

Aleph-Bet

The Hebrew alphabet, sometimes called the aleph-bet, is essential to Jewish identity. It is the most successful revival of an ancient and indigenous language to date, and because of that, it is essential for Jewish design.¹ Closely related to the ancient Aramaic language, Hebrew has gone through many stages in its long life, starting as paleo-Hebrew, then evolving to biblical Hebrew, modern Hebrew, and even Yiddish. Hebrew is a Semitic language used by the Israelites and was a regional dialect of Canaanite languages. The language died out after the Bar Kokhba revolt, only to be used and kept alive through Jewish religious practices and literature.² Yiddish uses Hebrew characters and many words have Hebrew roots, but it is a separate Germanic language created by Ashkenazi Jews in Europe as part of the diaspora that declined in use after the Holocaust.³⁴ In the 19th century, during the rise of modern Zionism (culturally, the concept of Zionism has always been a large part of the Jewish belief system) Hebrew was revived, with today over 9 million current speakers throughout the world.⁵

Similarly, graphic design has also gone through many different stages and styles throughout the decades. Focusing on graphic design for this exhibition, many different printing processes, tools, and perspectives will display the impact of Jewish graphic design. While the exploration of typography by Jewish designers has always appreciated the past, the movement towards more modern 'sans-serif' Hebrew typefaces found in the 20th century has the same essence as the New Typography movement.⁶ Hebrew type has been used as propaganda against the Jewish people, used by Jews as a form of protest and rebellion, and also as homeland reclamation through the complicated history of the region. With no capital or lowercase letters, Hebrew also parallels the Modernist idea of removing capital letters.⁷ In this exhibition, graphic design examples will explore how Hebrew and graphic design intertwine, and the history of the Jewish people will be revealed in between.

¹ Grenoble, Lenore A, and Lindsay J Whaley. 2009. *Saving Languages: An Introduction to Language Revitalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

² Sáenz-Badillos Angel. 1996. *A History of the Hebrew Language*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

³ Lechtman, Debbie. 2022. "Yevseksiya: The 'Good Jews' of the Soviet Union." *Roots Metals*. April 16, 2022. https://www.rootsmetals.com/blogs/news/yevseksiya-the-good-jews-of-the-soviet-union?_pos=10&_sid=677eaffa6&_ss=r.

⁴ European Parliament. 2022. "Yiddish Language and Culture and Its Post-Holocaust Fate in Europe | Think Tank | European Parliament." *Think Tank European Parliament*. January 19, 2022. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)698881](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2022)698881).

⁵ Gur, Nachman, and Behadrey Haredim. 2013. "Kometz Aleph – Au' • How Many Hebrew Speakers Are There in the World?" *Web.archive.org*. November 4, 2013. https://web.archive.org/web/20131104025104/http://www.bhol.co.il/article_en.aspx?id=52405.

⁶ Armstrong, Helen, and Tschold Jan. 2009. *Graphic Design Theory : Readings from the Field*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.

⁷ Pater, Ruben. 2016. *Politics of Design : A (Not So) Global Manual for Visual Communication*. Amsterdam: Bis Publishers.

Spotlight Text

“It appears to be almost the rule that such movements can be traced back to a single devoted person, who gave focus to the prevailing dissatisfactions of his people. Having issued from the group whose language was neglected, such reformers often had more than a purely intellectual motivation for establishing the existence of their language. Theirs became one contribution to the general liberation of the group, a medium of revolt and a symbol of unity.” - Einar Haugen, 1966

The revival of Hebrew as the modern, primary language of the Jewish people and Israel can be solely credited to Eliezer Ben-Yehuda and his family.⁸ Born in a Lithuanian village in 1858, Ben-Yehuda first went to a Yeshiva (Talmudic school) but ended up joining a secular Russian school for his education.⁹ Inspired by the Bulgarian fight for independence against the Turks, alongside other European state revivals, he wished the same could be done for his people, the Jews, and their ancient homeland Eretz-Israel.¹⁰

After originally planning on coming to Palestine as a doctor but being unable to because of a medical condition (tuberculosis), Ben-Yehuda was still determined to revive Hebrew in its indigenous homeland.¹¹ After he arrived in 1881, he developed a three-fold plan for revitalization: “Hebrew in the Home,” “Hebrew in the School,” and “Words, Words, Words.”¹² As for the first, he and his wife brought up their son, Itamar Ben-Avi, to be the first native speaker of Modern Hebrew, as they only spoke to him in Hebrew in their home.¹³ In 1882, he became a teacher at the Torah and Avodah School of the Alliance Israélite Universelle School in Jerusalem, and after a few months, his students were able to speak to each other in fluent Hebrew.¹⁴ Throughout this, many new words were necessary for complete conversations, so he created new words and eventually compiled them into a dictionary. He published the first volume in 1908, and his wife and son published the last in 1958.¹⁵¹⁶ Eliezer Ben-Yehuda’s legacy is immense, and his efforts to revive Hebrew inspired many current language revival attempts.

