

The Ashkenazic Hebrew and Aramaic of Germany

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Schiur-Matinée

In the chair:
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THE JEWISH CULTURE TERRITORIES OF MEDIEVAL EUROPE



THREE JEWISH LANGUAGES IN ASHKENAZ

SPOKEN

one
Jewish language

{ Yiddish

1

WRITTEN

texts of Near Eastern
origin

two
Jewish languages

{ Hebrew
Aramaic

2

texts of Ashkenazic
origin

three
Jewish languages

{ Hebrew
Aramaic
Yiddish

3

FUNCTION & STATUS OF THE THREE JEWISH LANGUAGES IN ASHKENAZ

Social prestige

	Yiddish	Hebrew	Aramaic
1 spoken	Everybody's native language	Nobody's native language	Nobody's native language
2 studied	Study of reading and writing as part of elementary education (everybody)	Study of parts of the Bible and recitation of prayers (nearly everybody)	Study of the Talmud as part of higher education (a small minority) and of the Kabbalah (an even smaller minority)
3 written	Popular literature (written by and for all social groups)	Formal, legal and communal literature (written by and for an educated minority)	Talmudic and Kabbalistic literature (written by and for an even smaller minority)

Yiddish

Everybody's native language

Study of reading and writing as part of elementary education (everybody)

Popular literature (written by and for all social groups)

Hebrew

Nobody's native language

Study of parts of the Bible and recitation of prayers (nearly everybody)

Formal, legal and communal literature (written by and for an educated minority)

Aramaic

Nobody's native language

Study of the Talmud as part of higher education (a small minority) and of the Kabbalah (an even smaller minority)

Talmudic and Kabbalistic literature (written by and for an even smaller minority)

