The Hebrew script written in Catalonia is not only the story of a unique Catalan script but also reflects the story of the Sefardic script, the script used by the Jews in the Iberian peninsula.

Already in the 11th century, when Catalonia was part of the Crown of Aragon, this Catalan script could be discerned. This old script, inspired by that written in the Ashkenazic countries, was probably used also by the Jews in Provence, with whom Catalonia conducted a close social and cultural relationship.

At the end of the 11th century the Catalan 'Ashkenazic' script had gradually transformed into the Sefardic type which was used in Andalusia as of the 10th century. Nevertheless, traces of the Ashkenazic character, demonstrated in the conservative square script written in Catalonia until the 14th century, prove the continuity of this early type.

Palaeography

Palaeography classifies the different types of Hebrew scripts on the basis of an understanding of the traditional art of writing in the Middle-Ages. The medieval scribe, who learnt to write from his father or his teacher, passed it on to his son or student, thereby developing in the course of time a stereotypic manner of writing.
The main types of medieval Hebrew scripts are: The Ashkenazic script - written in Western Europe; The Italian script; The Oriental script used in the Near East, and the Sephardic script - used in the Iberian Peninsula, North Africa and Sicily. Immigrant scribes, however, continued to use their homeland script also in their new locality. For example, Sephardic scribes, who emigrated from the Spanish areas to towns in Northern Italy, continued to use their Sephardic writing also in their new locality.1

The main classification of scripts is based on regional criteria. However, in order to understand the evolutional process of the script, we must add to this regional classification also a graphical classification.

The graphical classification divides the scripts in the middle ages according to three main modes: the square mode, semi-cursive mode, and cursive mode, and to two sub modes - semi-square and proto-cursive.

Square script - In the square script letters are made by straight horizontals and vertical lines, keeping a squarish pattern.

Semi-square script (Fig. 1)2 - The semi-square is the first sub mode to indicate the evolution of the letters. The semi-square sub mode demonstrates how the letters evolved from the square to the non-square modes. One can see that the letters lack the pattern of the square but do not yet display the distinctive features of the non square.

Proto-cursive - The second sub-mode - the proto-cursive - reveals a closer affinity to the semi-cursive and cursive modes.

The two sub modes may be described as linking the square script with the semi-cursive and cursive scripts. Presumably transitional, they were employed in scripts of the tenth and eleventh centuries, combining a morphological mixture of the square and the subsequently semi-cursive and cursive scripts.

Semi-cursive script - The semi-cursive letters change the straight appearance of the square. They develop curved and inclined lines, modifying the square pattern into a more flexible form.

Cursive script - Cursive writing developed through a reduction of calamus strokes that minimizes the time in which the hand is raised from the page. The texture of the script is relatively dense and many of its letters are frequently joined together, either by ligatures, in which two or more parts of several letters make a new form, or by connecting a part of a letter to that of the letter ahead.

Resources
The earliest dated writing material from Catalonia are burial inscriptions found in Barcelona, Gerona, Tarragona, Tortosa etc.3 Five of them are prior to the 11th century. The two earliest ones - Tarragona and Tortosa4 were inscribed by the ancient square script used by Jews all over the world prior to the 10th century. There are more than 20 extant dated manuscripts written in Catalonia between the end of the 12th century and the expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula.5

The Barcelona deeds are the most important documents for the subject of the present article as they may shed light on the Catalan script's evolution. They were written from the first third of the 11th century onwards, mostly in Barcelona but also in Leon and Navara and are preserved in the Corona d'aragon archive. The earliest of them are bilingual deeds in Latin and Hebrew.6 The later deeds, written in Hebrew, deal with the purchase and sale of land, vineyards, real estate, or other property.7

Script
In the following I shall introduce the gradual development process of the script written in Catalonia, based on the Barcelona deeds and on a few manuscripts. This presentation establishes a classification of the script into four modes: proto-cursive, cursive, semi-cursive and square.

1 The proto-cursive mode
The earliest script of the deeds written in Barcelona demonstrates the proto-cursive sub-mode.

As a sub mode this script shares the same characteristics common to other sub-modes of the Hebrew Scripts during the end of the 10th century and the beginning of the 11th. This script is also a sub type, which is a hybrid of Ashkenazic and Sephardic elements, combining the Ashkenazic features with those of a Sephardic character.