⁸ Saiger, David. 2009. “Eliezer Ben-Yehuda and the Making of Modern Hebrew.” My Jewish Learning. My Jewish Learning. February 20, 2009. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/eliezer-ben-yehuda/>.

⁹ Fellman, Jack. 2019. “Eliezer Ben-Yehuda & the Revival of Hebrew.” Jewishvirtuallibrary.org. 2019. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/eliezer-ben-yehuda-and-the-revival-of-hebrew>.

¹⁰ Saiger, David.

¹¹ Fellman, Jack.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Bush, Lawrence. 2014. “July 31: The Only Hebrew-Speaking Child.” Jewish Currents. July 31, 2014. <https://jewishcurrents.org/july-31-hebrew-speaking-child>.

¹⁴ Fellman, Jack.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Berlovitz, Yaffah . 2009. “Hemdah Ben-Yehuda.” Jewish Women’s Archive. February 27, 2009. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/ben-yehuda-hemdah>.

Coin with Hebrew text and Jewish Iconography Zuz of the Bar Kokhba Revolt

134/135 CE

Judea (Roman province)

The Jewish Museum

Designer Unknown

This coin, created during the second Jewish rebellion against the Roman Empire around 134 CE, contains Jewish symbols and Hebrew inscriptions.¹⁷ The Roman Empire occupied Judea starting from 63 BCE and when Emperor Hadrian toured his eastern empire in 131 CE, he decided to aggressively assimilate the Jews into the Roman population because he didn't like 'foreign religions.'¹⁸ Because of this, Jews in the region revolted, led by Shim'on Bar Koseba, known as Bar Kokhba.¹⁹ As part of this revolt, Jews began minting their own coins, like this one. Out of necessity, they took Roman coins, filed them down, and restamped them. This coin was made out of a silver Denarius (ancient Roman coin known as Zuz in Hebrew) and was inscribed with "Shim'on" on one side surrounded by a wreath. The other side had a palm branch along with Hebrew words signifying which year of the revolt and "of the Freedom (or Redemption) of Israel (or Jerusalem.)"²⁰

The Hebrew language, as it has evolved today, came from ancient Hebrew, a pictographic writing system similar to other languages from the region.²¹ Pictographs are icons that directly represent what the object physically looks like. These coins were designed specifically to follow Jewish coin tradition, so they did not have any human figures or pagan imagery, unlike the Roman coins used to make them.²²



¹⁷ "The Jewish Museum," The Jewish Museum, n.d., <https://thejewishmuseum.org/collection/30575-coin-zuz-of-the-bar-kokhba-revolt>.

¹⁸ "The Bar-Kokhba Revolt 132-135 CE," Copyright 2024, n.d., <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-bar-kokhba-revolt-132-135-ce>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "Coins from the Second Revolt," Copyright 2024, n.d., <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/coins-from-the-second-revolt>.

²¹ "Learn the Ancient Pictographic Hebrew Script | AHRC," n.d., <https://www.ancient-hebrew.org/learn/learn-the-ancient-pictographic-hebrew-script.htm>.

²² Alex Fox, "This 2,000-Year-Old Coin Commemorates a Jewish Rebellion against Rome," *Smithsonian Magazine*, May 19, 2020, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/2000-year-old-coin-commemorates-jewish-rebellion-against-rome-180974920/>.

Soviet Yiddish propaganda poster “Subscribe to ‘Emes’”

1920's

21.0 x 15.0 inches

Soviet Russia, Moscow

Blavatnik Archive

Signed AH

This poster, created by the Yevseksiya in the 1920s, is a soviet propaganda poster. The Yevseksiya was the Jewish wing of the Bolshevik party, and its purpose was to further communism in the USSR while also destroying the culture of Russian Jewry.²³ While this may seem confusing, as the Yevseksiya were Jews themselves, this was a very deliberate decision on their part, as it allowed them to peddle antisemitism without being able to be called out for it (*you can't be antisemitic, you're Jewish.*)²⁴

