Oxford School of Rare Jewish Languages

IMPACT REPORT 2024–25

Oxford School of Rare Jewish Languages

Impact Report 2024–25

This report was compiled, designed and edited by the Oxford School of Rare Jewish Languages (OSRJL) Administrator, Esther Edwards. A section of the report was authored by Professor Judith Olszowy-Schlanger and Esther Edwards together, whilst others were written by Esther Edwards, 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 2024–25 academic year, as well as previous academic years; 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 Administrator, Esther Edwards, and OSRJL students and teachers regarding feedback on the OSRJL programme. All processes of data collection pertaining to the 2024–25 academic year were conducted during said year, while other collection processes took place during previous years to which the data corresponds.

Images portraying and written materials produced by OSRJL students, teachers and/or supporters are published herein with the 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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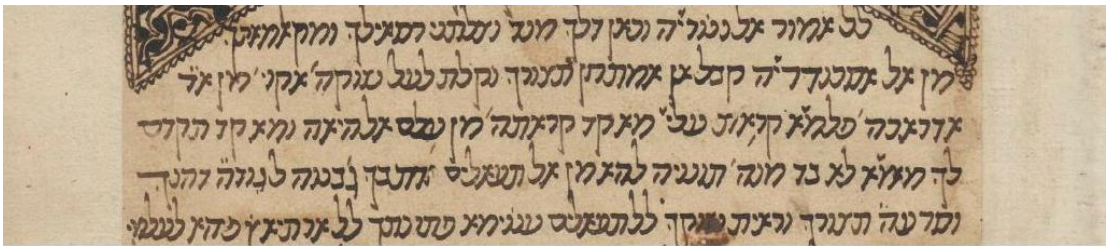
Behind the Oxford School of Rare Jewish Languages

In 2024–2025, the Oxford School of Rare Jewish Languages entered a new phase. Initially conceived by the Oxford Centre for Hebrew & Jewish Studies in 2021 to teach ten rare languages, it now offers classes on 18 languages at various levels of study. Our specialized languages teachers, leading researchers in the field, teach hundreds of students worldwide each year by combining linguistic and philological expertise with cutting-edge digital platforms.



Excerpt from Judeo-Arabic version of Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn, by Maimonides (1139–1204). Copied by Yosef bar Gabbay, Or. 18. Source: Leiden University Libraries

Languages are an important, incorporeal and irreplaceable aspect of Jewish history. For nearly two millennia, Jewish communities across the Diaspora adopted the languages of their non-Jewish neighbours, incorporating them into the fabric of daily life, while preserving Hebrew and Aramaic for religious and literary use. The resulting languages formed unique linguistic systems, enriched with Hebrew and Aramaic vocabulary and written in Hebrew script. They served as primary languages for storytelling, recording community traditions and engaging in everyday communication. From lullabies and folktales to biblical interpretations and medical texts, these languages in practice reflected the culture and identity of Jewish life throughout history. However, most of them are currently in danger of extinction, yet there is limited institutional support for their study. With only a few speakers remaining for some and only written evidence for others, these languages must be documented, taught and revitalized urgently.

In response to this decline, the Oxford Centre for Hebrew & Jewish Studies (OCHJS), in collaboration with the Institut des Langues Rares (ILARA) in Paris, established the Oxford School of Rare Jewish Languages (OSRJL). As the first institution of its kind, the OSRJL offers free, online courses in no fewer than 18 rare Jewish languages, alongside specialist lectures, workshops, Visiting Fellowship programmes, an academic blog, Jewish music classes and textbook publications. In just three years, it has become a vital hub for global

Dr Assaf Bar Moshe, OSRJL teacher, and his OSRJL Beginners Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic students 2024–25

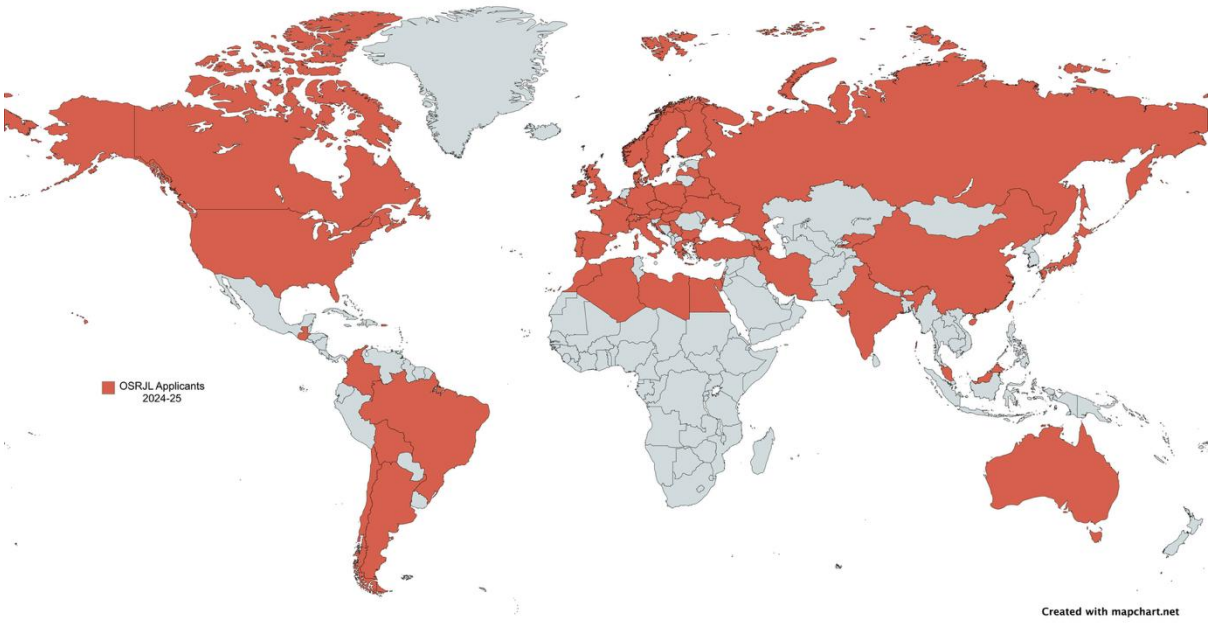
engagement with Jewish linguistic heritage.