2 See Fig. 10.
3 M. Cambridge, University Library T-S 16.100 and T-S 12.532, Sephardic script of the 11th century.
4 See Fig. 6.
5 See Fig. 9.
6 See Fig. 7.
Ashkenazic features - the first phase of the proto-cursive sub-type.

Fig. 2a - A Barcelona deed written in 1034\footnote{M. Beit-Arie, "Hebrew script in Spain: Development, Offshoots and Voisitudes", in: H. Beinart (ed.), Moreshet Sephardi: The Sephardic Legacy, I, Jerusalem, 1992, pp. 286-288.} - shows the earliest example of a dated 'Ashkenazic' proto-cursive script. Fig. 2b is a deed written in England in 1182\footnote{Ibid., PL. XXXI p. 103.}. Despite the 150-year gap, a comparison between the two deeds demonstrates the features of the early Ashkenazic script. In both examples one can notice the angularity of the letters, (see the top of the mem, or the angular base of the shin) and the letter's proportions. The lines in both examples are delicate and emphasize the distinction between vertical and horizontal.

Sefardic features - the second phase of the proto-cursive as a sub-type.

During the last decades of the 11th century there is an obvious shift of the Catalan-Ashkenazic script towards the accomplishment of the Sefardic characteristics.

A deed written in 1080 (Fig. 3a)\footnote{See J. Millas I Vallencrosa, ibid., PL. III p. 41.} and the Sefardic handwriting of a Spanish immigrant in Egypt (Fig. 3b)\footnote{M. Millas, PL VIII p. 49.} demonstrate the adoption of the Sefardic features by the Catalan script. The lines of the Sefardic letters are wider and more regular than those of the Ashkenazic ones, and the distinct morphology of the letters also endows the script with the Sefardic character. See the alef with its long left leg, the inclined leg of the tav, or the long base of the ayin.

The transference from the Ashkenazic script to the Sefardic script is gradual and the fulfillment of the Sefardic character may exist until the last decades of the 12th century. A deed written in 1092 (Fig. 4)\footnote{M. Millas, PL XII p. 69.} reflects both trends. Lines are still delicate and a little 'shady' like those of the Ashkenazic but, the alef and the long inclined bases are similar to the Sefardic. Yet, two deeds written in Barcelona at the end of the 11th century and the beginning of the 12th, convey the Ashkenazic character existing at the beginning of the 12th century. Fig. 5a - Hebrew deed written in Catalonia in 1096\footnote{M. Millas, PL XIV p. 63.}, and Fig. 5b - Hebrew deed written in Barcelona in 1112. The Ashkenazic character in both deeds is manifested in the morphology of the letters as well as in the whole texture.

2 The cursive mode

As in other regional types of script, the development of the Sefardic script, emanating from the Catalan -Ashkenazic script, occurs simultaneously with the shift from the proto-cursive mode to the cursive mode. Deeds written in Catalonia at the last decades of the 12th century cast demonstrate this modification, approving that the first evidence of genuine Sefardic script in Barcelona is written in the cursive mode.

In a Hebrew deed written in 1164/5 (Fig. 6)\footnote{J. Millas I Vallencrosa, ibid., PL. III p. 41.} the script loses its Ashkenazic character. Changing its mode as well, it becomes the cursive Andalusian script. See the alef - typically to cursive Sefardic alef, the cursive he and the cursive kof.

At the beginning of the 13th century there is a fully cursive script. In a deed written in 1202 (Fig. 7)\footnote{Ibid., PL. XXXI p. 103.}, most letters display the cursive morphology. Small spaces between letters and between words emphasize the cursiveness of the texture.

3 The semi-cursive mode

It seems reasonable to assume that the cursive Sefardic script preceded the semi-cursive, although the morphology of the latter is closer to the square.

Examining more than 15 Barcelona documents written between 1164 to 1269 confirms this hypothesis, indicating that the older ones in this group are written in a script closer to the cursive, while the latter are closer to the semi-cursive.

A comparison between the script of the deed written in 1202 (Fig. 7) and a deed written 15 years later, in 1218 (Fig. 8)\footnote{M. Millas, PL XII p. 69.} shows that the morphology of the letters in the latter is closer to the semi-cursive.

See for example the alef - instead of the single pen stroke in which the cursive alef is produced, the alef here is made by three pen strokes. See also the serifs which decorate the horizontal lines.