This poster advertised the Yiddish newspaper “Emes,” which translates to “the truth,” and it parallels the Russian version of the magazine “Pravda.”²⁵ The vast majority of Russian Jewry spoke Yiddish, the language of Ashkenazi Jews.²⁶ Yiddish historically used Hebrew characters, as seen in this poster. The red letters on this poster depict the Kremlin wall, and in the bottom left corner is a list of subscription prices in small, blocky type.²⁷ The Emes magazine published Soviet propaganda. It wrote about antisemitism in other European countries, the Nazis, and sometimes unfounded claims of rabbis being sexual predators.²⁸

The Yevseksiya's purpose was to destroy the core of Jewish identity, as it got rid of ‘kehillas,’ traditional Jewish community organizations, and was staunchly anti-Zionist. They also tried to destroy the Hebrew language by shutting down Hebrew schools and opening up new, Sovietized Yiddish schools that taught secular education and soviet propaganda. While the Yevseksiya never numbered that many, their impact on Jewish lives was immense, and their antisemitic propaganda has a large influence on antisemitic ideology today.



²³ Horn, Dara. 2019. “The Cool Kids.” Tablet. Tablet Magazine. September 6, 2019. <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/arts-letters/articles/the-cool-kids>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ “Blavatnik Archive.” n.d. www.blavatnikarchive.org. Accessed March 2, 2024. <https://www.blavatnikarchive.org/item/22983?page=1>.

²⁶ Walfish, Mordecai. 2003. “The History of Yiddish.” My Jewish Learning. My Jewish Learning. January 24, 2003. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/yiddish/>.

²⁷ “Blavatnik Archive.”

²⁸ Lechtman, Debbie. 2022. “Yevseksiya: The ‘Good Jews’ of the Soviet Union.” Roots Metals. April 16, 2022. https://www.rootsmetals.com/blogs/news/yevseksiya-the-good-jews-of-the-soviet-union?_pos=10&_sid=677eaffa6&_ss=r.

Magazine Cover

Milgroym no. 1

Sep 10, 1922

Photolithography

Berlin, Germany

The National Library of Israel

Franziska Baruch and Ernst Böhm

This magazine cover was designed by Franziska Baruch and illustrated by Ernst Böhm. The magazine was co-published by Rachel Wischnitzer and her husband and was a Yiddish art magazine created to express appreciation for both historical and contemporary Jewish artwork.²⁹ This magazine had a twin, *Rimon*, that was a Hebrew version of the same magazine.³⁰ Printed by Rimon Press, the first few pages of the magazine were decidedly multilingual, including German, Russian, Yiddish, Hebrew, and English.³¹ Because diaspora Jews were spread all over the world, the fact that multiple languages were present was the norm. The magazine was distributed to Berlin, New York, London, Toronto, Montreal, Buenos Aires, and Mandate Palestine.³²



Influential Hebrew type and graphic designer Franziska Baruch designed the cover of the magazine. The title, both in Hebrew and Yiddish means ‘pomegranate’ and as the name suggests, the cover includes a pomegranate, along with flowers and two birds designed by the German painter Böhm.³³ Baruch designed the typeface herself and was inspired by old Hebrew calligraphy found in illuminated manuscripts. She was a prolific Hebrew designer and throughout her career designed a newspaper masthead, headlines, book layouts, logos, banknotes, the Israeli passport, and more.³⁴

The Milgroym was highly influential in the ‘Jewish Renaissance’ where there was a cultural renewal in Jewish music, literature, and art at the turn of the 20th century.³⁵ The magazine contained Impressionism, Cubism, and Expressionism alongside papercuts, ritual objects, and medieval manuscripts which showed the appreciation the Wischnitzers had for both modern and historical Jewish art.

²⁹ Mishory, Ishai. 2019. “Molded Inexorably by the Times: Rachel Wischnitzer’s and Franziska Baruch’s Collaboration on the Headlines of Rimon/Milgroym.” In Geveb. December 10, 2019.

<https://ingeveb.org/articles/rachel-wischnitzers-and-franziska-baruchs-collaboration>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Brenner, Naomi. 2019. “Milgroym and Rimon, Fraternal Twins.” In Geveb. June 6, 2019.

<https://ingeveb.org/blog/milgroym-and-rimon-fraternal-twins>.

³² Brenner, Naomi. 2018. “Milgroym’s Cultural Context.” In Geveb. February 6, 2018.

<https://ingeveb.org/blog/milgroym-s-cultural-context>.

³³ “Milgroim - מילגרוים | Newspapers | the National Library of Israel.” n.d. www.nli.org.il. Accessed March 4, 2024.