The success of the OSRJL has been possible thanks to the generous support of the David Berg Foundation, the MBS Family Foundation, the Rothschild Foundation Hanadiv Europe, Taube Philanthropies, one foundation that wishes to remain anonymous, and many other generous individuals. The OCHJS is grateful to them for their unfailing support. As we look back on the OSRJL's fourth year, sustained by new and enduring sources of funding, we are delighted to see that the OSRJL continues to be on the front lines of efforts to preserve, spark interest in, enable access to and reflect on the nature and role of the irreplaceable history and knowledge of rare Jewish languages.

Professor Judith Olszowy-Schlanger FBA & Esther Edwards

The First Year after the Pilot Phase

This past academic year (2024–25) was the OSRJL's fourth year and followed the end of its pilot phase, which spanned three academic years, 2021–4. Interest in and the popularity of the languages taught continued. The programme received a total of 541 applications from individuals living in 50 countries and regions: Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, India, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Mainland China, Malaysia, Morocco, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, Ukraine and the United States of America.



We continued to cap the classes at a maximum of 30 student places to ensure that an effective learning environment was preserved. Due to popular demand, we added

four higher-level classes, and overall taught a total of 30 classes for 17 different Jewish languages. Classes taught and their teachers included the following:

Language	Level	Teacher
Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic	Beginners Intermediate Conversational	Dr Assaf Bar Moshe *Freie Universität Berlin*
Classical Judeo-Arabic	Beginners Intermediate/Advanced	Friederike Schmidt *Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München*
Haketia	Beginners	Dr Carlos Yebra López *California State University, Fullerton*
Judeo-French	Advanced Beginners	Dr Sandra Hajek *Georg-August-Universität Göttingen*
Judeo-Greek	Beginners Advanced	Dr Julia G. Krivoruchko *University of Cambridge*
Judeo-Hamadani	Beginners	Dr Don Stilo *Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology*
Judeo-Italian	Beginners Intermediate	Dr Marilena Colasuonno *University of Naples*
Judeo-Moroccan	Beginners	Haviva Fenton
Judeo-Neo-Aramaic	Beginners	Dr Dorota Molin *University of Oxford, University of Cambridge*
Judeo-Persian	Beginners Advanced	Dr Ilan Moradi *Beijing Normal University*
Judeo-Tat	Beginners	Dr Murad Suleymanov *EPHE, Paris*
Judeo-Turkish	Advanced	Professor Laurent Mignon *University of Oxford*

Karaim	Beginners Intermediate	Professor Henryk Jankowski *Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań*
Kivruli	Beginners Intermediate	Dr Hélène Gérardin *Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, EPHE, Paris*
Ladino	Beginners, Section 1 Beginners Section 2 Intermediate	Dr Carlos Yebra López *California State University, Fullerton*
Old Yiddish	Beginners	Dr Diana Matut
Yiddish	Beginners Advanced Beginners Intermediate Advanced Literature	Dr Beruriah Wiegand *OCHJS, University of Oxford*

Alongside these classes, we continued to offer and present other opportunities to learn about the world of Jewish languages and culture. We again hosted popular Jewish music classes taught by Dr Diana Matut, four specialist lectures, a brand-new manuscript workshop and a Visiting Fellowship. We were pleased to congratulate Dr Carlos Yebra López (Ladino and Haketia), Dr Assaf Bar Moshe (Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic) and Dr Dorota Molin (Judeo-Neo-Aramaic) on the publication of their respective books: *Ladino on the Internet: Sepharad 4*, *Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic: An Introductory Textbook* and *The Neo-Aramaic Dialect of the Jews of Dohok: A Comparative-Typological Grammar*. Dr Molin and Dr López spoke on their books for two of our OSRJL lectures.

Thanks to generous funding, all OSRJL language classes were offered free of charge to accepted students. The selection process continued to be competitive due to the sustained high number of applications. Class teachers led the application assessment process and both current university students and non-students were accepted into the programme; particular priority was given to those who had already been studying Jewish languages or had participated in OSRJL beginners classes and were seeking to advance to a higher level. All accepted students who fulfilled the participation requirements (75% attendance) were eligible to receive certificates of

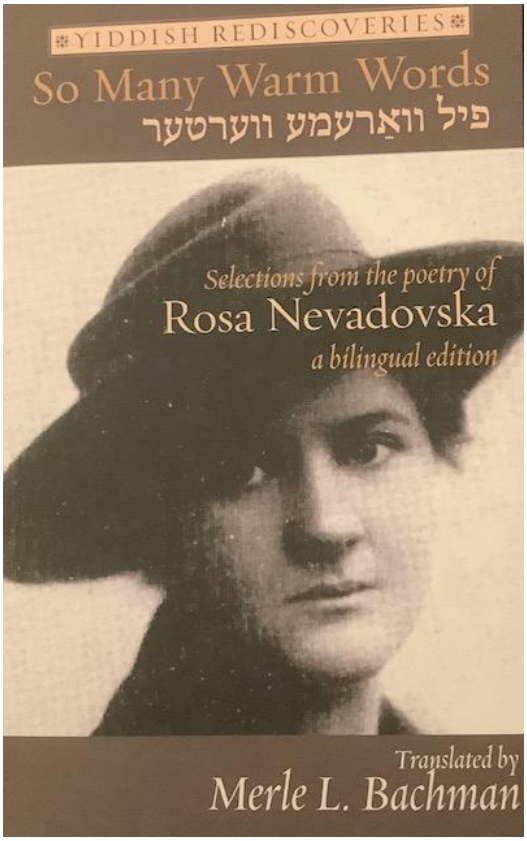
Dr Beruriah Wiegand, OSRJL teacher, and her OSRJL Advanced Yiddish Literature students 2024–25

participation at the end of the academic year.

