The Matanel Sefarad Seminar

Activity Report - Summer 2025 (Launch)

1. Vision and Mission

The Matanel Sefarad Seminar was established as the flagship program of the *Institute for Jewish Studies Barcelona (EJB)*, with the aim of creating a European, interdisciplinary, inter-university framework dedicated to the study and research of Sephardic Jewry. The program traces the trajectory of Sephardic culture from its origins in medieval Iberia, through its diasporic developments across the Mediterranean, the Americas, and other regions, and into contemporary questions of Sephardic identities and challenges.

The seminar is designed for selected students from across Europe, as well as educators, heritage professionals, and cultural practitioners. Its purpose is to offer a comprehensive and immersive learning experience that equips participants with the theoretical, methodological, research, and pedagogical tools necessary for meaningful engagement and impact within the academic and cultural fields.

At present, the Matanel Sefarad Seminar is the only academic program in Spain offering a systematic and interdisciplinary Jewish Studies curriculum, and the only program of its kind in Europe devoted specifically to Sephardic Studies.

We at the EJB are grateful to our enabling partners: The Matanel Foundation, for the encouragement and support. We are proud to present the Matanel Foundation Board with the Matanel Sefarad Seminar 2025 Activity Report and our appeal for continued support of the program in 2026

2. Launch Year – Summer 2025

Summer 2025 marked the inaugural year of the Matanel Sefarad Seminar. The launch phase included building the logistical and organizational framework, forming the teaching team, and implementing the full program for the first time. This provided an opportunity to test assumptions regarding demand, potential impact, and the academic and administrative viability of the model.

Based on all indicators, the launch year can be considered highly successful.

A call for applications for **Summer 2026** is now open:
https://www.ejbarcelona.org/matanel-sefarad-seminar-2026

A retrospective summary of **Summer 2025** is available at:
https://www.ejbarcelona.org/matanel-sefarad-seminar-2025

3. Academic Program

The seminar took place from **June 2 to July 11**, over six intensive weeks. The program included an average of **30 weekly academic hours**, with a total of **178 teaching hours**.

The curriculum consisted of **six thematic courses** (one per week), as well as workshops dedicated to developing individual student projects in research, education, or cultural engagement.

4. Faculty

The teaching team consisted of **22 lecturers** with PhD degrees or equivalent professional expertise, representing universities and institutions across Catalonia, Spain, Europe, the United States, and Israel.

Faculty List:
Prof. Ayman Agbaria – The Shalom Hartman Institute, Jerusalem
M. Carmen Algaba Muñoz, PhD Candidate – University of Barcelona (UB)
Nesim Bencoya – Center for Jewish Heritage, Izmir
Dr. Lucia Conte Aguilar – Pompeu Fabra University (UPF)
Arch. Dominique Tomasov – Yad Miriam
Dr. Erica Consoli – University of Barcelona (UB)
Dr. Marcelo Dorfsman – Melton Centre, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Dr. Gil Dori – Pompeu Fabra University (UPF)
Prof. Alexander Martin Fidora Riera – Autonomous University of Barcelona
Prof. Ana M. Gómez-Bravo – University of Washington
Dr. Goretti Luis Cobreros – University of Granada
Dr. Jaimie Luria – Cornell University
Prof. Mario Macías – Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB)
Dr. Maor Ze'ev – Institute for Jewish Studies Barcelona (EJB)
Prof. Haviva Pedaya – Ben-Gurion University
Dr. Renana Ravitsky – The Shalom Hartman Institute, Jerusalem
Prof. José María Sánchez de León Serrano – University of Barcelona (UB)
Prof. Diego Sánchez Alcolea – Catholic University of Murcia (UCAM)
Prof. Edwin Seroussi – Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Prof. Yosi Yona – Ben-Gurion University
Dr. Florence Touati Wachsstock – Lookstein Center, Bar-Ilan University
Arch. David Stoleru – The Beit Project

5. Participants – Students / Fellows

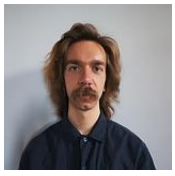
A total of **22 fellows -** from among 34 applicants, participated in the 2025 program, coming from: Spain, France, the United States, Serbia, Morocco, Sweden, Albania, Hungary, the Netherlands, Israel, and the Czech Republic.

