages.

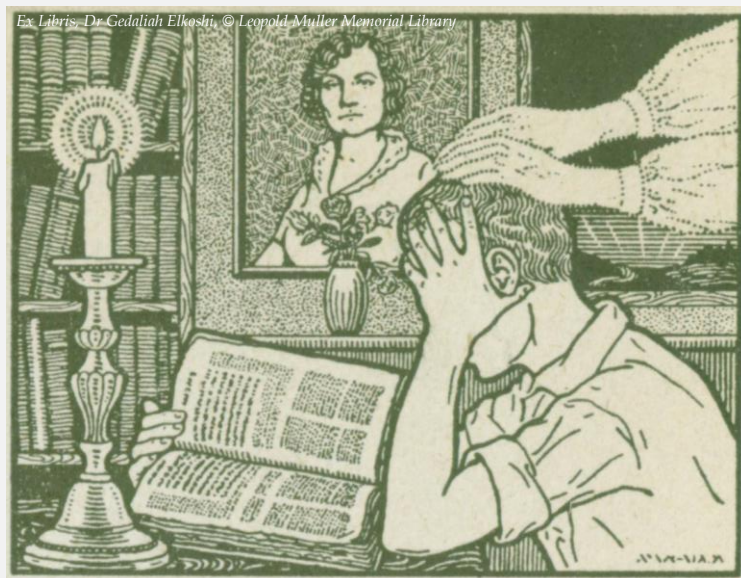
*Johnas Tsang, OSRJL Student*

## Looking Forward

We are greatly looking forward to the second academic year of the OSRJL beginning in October 2022 and, specifically, to implementing several developments to our programme which reflect much of the feedback we received from all our stakeholders this past academic year as well as our persistent desire to grow.

First, we are adding several new languages and levels to our class offerings. **Beginners Judeo-Moroccan (to be taught by Haviva Fenton) and Old Yiddish (Dr Diana Matut, University Halle-Wittenberg), as well as Advanced Beginners Judeo-Provençal (Dr Peter Nahon, University of Neuchâtel), will be introduced as entirely new classes, bringing our total number of rare Jewish languages taught to 15.**

Additionally, we will be splitting our Classical Judeo-Arabic class into Beginners and Intermediate/ Advanced levels (both to be taught by Friederike Schmidt) as well as our Judeo-Persian class into Beginners (to be taught by Maximilian Kinzler) and



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Advanced (Dr Ofir Haim) levels. We hope that doing so will allow for more students, as well as students of broader levels of prior language knowledge (including, perhaps, some of our students from the respective Beginners classes this past year, all of whom are welcome to apply to further levels and for other languages this year), to participate in learning and deepening their knowledge of these languages.

Also, we will be adding an Intermediate Ladino class (to be taught by Dr Carlos Yebra López) to complement our two sections of Beginners Ladino (Drs Ilil Baum and Carlos Yebra López) for the same reasons. Lastly, our Yiddish classes will be restructured and configured into Beginners, Advanced Beginners, Lower Intermediate and Yiddish Literature classes.

**All our language classes will be capped at 30 student places this academic year** to help provide the most conducive atmosphere possible for teaching and learning. Furthermore, we hope that the application process for this upcoming year will benefit from having an electronic **application form through Microsoft Forms** from the opening of applications in mid-August 2022. This form includes a detailed section in which applicants are asked to delineate their prior knowledge of a wide range of languages to help us better place them in the appropriate classes and levels.

To accompany our language classes, we are supporting our teachers to develop **new exercises for the OSRJL Tutorials website** and are increasing their hours as well as enlisting paid student helpers when necessary to do so. It is our hope that this platform will not only become a beneficial tool for students to use for practice outside class but also replace Slack to become the primary means of sharing resources for all our classes this year.

Furthermore, Dr Diana Matut will not only be teaching our new Old Yiddish class this upcoming year but will also be offering a **new set of 3 special Jewish music classes**. The first of these classes, 'The Oud, the Singer and her Lover . . . An Introduction to Sephardic Song Cultures', will commence in Michaelmas Term 2022. **Further OSRJL Lectures and blog posts on *The Bookshelf*** also will continue as part of our supplementary activities.

We are delighted that Celeste Pan has accepted a permanent role as our OSRJL Administrator. She is spending part of this summer working on producing a **Student Handbook** for incoming students designed to help get them started with their OSRJL classes. This handbook will include everything from Oxford term dates to instructions on registering for Zoom class meetings to information about supplementary activities and resources of the OSRJL to how to create an account on and use the OSRJL Tutorials site, and more.

Along with our language and music classes, public lectures, blog, Tutorials exercises and Student Handbook, we hope to host a **termly 'OSRJL Café'** – an online, once-termly event during which OSRJL students and teachers across our various



language classes can connect with one another and continue (or spark new) conversations outside class. Perhaps one day it will be possible to host some such events in person in Oxford for those students who are able to attend. In the meantime, though, we are looking forward to initiating these online events, which will be accessible to all our students across the world.



In addition to welcoming new students this upcoming year, we also look forward to hosting further **OSRJL Visiting Fellows working on any aspect of rare Judeo languages, including linguistics, literature, manuscript studies and book history**. Applications are currently open for 2 such fellowships; the Fellowships and Visitors Committee of the OCHJS will review applications and select successful candidates this autumn with a view toward hosting the 2 Visiting Fellows in Hilary and/or Trinity Terms 2023.

Finally, this year we hope to work with several of our teachers to begin preparations for the publication of **teaching manuals** on rare Jewish languages. Such vital resources are urgently needed to help preserve and encourage the teaching of endangered languages, and it has been a goal of the OSRJL's from the outset to facilitate their creation and publication. Further details will be announced on the OCHJS website in due course.

*Madeleine Trivasse*

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## Thank You

On behalf of all those involved in the running of the OSRJL, thank you for your interest in and support of our programme. Particularly, we would like to thank our generous funders, enthusiastic students and committed teachers for making the programme such a success. We look forward to engaging with you further this upcoming academic year and beyond.

In the meantime, if you wish to learn more about or apply for our classes, then please visit [our page on the OCHJS's website](#) or email our Administrator, Celeste Pan, or Coordinator, Madeleine Trivasse, at [osrjl@ochjs.ac.uk](mailto:osrjl@ochjs.ac.uk).

Currently, we are seeking donations to ensure all our OSRJL activities can remain free of charge to students and participants in years to come. If you wish to join with us in preserving, sparking interest in, enabling access to and reflecting on the nature and role of Jewish languages, then contact our Coordinator, Madeleine Trivasse, directly at [registrar@ochjs.ac.uk](mailto:registrar@ochjs.ac.uk) regarding how to make a donation to support the work of the OSRJL.

In gratitude,

*The OSRJL & OCHJS Team*



Oxford School of  
**Rare Jewish Languages**



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