The OSRJL continues to be a popular programme of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew & Jewish Studies, and many of its students express interest in continuing on to study more advanced levels with their teachers.

Esther Edwards

2024–25 in Review



The title page of a collection of poems by Rosa Nevadovska, a key text in the Advanced Yiddish Literature class 2024–25

We were grateful that many of our teachers—leading academics at universities and skilled teachers in Europe and around the world, most of whom joined the OSRJL in its inaugural year—carried on teaching in the programme. We also welcomed two new instructors this year: Dr Don Stilo, teaching Judeo-Hamadani, and Dr Ilan Moradi, teaching Judeo-Persian. Professor Judith Olszowy-Schlanger FBA (OCHJS President; Director, Centre for Hebrew & Jewish Studies, Oxford; Professor of Hebrew Manuscript Studies, EPHE, Paris Science et Lettres [PSL]; and Fellow, Corpus Christi College, Oxford) continued to direct the programme. Madeleine Trivasse stepped back from the OSRJL Coordinator position in October 2024 as she adjusted to life with her new baby. The position was absorbed into the Director and Administrator positions, and Madeleine continued to support and advise the programme in her capacity as the OCHJS Registrar. Esther Edwards worked as the OSRJL Administrator after stepping into Celeste's shoes at the end of 2023–24. She has been training her replacement, Luhai (Luka) Liu, who will be taking on the position for the 2025–26 academic year. Throughout, Priscilla Lange (OCHJS Academic Administrator) continued to support the OSRJL, organising the annual OSRJL public lectures and the Jewish music classes. Kerry Maciak (OCHJS Bursar) and Jun Tong (OCHJS Accounts Assistant) took care of all financial aspects of the programme's

Luhai (Luka) Liu, Oxford DPhil Student & new OSRJL Administrator beginning August 2025

administration. Michael Allaway (Software Engineer, University of Oxford) worked on the OSRJL Tutorials platform, implementing a number of changes in line with feedback from teachers and students.



2024–25 OSRJL Administrative Staff (L-R):

Professor Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, OCHJS President

Madeleine Trivasse, OCHJS Academic Registrar

Esther Edwards, OSRJL Administrator



Priscilla Lange, OCHJS Academic Administrator

Kerry Maciak, OCHJS Bursar

Jun Tong, OCHJS Accounts Assistant

The OSRJL's Advisory Committee, whose expert membership has remained constant since the programme's inception, yet again offered invaluable insight and support. Its members included: 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).

The OSRJL's unique programme continued to be funded by generous individuals and foundations. Professor Judith Olszowy-Schlanger and the OSRJL team have continued their efforts to secure the necessary funding for the OSRJL to ensure that it continues for many years, providing much-needed teaching for rare and endangered Jewish languages.

This year, we were able to add four higher-level classes to our offerings: Advanced Judeo-Greek, Intermediate Judeo-Italian, Intermediate Karaim and Conversational Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic (alumni only). These classes lasted for one term each and occurred in addition to all our other classes. Due to an unexpected development and at the last minute, Judeo-Provençal could not be offered this year. Overall, the advertised array of 17 languages taught through the programme during the 2024–25 academic year and their teachers included:

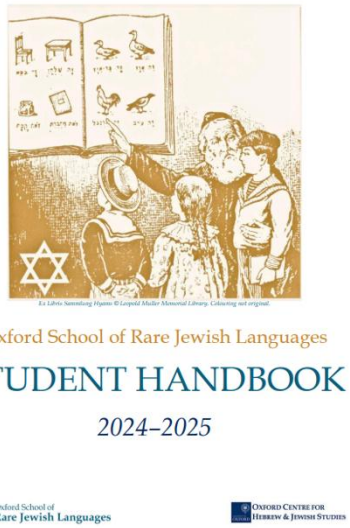
Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic *Dr Assaf Bar Moshe, Freie Universität Berlin*
Classical Judeo-Arabic *Friederike Schmidt, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München*
Haketia *Dr Carlos Yebra López, California State University, Fullerton*
Judeo-French *Dr Sandra Hajek, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen*
Judeo-Greek *Dr Julia G. Krivoruchko, University of Cambridge*
Judeo-Hamadani *Dr Don Stilo, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology*
Judeo-Italian *Dr Marilena Colasuonno, University of Naples*
Judeo-Moroccan *Haviva Fenton*
Judeo-Neo-Aramaic *Dr Dorota Molin, University of Oxford, University of Cambridge*
Judeo-Persian *Dr Ilan Moradi, Beijing Normal University*
Judeo-Tat *Dr Murad Suleymanov, EPHE, Paris*
Judeo-Turkish *Professor Laurent Mignon, University of Oxford*
Karaim *Professor Henryk Jankowski, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań*
Kivruli *Dr Héléne Gérardin, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, EPHE, Paris*
Ladino *Dr Carlos Yebra López, California State University, Fullerton*
Old Yiddish *Dr Diana Matut*
Yiddish *Dr Beruriah Wiegand, OCHJS, University of Oxford*

This year we received 541 total applications from prospective students (many of whom applied for multiple language classes), which indicate a significant interest in learning these important aspects of Jewish heritage.