Twelve participants attended the full six-week program; ten participated in selected modules.

Attendance sheets with participant signatures were submitted to Matanel at the conclusion of the seminar.

The cohort was diverse and included graduate students, educators, heritage and museum professionals, cultural activists, and artists.

5.1 List of Participants (2025)

1. **Àngela Martín (Spain)** Musicologist and educator
2.  **Dr. Kliment Ionah Bannour-Maikov (Spain)** – Artist, cultural activist
3. **Lisë Stern (USA)** – Educator, Rabbinical school of Boston
4. **Kevin Buckland (Spain)** – Artist and cultural activist
5. **Filip Belevski (Serbia)** – Researcher and heritage specialist

6. **Dr. Lukasz Gorniok (Sweden)** – Historian and educator – Paideia

7. **Melsen Kafilaj (Albania)** – M.A. student in Jewish heritage

8. **Kinga Szemere (Hungary)** – Curator at the Budapest Jewish Museum

9. **Shira Kavita Huizing (Netherlands)** – M.A. student in Jewish Studies

10. **Agnieszka Baraszko (Sweden)** – **Educator** at Paideia, Stockholm

11. **Nelly Zagury (France) –** Artist and educator

12. **Enric-Ernest Munt (Spain)** – Civil servant, Jewish culture activist

13. **Asher Barnea (Israel)** – Educator and school leader

14. **Tom Rousseau (France)** – Business student, cultural activist

15. **Dr. Anaëlle Gobinet-Choukroun (France)** Curator and researcher

16. **Arc, Nathalie Kertesz (Spain)** – Visual artist, curator, educator

17. Arc. **Dominique Tomasov (Spain)** – Researcher, educator, activist

18.. **Mounir Arjdal (Marrocco)** – Journalist and Jewish culture activist

19. **Yechiel Bar-Chaim (Czech Republic) –** NGOs **strategic consultant**

20. **Eyal Lally Bitton (Spain)** – Audio-visual artist

21. **Fernando Cardona Pons (Menorca – Spain)** – Visual artist, networker

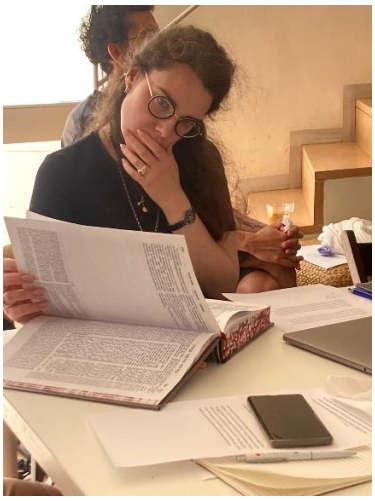
22. **Margot Fuentes Kratter (Chile)** – Educator, culture activist

6. Documentation

The seminar was thoroughly documented through professional still photography and video. Participants also contributed additional visual documentation throughout the program.

A summary of the 2025 seminar can be viewed on our website:
https://www.ejbarcelona.org/matanel-sefarad-seminar-2025

6.1 Example Documentation:



For video documentation, please see our YouTube channel:

https://www.youtube.com/@EstudiosJudiosBarcelona

8. Evaluation

The Seminar evaluation process included:

• weekly feedback questionnaires
• individual evaluation sessions with students and faculty
• written testimonials submitted at the program's conclusion

A follow-up alumni survey, one year after program completion, will be conducted at a later stage.

8.1 Key Indicators and Outcomes

The weekly questionnaires provided a clear and consistent picture of high participant satisfaction across all areas of the program. Participants evaluated five key dimensions: organization and logistics, the atmosphere and learning environment, the meaningfulness and effectiveness of learning, the program's contribution to their professional development, and their overall experience. The aggregated results demonstrate exceptional performance throughout.

