

MIDDLE AGES JEWISH CEMETERY IN BARCELONA ON MONTJUÏC

IX-XIV centuries

Defining its limits

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CEMETERY

Located at the east end of Montjuïc, this dense cemetery traces its beginnings to the 9th century, as it appears in medieval documents which mention some ancient Jewish graves - *veteres judeorum sepulturas*- in 1091.¹ Another document from 1368, referring to the Jewish community of Tortosa, mentions the graves in the Cemetery of Barcelona "*donde las hay desde hace más de 500 años*" (where there have been for over 500 years).²

The attack on the Call -Jewish quarter- perpetrated in 1391, resulted in the forced abandonment of the cemetery in the late 14th century. The site was looted and the tombstones sold and reutilized as building material. A few of these fragments can be seen in some city buildings. This is the case of Lieutenant Palace, built in the 16th century, where a large number of them is visible.

In the early 15th century, King Martin the Humane granted the area of the Jewish cemetery to the Celestinians, a Benedictine order who looked after the Royal Chapel.

Subsequently the memory of this cemetery is lost, and only preserved through place names appearing in military-historic mapping mainly from the 17th and 18th centuries.

The land, which appears to be under military jurisdiction, should serve as agriculture fields and its margins start being transformed with the quarries for the extraction of clay.

The constant human activity on this part of the mountain has been changing the landscape over many centuries. Thus, the extent of the necropolis has always been an unknown, given the difficulty of establishing its original limits. However, in the definition of the boundaries of properties in the general area and the 'place names' we can find the traces that allow to identify and re-draw them.

In 1898, after the fall of overseas colonies, batteries General Álvarez de Castro were built to strengthen the defense of the city coasts from a maritime attack, and during these works some of the graves were damaged and their presence revealed on both sides of the Road to the Castle.³

¹ 1091 Agreement for the sale of a piece of land on Montjuïc, which adjoined certain "*veteres judeorum sepulturas*" (old Jewish burials) (4, 5) *Libri Antiquitatum Barchinone sedis*, vol. X, p. 188, "*A Jewish cemetery in Barcelona Montjuïc*" Agustin Duran i Sanpere and José María Millás i Vallicrosa.

² A. Curto Homedes, "*The Jewish Cemetery of Tortosa*", in *Minutes of the Colloquium on the History of the Jews in the Crown of Aragon*, Lleida 1991, p. 407. Quoted by Jordi Casanovas Miró in *The Hispanic Jewish cemeteries, sources and documentation in view of archaeological reality. Jewish Sites and Synagogues of Medieval Sepharad*, Published by the University of Castilla La Mancha, 2003

³ SAMPERE DURAN, A., *A Jewish cemetery in Barcelona Montjuïc*, *Sefarad*, 7:2 (1947) p.231

During later works, such as the facility for the National Shooting Society, sporadic findings would occur. Between 1945 and 1946 the first archaeological excavation on the site is conducted by the Municipal Institute of History under the direction of A. Duran i Sampere and J. M. Millas Villacrosa, allowing morphological study of 171 graves as well as the various objects and human remains.

In 2001, in anticipation of a construction that would be made in that area of the mountain, the City Council commissioned an excavation campaign in an area adjacent to that excavated in 1945. During these works 557 graves were found and only *matseva* (tombstone). The full report of this action has not yet been published, but an article with the results of the studies is available with an account of what regards to the morphology of the tombs and analysis of human remains.⁴

It is the first time that, in Catalonia, it is possible to identify the complete information of the person buried, as the *matseva* was where it was originally placed. It belongs to Miriam, *wife of Rabbi Isaac ha-Levi, who died the month of Kislev of the year 4990* "(November - December 1229).⁵

As of this moment and with the new elements discovered, different studies on funeral epigraph of the cemetery are performed. Of special mention is the work Jordi Casanovas Miró on 74 elements contained in the Medieval Hebraic funerary inscriptions of Spain, published with *Monumenta Paleographica Medii Aevi Series 4.1 Hebraica Barcelona*.

In March 2007, the process for the declaration of a Cultural site of National Interest as a Historic site is initiated, as per the request originated by the founders of Center of Studies Zakhor in conjunction with the Jewish communities of Catalonia and the Centre d'Studies of Montjuïc.

On June 15, 2009 the Official Gazette of the Generalitat de Catalunya publishes the declaration in favor of Medieval Jewish Cemetery of Montjuïc as a Cultural Asset.

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⁴ SAMPERE DURAN, A., A Jewish cemetery in Barcelona Montjuïc, *Sefarad*, 7:2 (1947) p.231

⁵ X. Maese i Fidalgo, Jordi Casanovas i Miró: *Nova approximation to the chronology of the Jewish Cemetery on Montjuïc* (Barcelona), in *Tamid* (Barcelona), 4 (2002-2003)