A deed written in 1258\footnote{Ibid., PL. XXXI p. 103.} clearly illustrates that the scribe of this document wished to use the semi cursive mode. There are wider spaces between...
letters and words and the shape of the letters is the shape of the semi-cursive.

The first fully shaped semi-cursive was written in 1252 in Gerona (Fig. 29). It is a calligraphic script in which the scribe pays attention to each letter and to the composition of the whole text.

4 The square mode

Contrary to the cursive mode and the semi-cursive, the square script written in Catalonia is like all square scripts, conservative and preserves some of the ancient features. This factor enables us to distinguish between the Square Catalan and the Square written in the south of Spain.

Clues to an ancient square script in Catalonia are found in the early inscriptions of Taragona and Tortossa. A comparison of them to contemporary Oriental inscriptions shows the clear distinction between the two regional types. However, there is not enough material to confirm this hypothesis.

The first distinct evidence of the Catalan square script are the witnesses' signatures of the Barcelona documents. Despite the individual features which influence the script of these signatures, they demonstrate the same Catalan character subsequently noticed in manuscripts. The first calligraphic square script found in Catalonia was written in Gerona, in 1184 (Fig. 10). Both, the early signatures and the calligraphic script, show the preservation of some early Ashkenazic features and confirm the differentiation between the Catalan square script and the square script written in Andalusia.

I would like to introduce the difference between the square script written in Catalonia (Fig. 11a) and what I call the 'Toledan Style' (Fig. 11b). Contrary to the Ashkenazic influence on the Catalan style we can possibly notice the traces of the Oriental in the Toledan style.

Letters of the Toledan style are planned to be as square as possible. This design is manifested by several features: erect length lines; straight base lines; and the weight of letters which creates a regularity in the thickness of both horizontal and vertical lines. The Catalan letters exhibit a different weight and another proportions, emphasizing the height of the vertical lines by turning the letters into rectangular proportion.

The morphology of the typical alef is most suitable for demonstrating the difference between the styles and indicating its origin (Fig. 12).

Comparing four schematic types of alef, attests the affinity of the Catalan letter to the Ashkenazic, and marks the resemblance of the Toledan letter with the Oriental one.

In the Oriental alef the middle component (designated as no. 1) is formed by two strokes. The left leg (signed as no. 2) joins the middle stroke near its center. In the Toledan alef the two strokes of the middle component become a single one, made as a straight line, but the left leg still joins the middle component at about its center.

The Ashkenazic alef differs from the Oriental one in respect of the same feature. Like the Toledan and the Oriental alef, both Catalan and Ashkenazic letters have a heavy turning stroke at the base of the left leg. In contrast to the Catalan and the Ashkenazic alef, both long lines meet at the top coming down in a straight vertical line.

There are probably several genres of Catalan square script, as well as the Provençal script. The following illustration (Fig. 13a and Fig. 13b) will compare Catalan writing with Provençal writing, both made by the same genre of script, by two different scribes. While demonstrating the similarity between the Catalan script and the Provençal script, these examples suggest a correlation between style and text. Both Ms. are of Maimonides Mishne Tora, but one was written in Narbonne in 1282 and the other one in Gerona in 1305-6.

Summary

The Hebrew script of the Barcelona documents, affirmed by dated manuscripts and dated inscriptions, reflect the evolutionary process of the Hebrew script written in Catalonia throughout the Middle-Ages. This process could be attested by social and historical circumstances.

There is no extant dated evidence from the 11th century in Provence, but according to more recent specimens one can notice the correlation between the Provençal script and the Ashkenazic script on the one hand, and the Sefardic on the other. This combination of Ashkenazic features with Sefardic ones is also the core of the Catalan script, presenting a mixture of east and west. Except for a short period, Catalonia, and Barcelona in particular, were under Christian rule. The European orientation of the Catalan script can partly be understood by the

24 MILLAS, PL., XXXII p. 135.
25 See Fig. 2a or Fig. 3
28 Ms. London, British Library Or. 2201, Toledo 1300.
29 The lettering of the Hebrew inscriptions may also exhibit the same distinction between the Catalan and the Toledan style. See for example CANTERA; MILLAS ibid., inscription no. 71 - Toledo 1349, pp. 119-122, and no. 170 - Gerona 1371, pp. 240-24.
31 Ms. Vatican, Bib. Vaticana Ebr. 173.
good relationships between Jews and the Carolingian rulers which increased the Jews possibilities of serving their rulers.