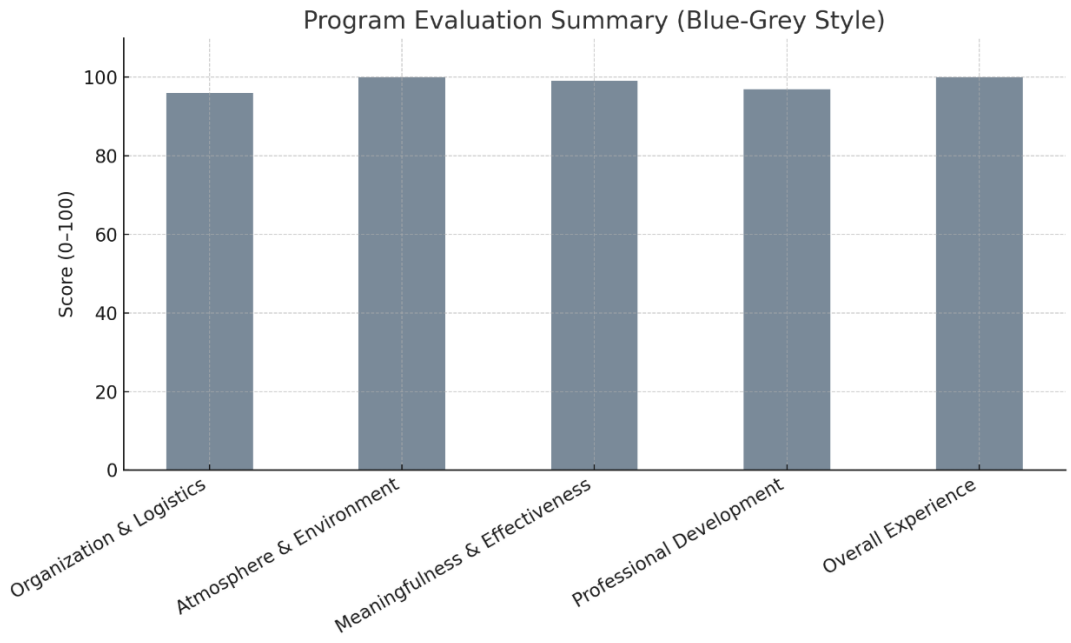
Organization and logistics (96/100) - Participants expressed a very high level of satisfaction with the program's operational structure. Despite minor challenges, the majority felt that the organizational framework supported their learning experience effectively.

Atmosphere and learning environment (100/100) - This category received a perfect score. Respondents highlighted the warm, engaging, and intellectually stimulating environment as one of the strongest elements of the program. The sense of openness and thoughtful facilitation created conditions ideal for deep learning and meaningful dialogue.

Meaningfulness and effectiveness of learning (99/100) The program's pedagogical approach resonated strongly with participants. They emphasized the relevance of the content to contemporary realities and appreciated the balance between conceptual richness and practical insight.

Contribution to professional development (97/100) - Participants reported that the program enriched their professional toolkit and broadened their perspectives. The relevance of the learning to their ongoing work was noted repeatedly in qualitative feedback.

Overall experience (100/100) - The perfect score in this category highlights the program's success in offering a transformative, well-designed, and impactful experience. Participants consistently described the program as inspiring, enriching, and expertly delivered.



The combined results indicate that the program excels in all major domains of participant experience. The exceptionally high scores reflect strong pedagogical design, effective facilitation, and a supportive learning environment. Overall, the evaluation demonstrates that the program not only meets but exceeds participant expectations, offering substantial personal and professional value.

8.2 Critical Feedback

Three key areas for improvement were identified:

1. **Program Duration** – Some participants noted challenges related to work commitments over a six-week period.
2. **Financial Concerns** – High living and accommodation costs in Barcelona were not covered by the program.
3. **Casa Adret Venue** – While valued culturally, participants reported discomfort with seating and limitations of the air-conditioning system during summer heat.

For details on how the elements identified as needing improvement will be addressed, see section *8.4.1 Key Adjustments and Developments for 2026* below.