As has always been the case, our applicants were a mix of current students studying a wide range of fields at academic institutions across the globe and members of the broader public, both within and outside academia. Of the 541 applicants, there were 283 new ones, interested in joining the OSRJL classes for the first time, and 258 alumni. 299 of the total applicants were members of the general academic and non-academic public, while 242 were students. In the end, we offered 593 places to 380 individuals. Students were allowed to take up to four classes per term, and many took two or more throughout the year. Electronic certificates of participation were issued to all students who participated in 75% or more of their class sessions, according to our

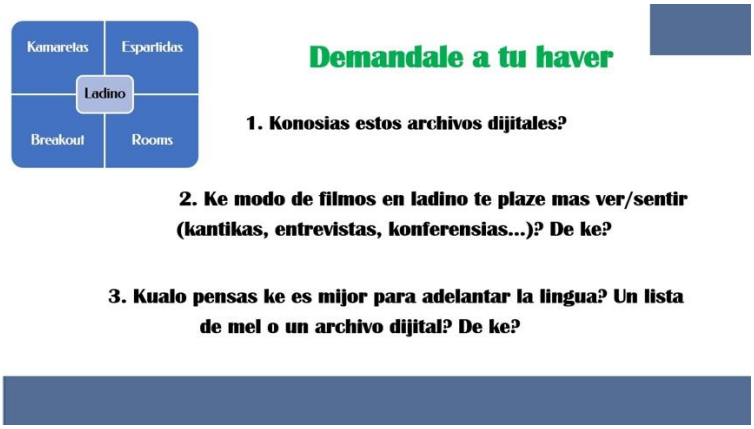
guidelines. We issued a total of 287 certificates at the end of the academic year. The OCHJS continues not to offer credit for these classes, but some students are able to receive official recognition towards their degrees from their home universities for their studies with the OSRJL.

All classes limited to a maximum of 30 student places, allowed a waitlist of up to 10 applicants, some of whom were offered places when they became available. Our third edition of the OSRJL Student Handbook, this year produced by OSRJL Administrator Esther Edwards, proved a welcome introduction and guide to the programme for new and returning students alike.



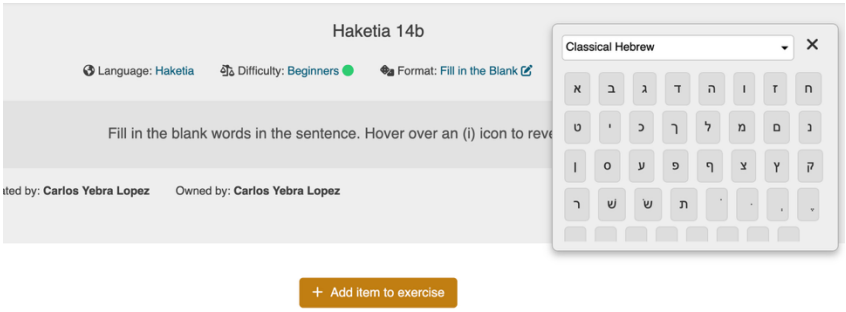
As has been our model since the programme's inception, classes were offered for one, two or three terms depending on the language, with the several languages taught across all three terms in a cumulative sequence. Each class met once a week on Zoom for one hour, while the OSRJL's Tutorials platform gave students opportunities to practice between sessions. Classes offered for one term included: Beginners and Intermediate Kivruli, Beginners and Advanced Judeo-Greek, Advanced Beginners Judeo-French, Beginners and Intermediate Karaim, Advanced Judeo-Turkish, Beginners Judeo-Hamadani, Conversational Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic (alumni only) and Intermediate Judeo-Italian. Those offered for two terms included: Beginners Haketia, Beginners Judeo-Italian, Beginners and Intermediate/Advanced Classical Judeo-Arabic, Beginners Judeo-Tat and Intermediate Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic (alumni only). Those offered for three terms included: Beginners Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic, Beginners and Intermediate Ladino, Beginners Old Yiddish, Beginners Judeo-Neo-Aramaic, Beginners and Advanced Judeo-Persian, Beginners Judeo-Moroccan, Beginners Yiddish, Advanced Beginners Yiddish, Lower Intermediate Yiddish and Advanced Yiddish Literature. In total, the OSRJL offered 480 hours of language teaching over the course of the year.

Above: Dr Carlos López, OSRJL teacher, and his OSRJL Beginners Ladino Section 1 class

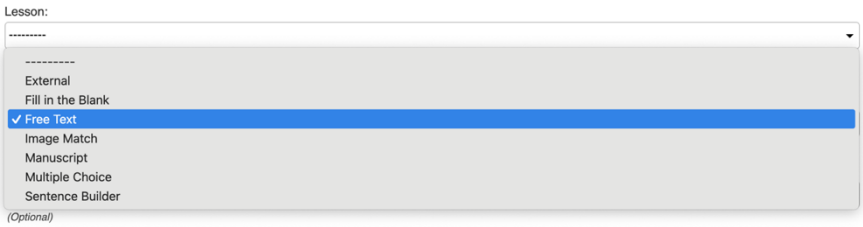


Our language classes are the beating heart of the OSRJL programme, and yet there was so much more that occurred during the 2024–25 academic year and was received with positive feedback and encouragement. Such activities included the following:

OSRJL Tutorials Website: This year, Michael Allaway worked to further develop our Tutorials website in response to feedback from teachers and students. The Tutorials site has been designed especially for the OSRJL to support students' learning with self-correcting exercises and other educational resources (text, image, audio and video files). This year, Michael was able to add virtual keyboards that included special characters in the Roman and classical Hebrew alphabets with the *niqud* to expand the options for students to write in various languages. He also created new 'Classes' and 'Help' sections. The 'Classes' section will assist the teachers in organising and managing their exercises together by allowing them to group exercises for specific classes. In the coming months, we will be working on developing articles for the new 'Help' section to further support students and teachers in their use of the site. Lastly, Michael created a new exercise format: the new 'Free Text' format allows for open, questions-and-answers exercises. It is similar to the manuscript format, but allows the question to be free text if necessary.