<https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/mgm?>

³⁴ Mishory, Ishai.

³⁵ Ibid.

Sarajevo Haggadah Illuminated Manuscript

c. 1350

6.5 x 9 inches

Barcelona, Spain

National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Anonymous artists and scribes

This famous Haggadah, created in Spain but now located in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, is a testament to both the Jewish people, and the allies who helped keep their history alive.³⁶ Created in Spain around 1350, this Haggadah is rumored to have been created for the wedding of two prominent Jewish families as their crests are found in the manuscript, though the provenance is not definitive.³⁷ After the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492, the book changed owners and its next known location was Italy during the 16th and 17th centuries.³⁸ After surviving the Roman Inquisition, the book somehow made its way to Bosnia in 1894 when it was sold to the museum by the Sephardic family Koen.³⁹ It was then sent to Vienna for analysis, and since its return, stayed in Sarajevo ever since where it survived the Nazis in 1941 as well as the Siege of Sarajevo in 1992, thanks to many brave souls including a Muslim librarian, Dervis Korkut.⁴⁰



A Haggadah is a Jewish religious text created for the holiday Passover, as it is read during a Passover Seder. Passover celebrates the freedom of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and a Haggadah tells the story of this event along with other blessings, songs, stories, and Seder instructions.⁴¹ The Sarajevo Haggadah is written in medieval Sephardic script and despite there being strict religious restrictions on figurative forms, is still highly illustrative with lots of decorative elements.⁴² The Sephardic script evolved in the Iberian Peninsula, where Sephardic Jews settled, around 1000 or 1500 CE, and does not have the same French and German gothic, black letter influences found in Ashkenazi Hebrew writing.⁴³

³⁶ Sijarić, Mirsad. 2016. "Sarajevo Haggadah." Zemaljski Muzej Bosne i Hercegovine. March 7, 2016. <https://www.zemaljskimuzej.ba/en/archaeology/middle-ages/sarajevo-haggadah>.

³⁷ Halliday, Ayun. 2023. "Discover the Sarajevo Haggadah, the Medieval Illuminated Manuscript That Survived the Inquisition, Holocaust & Yugoslav Wars | Open Culture." Open Culture. April 14, 2023. <https://www.openculture.com/2023/04/the-sarajevo-haggadah.html>.

³⁸ Sijarić, Mirsad. 2016.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Rubin, Jamie. 2003. "The Haggadah." My Jewish Learning. My Jewish Learning. March 28, 2003. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-haggadah/>.

⁴² Sijarić, Mirsad. 2016.

⁴³ Anderson, Donald. n.d. "Calligraphy - Old Hebrew, Scripts, Art | Britannica." Wwww.britannica.com. Accessed March 28, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/art/calligraphy/Old-Hebrew#ref512846>.

Levi

Font Family

2023

Tel Aviv, Israel

AlefAlefAlef Typefoundry

Avraham Cornfeld

The type family Levi was created by the Israeli type-foundry AlefAlefAlef and is inspired by classic Ashkenazi script.⁴⁴ This typeface has 7 weights, varying from ultralight to ultrabold, and is mostly designed for Hebrew text (with or without the vowels), but does include uppercase Latin letters.

Levi was designed by Avraham Cornfeld, founder of AlefAlefAlef. The purpose of this font was to blend historic Hebrew text with modern, tech sensibilities, and it “seamlessly blends tradition with contemporary grandeur.”⁴⁵ The name comes from the Jewish figure Levi, a son of Jacob, and his descendants make up the ancient Levi tribe of Israel, or “Levites.”

Revival fonts based on Ashkenazi script are plentiful for Jewish and Hebrew-speaking graphic designers, for example, Franzisca Baruch designed the typeface Stam, and Soncino Chumash was created by Marcus Beamer.^{46,47} On the alefalefalef website where Levi is for sale, it is described as “rooted in the essence of the wandering Jewish people in Europe.” Yoel Ben-Shimon, a Jewish scribe from the 15th century who is well known for his manuscripts in the Ashkenazi style, is mentioned as an inspiration.⁴⁸ The same complicated pen strokes and slant changes can be found in both French and German gothic lettering and Ashkenazi Hebrew calligraphy.⁴⁹ Though Hebrew does not have any capital or lowercase letters, there are still similarities between how texts are illuminated to the Latin letter equivalents. Interestingly, the Nazi party banned the use of blackletter type in 1941 because they saw it as ‘Judenletter,’ or Jewish type.⁵⁰