1 spoken

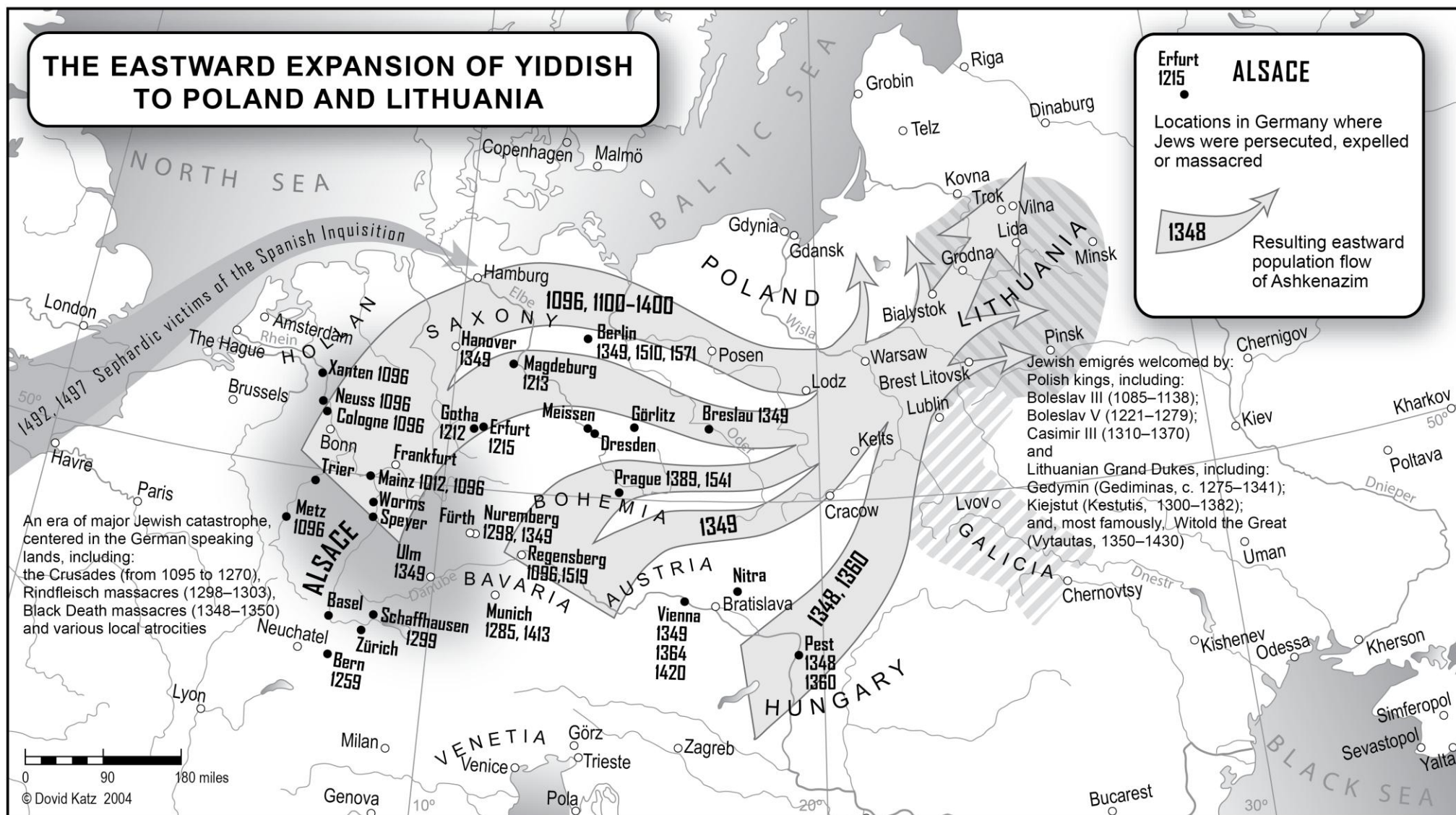
2 studied

3 written

The *Living* Roles of Hebrew & Aramaic in Ashkenazic Civilization

- ❑ Saying/reciting: daily prayers (& other texts).
- ❑ Study and education: the sacred books.
- ❑ Active (newly written) Hebrew: letters, community & court documents, commentaries on Bible, Mishnah, codes of law.
- ❑ Active (newly written) Aramaic: treatises on Talmud and Kabbalah.

THE EASTWARD EXPANSION OF YIDDISH TO POLAND AND LITHUANIA





Era of *Haskóle* (*Haskalá*) in Late 18th Century Germany

[Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786)]

Western Ashkenazim

B E C O M E . . .

‘German Jews’

The Implications (/Requirements)

- ❑ Jews need to integrate with mainstream society: clothing, language, mannerisms, professions, attitudes and philosophy of life ('Westernization')
- ❑ Jews need to become Germans of the Mosaic faith.
- ❑ Jews need to abandon Yiddish, become German speakers. Yiddish is an ugly, corrupt, and corrupting *zhargón* that must be eradicated.
- ❑ New Westernized forms of religious worship (Reform, etc.).
- ❑ *Science of Judaism* movement.

The Linguistic Implications

- ❑ Vernacular: Yiddish replaced by German (transition period included German in Yiddish type and Yiddish spelling conventions).
- ❑ Studies: Aramaic as productive language abandoned (but classic texts retained for prayer and study).
- ❑ For Jewish needs: A modernized written Hebrew.

Primary German-Jewish Use of Hebrew

- ❑ Liturgy: Prayers, blessings traditional texts at synagogue.
- ❑ Studies: Study of Bible, Mishnah, community documents.
- ❑ For Jewish Needs: Using Hebrew for educational, research and religious purposes.

Digression: Later 19th Century East Europe:

- ❑ East European Jewish nationalism: Zionism. *With revival of Hebrew* (written & spoken revival for a language that *nobody* spoke). *Hebraism*.
- ❑ East European Jewish Hereism & Jewish socialism): *with elevation of Yiddish to status of formal national language* (literature, education, suitability to all aspects of life). *Yiddishism. Diaspora Nationalism* (Simon Dubnow). Belief in cultural autonomy within future democracies.
- ❑ Years of conflict. Then: Big bust-up of 1908: *The Language War* (Y: Riv-leshóynes, AH: Riv-leshóynoys, IH: Riv-Leshonót).