New Hebrew keyboard on the Tutorials site



New 'Free Text' exercise on the Tutorials site

OSRJL Lectures: OCHJS Academic Administrator Priscilla Lange continued to organise a series of talks for the OSRJL, offered in person and online, as part of the OCHJS's public lecture offerings. These lectures are open to OSRJL students and the general public and provide opportunities to take a deeper look into topics related to rare Jewish languages. We were excited to launch two new books by two of our OSRJL teachers as part of our programme this year: Dr Dorota Molin's *The Neo-Aramaic Dialect of the Jews of Dohok: A Comparative-Typological Grammar*, and Dr Carlos Yebra López's *Ladino On the Internet: Sepharad 4*. Dr López's talk was recorded and made available on the OCHJS's Vimeo account, where previous OSRJL Lectures as well as other events of the OCHJS are also available for viewing.

Michaelmas Term 2024

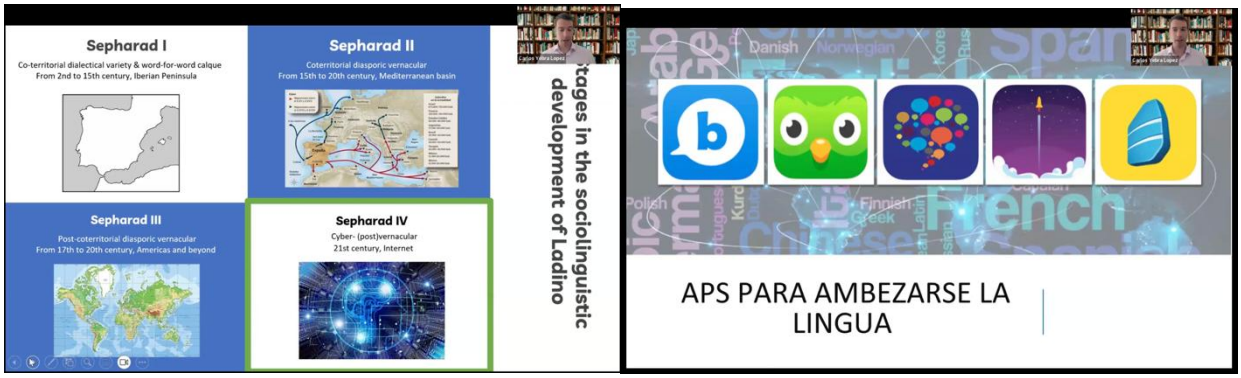
'Book Launch: *The Neo-Aramaic Dialect of the Jews of Dohok: A Comparative-Typological Grammar*' *Dr Dorota Molin, University of Oxford, University of Cambridge*

Hilary Term 2025

'Far more than days and dates: What can we learn from Yiddish calendars (1875–1914)?' *Professor Nathan Cohen, Bar-Ilan University*

Trinity Term 2025

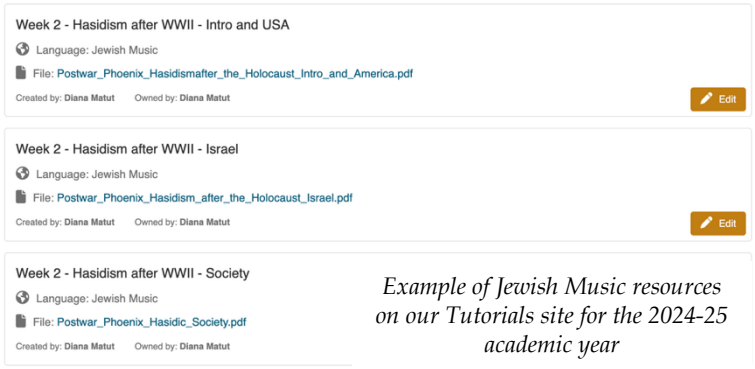
'Book Launch: *Ladino On the Internet: Sepharad 4*' *Dr Carlos Yebra López, California State University, Fullerton*



Screenshots of slides from Dr López's virtual OSRJL lecture presenting his new book, Ladino on the Internet: Sepharad 4

The British Library © British Library Board (MS Or. 1047, fol. 2r)

Jewish Music Classes: Dr Diana Matut continued to teach her popular Jewish music class series. This year, the theme of her classes was 'Yiddish Musics: The 20th and 21st Centuries', and she taught on it across all three terms. Her classes focused on the development of Yiddish musics mainly after the Second World War. They were offered once a week for one hour per session during the eight weeks of each Oxford term, just as the OSRJL's language classes were. There were 26 students in Michaelmas Term, 23 in Hilary Term and 15 in Trinity Term. Certificates of participation were issued for these classes by OCHJS Academic Administrator Priscilla Lange, who organised the classes.

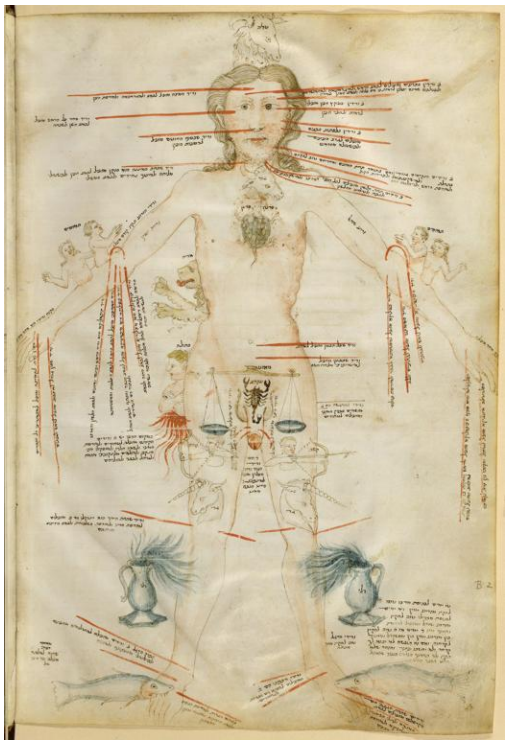


Example of Jewish Music resources on our Tutorials site for the 2024-25 academic year

Classical Judeo-Arabic Manuscript Workshop: We were very pleased to offer a brand-new intensive manuscript workshop during the last two weeks of Hilary Term.