האחשדרפנים

ASHKENAZI LETTERFORMS

מי האיש הקפץ חיים? אהב ימים, לראות טוב. נצר לשוקה מרע

SUPREME

אנטומיה של טיפוגרפיה עברית

העברית היא שפה המשתייכת לקבוצת הלשונות השמייות הצפון-מערביות

סרקאזם

אות אשכנזית גותית ממזרח אירופה מהמאה ה-15

PROMINENT

THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO THAT CAN'T BE DONE

יום שבת ה-10 בדצמבר 1982

⁴⁴ alefalefalef. n.d. “Font Levi — AlefAlefAlef.” AlefAlefAlef — House of Hebrew Typography. Accessed April 3, 2024. <https://alefalefalef.co.il/en/font/levi/>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Messner, Philipp. 2017. “People’s Council (Protocols of Debates).” Fonts in Use. May 3, 2017. <https://fontsinuse.com/uses/16680/people-s-council-protocols-of-debates>.

⁴⁷ alefalefalef.

⁴⁸ Jewish Virtual Library. n.d. “Joel Ben Simeon.” Www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org. Accessed April 4, 2024. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/joel-ben-simeon>.

⁴⁹ Anderson, Donald. n.d. “Calligraphy - Old Hebrew, Scripts, Art | Britannica.” Www.britannica.com. Accessed March 28, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/art/calligraphy/Old-Hebrew#ref512846>.

⁵⁰ TypeRoom. 2020. “A Nazi Font Banned by Nazis? Fraktur and Its Legacy in the Must-Listen Design Podcast of This Week - TypeRoom.” Www.typeroom.eu. February 21, 2020. <https://www.typeroom.eu/a-nazi-font-banned-by-nazis-fraktur-legacy-must-listen-design-podcast>.

Torah Ark Door Panel
Torah Ark
11th century with later
carving and painting
Walnut wood with paint
and gilding traces
34in x 14in x 1in
Cairo, Egypt
The Walters Art Museum
Unknown Egyptian Artist

This fragment of a Torah Ark door comes from the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo.⁵¹ The Hebrew inscription on the front of the door states "Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord" (Psalm 118:19-20) which is particularly fitting, as an Ark is a cupboard in a Synagogue that holds the Torah.⁵²⁵³ Carved sometime in the mid-11th century, this door also has traces of paint and gilding, suggesting that it was further embellished later in its life (estimated sometime during the medieval period).⁵⁴ The elaborate patterns of the carvings, including vine scrolls and lozenges, showcase the influence of Islamic art, resulting from the Arab conquest of Egypt in the seventh century.⁵⁵



This panel was removed from the Ben Ezra Synagogue sometime around 1900 during its renovation.⁵⁶ Ben Ezra is especially important to Jews for its wealth of history and knowledge about Mizrahi Jews from Egypt.⁵⁷ This includes the Cairo Geniza, a collection of over 400,000 documents and other written material detailing the lives of Egyptian Jews from the eleventh to nineteenth centuries.⁵⁸ The Ben Ezra Synagogue was recently reopened in late summer, 2023.

⁵¹ The Walters Art Museum. n.d. "Panel from a Torah Ark Door | the Walters Art Museum." Online Collection of the Walters Art Museum. Accessed April 20, 2024. <https://art.thewalters.org/detail/18422/panel-from-a-torah-shrine/>.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Skolnik, Fred, and Michael Berenbaum. 2007. *Encyclopedia Judaica*. Vol. 2. Detroit Jerusalem Macmillan Reference Usa ... In Association With Keter Publishing House Ltd.

⁵⁴ The Walters Art Museum.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Fein, Ariel. 2023. "The Ben Ezra Synagogue, Fustat, Egypt." Khan Academy. 2023. <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-islam/chronological-periods-islamic/islamic-art-medieval/a/the-ben-ezra-synagogue-fustat-egypt>.

⁵⁸ Princeton Geniza Lab. n.d. "What Is the Cairo Geniza?" Geniza Lab. Princeton University. Accessed April 20, 2024. <https://genizalab.princeton.edu/about/what-cairo-geniza>.

Additional Elements

Logo



Wall Mockup



Website (Made in conjunction with GD2 as class final)

https://www.figma.com/proto/6QYNBJi7IacdJjhoijdaZc/sfreed_GD2_P2?page-id=232%3A309&type=design&node-id=232-310&viewport=-1716%2C291%2Co.24&t=ETJqVcxPfi2QWrik-1&scaling=scale-down&mode=design

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<https://www.ancient-hebrew.org/learn/learn-the-ancient-pictographic-hebrew-script.htm>.

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