8.3 Example Student Testimonials

8.3.1 **Melsen Kafilaj (Albania)** - Hochschule für Jüdische Studien Heidelberg.
In my opinion, what makes the Matanel Seminar offered by Instituto de Estudios Judíos-Barcelona (EJB) exceptional lies in the fact that it not only fills an academic gap in Spain, specifically, and in the entire Mediterranean Area, if we speak in a broader sense of this word, by offering a unique program in the History, Thought, Language and Culture of Sephardic Jews, with the high goal of reviving, preserving and transmitting the Sephardic Culture and Civilization, but through its two core values; 1) The Culture of Openness and 2) The Culture of Dialogue (both essential components of the Sephardic Spirit) it paves the way and contributes here and now in our turbulent and unstable world in the promotion of the Social-Cultural Coexistence, recognizing and respecting our dignity of differences, but serving also as a building block for the sake of peace, religious tolerance, improvement and reparation of the world; of a house that we build together!
For everybody that is in search of a meaning of the Jewish Values extracted from a particular tradition(s) or who wants to reconnect their Identity with Sephardic Values and Civilization or as an intellectual investment for yourself, this program is a "must"! I highly recommend it!

8.3.2 **Filip Belevski (Serbia)**
Participating in the Matanel Sefarad Seminar has been an incredibly enriching experience for me, both intellectually and personally. The combination of high-level academic lectures, diving into text study, and engaging field visits created a unique environment for learning and reflection. The seminar's interdisciplinary approach created a sum greater than its parts, blending history, philosophy, and cultural heritage through case studies. The warm atmosphere, meaningful discussions, and exchange within a diverse cohort made practically every session

engaging and inspiring. The program not only expanded my understanding of Jewish identity and thought in general, and deepened my connection to Sephardic tradition, but also gave me practical tools and fresh perspectives that I can bring into my community work and academic path. I am grateful for the opportunity to have been part of such an amazing experience and highly recommend this program to anyone seeking to grow both in knowledge and in community.

8.3.3 **Lisë Stern (USA)**

In Barcelona,The Matanel Sefarad Summer beckoned We gathered from lands touched by Sephardic culture: Jerusalem, Morocco, France, Hungary, Albania, Bosnia, Holland, Catalonia, the United States of America, that's me.
Because even if my own roots are Ashkenazi, I am connected to Sepharad. We were, As we say All at Sinai. And therefore beyond/ A quiet base. In an ancient space Our historic place. Now here Assembled On the street named for the Rashba, Rabbi Shlomo ben Avraham ibn Adret, One of many Sefardic sages Of the Middle Ages, Maimonides and Nachmonides and all of these Jewish scholars and doctors and philosophers, Rabbis and residents of this former Call, The Jewish center of this Catalonian capital. Five hundred thirty-three years after our final expulsion, An explosive end to a tarnished Golden Age. A banished Spanish history, So many intertwining roots.of a Jewish past.
My own and those of others, Revealed and hidden. We are one and we are many. Matrilineal, patrilineal, liminal, Yehudim Sefaradim, Jews and friends -- For six weeks we studied, Learning from morning to late afternoon, From professors and experts and researchers, Of all things Sefardi, Of then and now, The stages and eras, Confrontations explanations, Conversos and Cryptos, And the meaning of ham. Field trips, To a buried cemetery on Montjuïc, The Jewish Mountain, Across the street from newly revealed roadside graves, From centuries ago…
To Girona, Port Bou, Montserrat… To libraries and museums and monasteries… To interacting with the city of Barcelona itself, exploring traces of past times, Feeling the stories From stones: Engraved with Hebrew letters embedded in church walls, Or ravaged with shrapnel remnants, Or supporting tiles with colorful inscriptions, Of previous lives, Listening to voices of piyyutim, Liturgical poetry, Chanted by modern singers, And musicians bringing old words to new life. Kneading dough into loaves Of challah bread, Scraping aubergine flesh from wrinkled purple skins, Adding garlic, lemon juice, Creating a Shabbat dinner feast, Sharing food memories Beneath a moonlit sky, Drawn together by hunger for traditions, Thirst for understanding, To glimpse and share each other's Mysteries, histories, Feasting on our own oral and written Torah. I left with connections I did not know I had, Friendships and songs and inspirations, And so much information, I will return to my final year of rabbinical school Filled with gratitude and Infused with knowledge, To hold, And to share, And to share.