Our Classical Judeo-Arabic teacher, Friederike Schmidt, led the workshop, which met over two 90-minute sessions. The workshop focused on equipping students of Judeo-Arabic with the essential skills for reading manuscripts written with script types that are no longer familiar to readers of modern printed books in Hebrew script. The students worked on three different texts from four different manuscripts in two scripts: Yemenite and Sephardi. Among these manuscripts were an Arabic translation of Qohelet, Maimonides' *Dalālat al-Ḥāʾirīn* and a letter from Yehuda ha-Levi in Toledo to Ḥalfon b. Netanel. We received 39 applications for this workshop and were able to accept 26 students. The student feedback praised the teaching and erudition of Ms Schmidt and called for more workshops like this one.

Judeo-Arabic version of Dalālat al-ḥāʾirīn, by Maimonides (1139–1204). Copied by Yosef bar Gabbay, Or. 18. Source: Leiden University Libraries



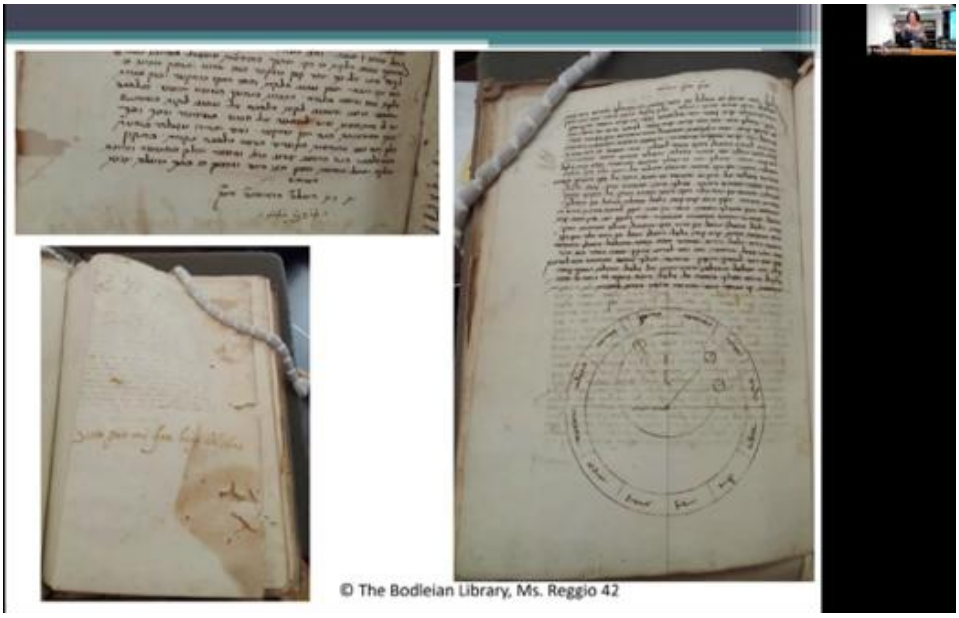
Zodiac and Vein Man. *Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Ms Hébreu 1181, fol. 264v.*

***The Jewish Languages Bookshelf*, An Academic Blog:** This year, our academic blog, *The Jewish Languages Bookshelf* (*The Bookshelf*), featured an article by Dr Justine Isserles, exploring a fifteenth-century Hebrew medical miscellany from Provence:

'Body Parts, Veins and Pathologies in Judeo-Italian and Latin in Hebrew Characters *Dr Justine Isserles (EPHE-PSL, SAPRAT, Paris)*

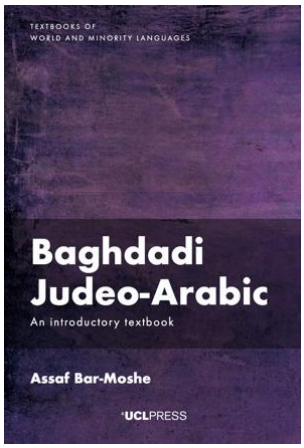
In this article, Dr Isserles analyses medical terms that appear in both Judeo-Italian and Latin but written in Hebrew characters, and that pertain to body parts, veins, conditions and illnesses. The piece included a fascinating illustration of the Zodiac Man from Ms Hébreu 1181, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale.

OSRJL Visiting Fellowships: This year, Dr Ilana Wartenberg (Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Institute, Tel Aviv University) returned in Trinity Term 2025, to further her research, this time on 'Judeo-Latin in the Hebrew Transmission of the *Theorica Planetarum* as Manifest in Ms. Reggio 42 from the Bodleian Library'. Dr Wartenberg shared her research in a David Patterson Lecture, coordinated by OCHJS administrator Priscilla Lange, which was recorded and can be found on our Vimeo account or using this link.



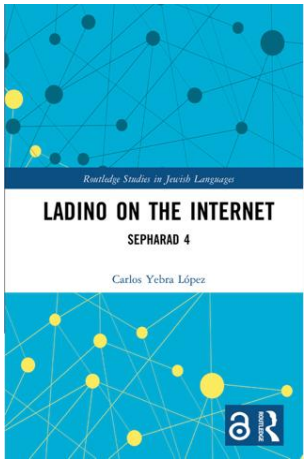
Slide from Dr Wartenberg's David Patterson lecture on 'Judeo-Latin in the Hebrew Transmission of the Theorica Planetarum as manifest in Ms. Reggio 42 from the Bodleian Library'

Publications: We were very pleased to see three books by our OSRJL teachers come to publication this year:



Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic: An Introductory Textbook (Dr Assaf Bar Moshe)

This textbook is the first in the OSRJL's sub-series of books on rare Jewish languages published by UCL Press in the Textbook of World and Minority Languages series. In this textbook, Dr Bar Moshe provides the learning materials for beginners interested in Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic, the language of one of the oldest and largest Jewish communities historically, to advance to a conversational level. Through 10 lessons, he gives readers the necessary materials to learn common expressions, how to greet, speak about family and food, and other important topics. Included are key vocabulary words, grammatical explanations and exercises, as well as insights into the historical Jewish culture.