It seems logical to assume that the Latin script used by the Carolingian scribes influenced the Hebrew script used by Jewish officials. The Western orientation of the script (as manifested in the Catalan language too) is firmly established in the affiliation of the Catalan Jews to the French environment.

While the 'Ashkenazic' type of script was dominant in the north of Spain, the Jews in the south used quite another script – the script which is known to us as the Sefardic type.

Since the end of the 11th century, from the beginning of the Reconquista, there is a gradual, but rapid, shift of the 'Ashkenazic' type in Catalonia towards the Sefardic type. The Sefardic script originated in the Maghreb during the 9-10th centuries. It was inspired by the Oriental script, most probably brought to the Maghreb by the many Jewish immigrants from Babylonia. At the end of the 11th century, presumably due to the cultural changes caused by the Reconquista, the 'Ashkenazic' type became a proper Sefardic script.

Prof. M. Beit-Arié discusses this issue in his article. Beit-Arié comes to the conclusion that in a paradoxical way the Jews under the Christian conquerors adopted the Hebrew script previously used under the Muslim ruler, thus confirming the latter's cultural superiority. However, considering the intensive impact of the whole Arabic culture which influenced the North, this is not a paradox at all. The massive emigration of educated Jews from the south to the north, and the familiarity of the northern Jews with the Arabic language (employed by the rulers to increase their connections with the conquered society), accelerated the dominance of the Andalusian script.

Beit-Arié states that the Reconquista which unified all the Jewish communities under the same political and religious authorities, also integrated the Hebrew script, and consequently, a new type of script was created, characterized mostly by features of the Andalusian Hebrew writing.

Nevertheless, in respect to the square script, this is not the complete truth. The clear distinction between the Catalan square script and the Toledan style must lead to the assumption that some of the 'Ashkenazic' features affected the Catalan script at least until the 14th century, retaining its uniqueness while keeping its integral role within the evolutionary process of the medieval Hebrew scripts.

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Fig. 3a – Ms. Barcelona, Archivo Capitular de la S.I. Catedral, Mit. Esc arm. 2 n. 478. Sefardic features in Ashkenazic script, Barcelona 1080.

Fig. 3b – Ms. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Heb. d. 42 f. 42-47. The handwriting of Josef Ibn Avitur
Fig. 4 - Ms. Barcelona, Arxiu de la Corona d’Aragó, Perg. Berenguer II, 78, Sefardic and Ashkenazic features, Barcelona 1092

Fig. 5 - Ashkenazic features at the end of the 11th century and the beginning of the 12th century

a - J. Millàs i Vallicrosa, *Documents hebraics de Jueus catalans*, Barcelona 1927, PL. II p. 39, Catalonia 1096

b - J. Millàs i Vallicrosa, *Documents hebraics de Jueus catalans*, Barcelona 1927, PL. XXXI p. 103. Barcelona 1112

Fig. 6 - J. Millàs i Vallicrosa, *Documents hebraics de Jueus catalans*, Barcelona 1927, PL. III p. 41. First cursive script, Barcelona 1164/5
Fig. 7 - J. Millàs i Vallicrosa, *Documents hebraics de Jueus catalans*, Barcelona 1927, PL. VII, p. 49. A fully cursive script, Barcelona 1202

Fig. 8 - J. Millàs i Vallicrosa, *Documents hebraies de Jueus catalan*, Barcelona 1927, PL. XII, p. 59. The development of the semi-cursive, Barcelona 1218

Fig. 9 - J. Millàs i Vallicrosa, *Documents hebraies de Jueus catalan*, Barcelona 1927, PL. XXXII p. 105. First fully shaped semi-cursive script, Gerona 1252

Fig. 10 - Ms. Hamburg, Staats-und Universitätsbibliothek Cod. Hebr. 19. Square script, Gerona 1184
Fig. 11 - Square script written in Catalonia and in Toledo.

a - Ms. Parma, Bib. Palatina 3214, Barcelona? 1277/8

b - Ms. London, British Library Or. 2201, Toledo 1300

Fig. 12 - The schematic alef

Fig. 13 - Catalan and Provencal writings.

a - Ms. Vatican, Bib. Vaticana Ebr. 173. Gerona 1305-6

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