8.3.4 **Agnieszka Baraszko (Sweden)** - Paideia, European Institute for Jewish Studies in Sweden

I am writing to you from not so warm Sweden with my sincere gratitude and an absolute awe for what you have put together. I enjoyed learning together from you, from amazing speakers, and

from fellow participants. It was a great balanced full of diverse elements complementing each other.
From my own professional experience, I recognize how much time, effort and energy had to be put into creating such a well-structured program, and how much does it take to continuously make sure it is running as planned, readjusting if needed, as well as tending to participants' needs. Really, congratulations to you all.
I would finish by saying that spending this important and meaningful time with our group meant a great deal to me and inspired me to continue the work we all do for the Jewish life and culture. How I wished to be there for a longer time!, I hope for our paths to cross again soon.

8.3.5. **Kliment Ionah Bannour-Maikov (Spain)**
The Matanel Sefarad seminar was a summer oasis of great depth, of Jewish thought and art, and of new friendships, that nourished my Sephardic roots and my rootedness in Barcelona, a city with a rich Jewish intertwined past, sustained by our collective effort - present. The word present holds both meanings in several languages: the present time and a gift. And this is what these several weeks were for me: being present in today's realities of our world, receiving and transforming the present of passionate Jewish ancestors to get closer to several profound questions that we bear. How not to lose our identity and persist with our art. How to transform the past into the potential for future change. How to inspire together. How to change the atrocities of the world through our togetherness.

8.4 **Conclusions**

The inaugural year of the seminar confirmed both the viability and the value of establishing a European framework for advanced study in Sephardic-Jewish heritage. The educational model and logistical infrastructure developed in 2025 provide a solid foundation for continuation and further improvements in 2026, as outlined in the Matanel Sefarad Seminar - 560 project proposal.

8.4.1 Key Adjustments and Developments for 2026

1. **Improve Study Conditions at Casa Adret** - Acquire appropriate seating and improve air-conditioning. The continuation track will be relocated to an alternative venue due to space constraints.
2. **Student Housing Arrangements** - Develop agreements with student residence networks to reduce accommodation costs.
3. **Adjustment of Program Duration** - In order to remain within the current budget framework, and in accordance with participant feedback, the program's duration will be

modified. Accordingly, the 2026 cohort will take place over four intensive weeks (June 1st - June 26th, 2026).

4. **Fundraising** - Secure additional funding to improve study conditions, increase faculty compensation, reduce student expenses, and expand field trips
5. **Advancing Academic Recognition -** Strengthening the partnerships established in 2025 with *Paideia, UCV,* and *UCAM*, and extending these agreements to additional institutions, including: *Hochschule für Jüdische Studien Heidelberg* and the *Institute of Jewish Studies, University of Antwerp.*
6. **Continuation Program (Second Year)** – In Summer 2026, a pilot continuation track of the Matanel Sefarad Seminar will run alongside the second cohort, in Belchite (Zaragoza region). This continuation (and independent) program, designed as a Sephardic Heritage Laboratory, combines archaeological fieldwork excavating the medieval Jewish quarter (including the recently discovered synagogue) with a curriculum dedicated to "difficult heritage" and to the contemporary challenges surrounding Jewish and Sephardic heritage in Europe. For full details about the program, please see:
   Call for applications:
   https://www.ejbarcelona.org/seminarsefaradbelchite

9. Final Summary

The first year of the *Matanel Sefarad Seminar* demonstrated that the vision of creating a European framework for the study and research of Sephardi-Jewish heritage is both feasible and worthwhile, with clear potential for continued development.

The 2025 seminar established a solid operational foundation - in terms of academic content and teaching quality, as well as logistical and administrative management - which sets the groundwork for the program's continuity and growth in the coming years as a relevant actor in the study of Sephardi Jewish heritage.

We at the EJB extend our sincere appreciation to the *Matanel Foundation* and its team for their guidance and committed support. The achievements outlined above would not have been possible without this partnership.

For further information or clarifications:

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