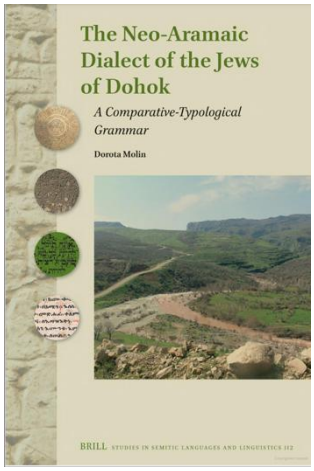


Ladino on the Internet: Sepharad 4 (Dr Carlos Yebra López)

This monograph constitutes the first critical and systematic account written in English about the online revitalisation of Ladino. In his book, Dr López conclusively demonstrates that, nowadays, the global Ladino-speaking community connects first and foremost online—a reality which calls for a full, comprehensive examination of the web-based development of the Sephardic diaspora (including that of Ladino) as a qualitatively different stage, termed 'Sepharad 4' in this monograph.

Drawing upon the methodological framework of Revivalistics and including a comparative analysis with similar initiatives apropos Yiddish, this volume analyses case studies including YouTube digital archives, social media platforms, language learning apps, online schools and Ladino on Netflix, plus on Web 3.0 platforms.

The book is of particular interest for those seeking to familiarise themselves with the use of technological tools to further the revitalisation of endangered languages such as Ladino.



The Neo-Aramaic Dialect of the Jews of Dohok (Dr Dorota Molin)

In this monograph, Dr Molin provides an in-depth analysis of the grammatical, dialectical and typological distinctives of Jewish Neo-Aramaic from Dohok. This dialect has not yet been documented and is currently on the verge of extinction. Dr Molin focuses on phonology, verbal morphosyntax and syntax, while drawing out the historical development of this unique dialect. At the book launch in Michaelmas Term, a panel took the opportunity to introduce Jewish Aramaic and give an overview of its history, drawing from Dr Molin's book, and enquire into the current reality of Aramaic as a spoken language in Israel.

Monitoring, Evaluation & Reflection

We continued our practice of inviting students and teachers to give feedback regarding the OSRJL at the end of the academic year. We also released a separate survey to those students who dropped out of classes without completing them and invited these students to make a donation to the programme (suggested donation £50) in lieu of finishing. This practice was discussed and developed at the end of the 2023–24 academic year as a way of disincentivising dropping out. It is important for the vision of the programme that the classes remain free of charge and accessible to all students, but we are aware that, for some, the lack of financial commitment might have the effect of lowering their level of investment in the class. The suggested donation for those who drop out is a way of mitigating that impression. We will continue to monitor this approach and refine it over the coming years.

Feedback continues to be an important tool for growing and refining the OSRJL programme. It is shared in an anonymised form with the teachers and programme Director and, together with advice from the Advisory Committee, remains an important part of moving the OSRJL forward. As in previous years, the surveys have contained a number of positive points and expressed hopes for further growth of the OSRJL. More in-depth thoughts from some students and teachers can be seen below

Esther Edwards

Over the past academic year, I had the privilege of studying four courses at the Oxford School of Rare Jewish Languages: Advanced Judeo-Persian, Advanced Judeo-Turkish, Beginners Judeo-Tat, and Beginners Judeo-Hamadani. As a descendant of the Persian Jewish community of Hamadan, with ancestry tracing back to 1725, these studies carried profound personal meaning for me. Each course combined linguistic rigor with cultural depth, allowing me to expand my existing knowledge of Persian, Azerbaijani, Turkish and Hebrew in order to explore rare Jewish languages that once flourished in the region of my forefathers. I particularly valued engaging with Judeo-Persian poetry and philosophy, Judeo-Turkish newspapers, and Judeo-Tat dialogues, which reflected the resilience and creativity of Jewish communities across centuries. I am deeply grateful to the OSRJL for enabling me to connect more closely with this heritage. This experience has ignited my strong desire to pursue research in Judeo-Persian manuscripts and texts.

Dr Arya Arad, OSRJL Student

I signed up to Judeo-Italian as I am interested in Early Modern Jewish history of the Mediterranean world and Renaissance Italy. Each class was challenging yet easy to comprehend without any prior knowledge of Judeo-Italian; only basic knowledge of Italian and Hebrew script was needed. After the study of our first Early Modern Judeo-Italian text, I was fascinated to learn in the first lesson about Lecce's Jewish history and that it is likely to be one of the very first areas Jews settled in Europe after they were taken as slaves by the Romans from their homeland of Israel 2,000 years ago. I also learned how the original Italian Jews liked to keep a separateness from the Sephardic Jews who arrived in the 15th century in order to maintain a certain cultural continuity. This, and the lessons in general, left me with the desire to travel to Lecce's Jewish history museum and to continue my study of the rare language and the history of the different Italian Jewish communities. I am very thankful to the OSRJL for allowing me to have access to such terrific teachers and texts for free!

Hannah Clapinson, OSRJL Student

Over the past four years, I've participated in nearly all the language courses offered at OSRJL, including many that continued into advanced levels in the final year. The programme allowed me to explore not only languages I was already familiar with, but also those I had never encountered before—such as Kivruli and Judeo-Turkish—opening entirely new intellectual horizons. The experience rekindled a joy I hadn't felt since my university days, when I studied under Roman Stopa (glottogony and click languages) and Andrzej Zaborski (Semitic and Afroasiatic linguistics). At the OSRJL, I had the privilege of learning from lecturers whose depth of knowledge and passion echoed that formative academic environment. I acquired skills I never expected—including the ability to read manuscripts and navigate texts in languages like Classical Judeo-Arabic, Old Yiddish, Judeo-Persian and Judeo-Italian. I hope to

continue learning to speak Judeo-Baghdadi, Karaim, Juhuri and Ladino, should I find conversation partners. Thanks to the structured and inspiring approach of the Yiddish classes, I've read more Yiddish literature than I ever could have managed on my own. Equally unforgettable were the sessions on Yiddish music, which revealed astonishing connections—even with Turkish musical traditions. These interdisciplinary moments were among the many highlights of a truly enriching journey.