But let's get back to the West (and our topic): What *kind* of Hebrew?

- ❑ Western Ashkenazic Hebrew (“German Hebrew”) *retained*.
- ❑ Ashkenazic Hebrew in Germany was a liturgical, academic, scholarly language, not vernacular. *German* in purest form was the ideal vernacular (but there were many linguistic survivals nonetheless).
- ❑ There are three basic kinds of Ashkenazic Hebrew. But first: What is it?

Sample basics of Ashkenazic Hebrew (for those of you who know Hebrew; others, just take a breath and enjoy the sunshine)

Sets of historically long and short vowels from ancient Hebrew continue to be differentiated, most prominently:

tsere (ֵ) [ē] (Ash. ej, aj, etc) ≠ segol (ֶ) [ɛ]

qamets (ֹ) [ō] (Ash. ō, ɔ, ū, etc) ≠ patah (ַ) [a]

holem (ֻ) [ū] (Ash. ou, au, oj, ej, aj, etc) ≠ qamets katan (ֺ) [ɔ]

Hamotsi: Blessing before eating bread (/a meal)

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ

Israeli (“Sephardic”):

Barúch atá Adonái, elohénu mélech ha-olám, hamotzí léchem min ha-áretz

Relaxed German (/Western) Ashkenazic:

Bóruch áto Adounój, elouhéjnu mé(:)lech hō-óulom, hamóutzi léchem min hō-óretz

Formal German (/Western) Ashkenazic:

Borúch ató Adounój, elouhéjnu mélech hō-oulóm, hamoutzí léchem min hō-óretz

Kaddish: The First Line

יְתַגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא

Israeli (“Sephardic”):

Jitgadál vejitkadásch schme rabá

Relaxed German (/Western) Ashkenazic:

Jisgádal vejiskádasch schmej rábō

Formal German (/Western) Ashkenazic:

Jisgadál vejiskadásh schmej rabō

Three Registers (/Styles) of Ashkenazic

Example: Hebrew שְׁלוֹמִים, Israeli: schalóm
(introducing ‘posttonic reduction’...)

Formal: schōlóum

Informal: schóloum

Intimate (‘residual Yiddish’): schólem

Three *Registers* (/Styles) of Ashkenazic: Hebrew דָּוִד (dōwíð), Israeli: davíd

Formal: dōvíd

Informal: dṓvid

Intimate ('residual Yiddish'): dṓvət

Three *Registers* (/Styles) of Ashkenazic: Hebrew דָּוִד (dōwīð), Israeli: davíd

Formal: dōvíd

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What about *Politics*?

- ❑ Interwar Germany: Some Zionist organizations and youth groups turned to ‘sephardische Aussprache des Hebräischen’
- ❑ Most religious groups of the various denominations did *not* switch away from Western (German) Ashkenazic. Western German-Jewish congregations maintained their traditions.
- ❑ Internal Jewish cultural politics: the most emotional point was the vowel holem (cholan): ou, au, but never the hated oj or ey (‘die ostjüdische Aussprache’).

Postwar Jewish Politics on the Question

- ❑ Postwar rampant politicization: ‘If you support Zionism and the new State of Israel’ switch to ‘Sephardic’ . . . Among Eastern *and* Western Ashkenazim in America, Canada, Australia, etc.
- ❑ End-of-century re-identification of Ashkenazic as ‘for Haredim only’ (often shunned most resolutely by the Neo-Orthodox)
- ❑ 21st century interest in the diversity of Jewish life and fascination with the bona fide traditions of each country. . .

More online (all free)...

- ❑ The *Ashkenazic Hebrew Manual*
- ❑ You are invited to look through the section 'Ashkenazic Hebrew' at: www.dovidkatz.net

Questions and discussion
welcome!