Of course, this brief reflection can't capture everything. The scope and depth of what I've learned—linguistically, culturally, and personally—go far beyond what can be expressed here. The knowledge gained at the OSRJL will continue to inform my creative work, including a forthcoming book and a collection of songs shaped by the languages and cultures I've had the privilege to study.

Agnieszka Ewa Zylbertal, OSRJL Student

Teaching Judeo-Persian at the OSRJL was a wonderful experience. The reading of the texts, the discussions, as well as the simulated theatrical conversations enabled the students not only to learn Judeo-Persian but also to enjoy the lessons and to discover the culture reflected in this language. The teaching method used for both the Beginners class and the Advanced one was to develop four perspectives of acquiring a language: oral understanding, speaking, reading and writing. This comprehensive method which expresses the vocal visual active and passive aspects of a linguistic knowledge was appreciated by the students.

In the Advanced class, we read, translated and analyzed a variety of texts from the 14th century till the 19th century, texts of the poets Shain and Imrani, of the historian Babai ben Lutf and of the philosophers Judah Ben El'azar and Simantov Melammed. The variety of genres included Biblical epic, didactic poetry, profane literature, historiography, philosophical theology and mystical theology. The analyzing discussions were, however, not only grammatical but referred also to other fields related to the texts, such as poetry, religion, theology, philosophy, history and astronomy. We had simulated theatrical conversations related to the texts and watched a film showing the cultural life of the Persian Jewish community. The students were asked to transcribe classical proverbs of the Persian culture into Judeo-Persian as a writing exercise.

In the Beginners class, the students started to learn Judeo-Persian with no previous knowledge of it. They learned the basic grammar of the language in order to be able to read and analyze texts in Judeo-Persian in the future. The conversations followed the grammatical subjects step by step. The fact that these enthusiastic students are from many different countries and of diverse disciplines significantly contributed to our discussions and learning.

Dr Ilan Moradi, OSRJL Judeo-Persian Teacher

My first term teaching at OSRJL was a very positive experience for me. I got a chance to speak to a group of enthusiastic students about Judeo-Hamadani, a rare and highly endangered Iranian language. There are not many people in the world who specialize in Northwest Iranian languages—except for the varieties of Kurdish—especially the smaller, poorly documented ones. Having an opportunity to speak about the languages of my own area of specialization was a rare treat for me.

Just to be clear, Northwest Iranian (NWI) languages are an integral part of the Iranian language family that form one branch of the Indo-European language family. The NWI languages are not Persian-derived but are descended from the undocumented language of the ancient Medes (or some unknown variety of it). The Persian and the Median branches of Iranian languages separated from each other some 3,000 years ago! As such, there is almost no mutual intelligibility between Modern Persian and a modern NWI language.

It was very exciting for me to teach this exotic course to a group of 12 students from ten different countries and ten different language backgrounds spread out over 16 time zones of the world—none of whom were located within the United Kingdom! Most of the students were very keen on going through an intense and compact presentation of the grammar of a language they had never heard of before. Also, a NWI Iranian language, such as Judeo-Hamadani, has some quite exotic grammatical phenomena that the students had never heard of before and they found these features surprising indeed.

When I covered each new section of the grammar, I would pause and ask if there were any questions. Often, I was presented with astute and stimulating questions, but at other times there were no questions at all. It was very rewarding to me when, at one point, I asked the students why there weren't more questions and one student answered, 'There are no questions because you are presenting everything so clearly'.

Professor Don Stilo, OSRJL Judeo-Hamadani Teacher

Looking Forward

For the OSRJL, this first year beyond its pilot stage was a successful and stimulating one. The changes in staff have encouraged us to focus more on the essential elements of the programme, while evaluating ways that growth can be achieved in sustainable ways. The opportunities for the programme seem abundant. With so many possibilities for growth ahead, the OSRJL is focussing on creating a core programme that is sustainable and excellent while exploring other ways to expand, such as putting on more workshops similar to the one offered this year, developing new student cafés, and teaching further Judeo-languages and higher levels for the languages already offered. We will also be monitoring the changes implemented this past year, particularly the new updates to the Tutorials site and the requested donation for those who do not complete the course. Furthermore, we look forward to welcoming two new Visiting Fellows: Dr Bernardino Pitocchelli (Università di Napoli

Federico I), who will be working on 'Translating *Bereshit:* Material Studies Towards an Edition of the Judeo-Italian *Genesis'*, and Dr Elly Moseson (The Jewish Theological Seminary of America), who will be working on 'Dreams and Nightmares in Jewish Magical Literature'. Additionally, we will be holding three new Jewish music classes as well as adding an Advanced Old Yiddish class, an Advanced Judeo Neo-Aramaic class and another term of Beginners Judeo-Persian.

Finally, in our fundraising efforts, we continue to work on securing an endowment for the OSRJL so that we may keep building and growing the programme for years to come, ensuring a future for many of these rare and endangered Jewish languages.

Esther Edwards

Thank You

On behalf of all those involved in running the OSRJL, thank you for your interest in and support of our programme during its fourth year. 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 during the 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 new Administrator, Luhai (Luka) Liu at osrjl@ochjs.ac.uk.

As we continue endeavouring to ensure the stability of the future of the programme, we are seeking donations to enable all our OSRJL activities to 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 OSRJL Administrator directly at osrjl@ochjs.ac.uk, or the OCHJS Fundraising Officer at fundraising@ochjs.ac.uk, regarding how to make a donation to support the work of the OSRJL.

In gratitude,

The OSRJL & OCHJS Team

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