

THE GOLDEN CHAIN – A TIMELINE OF EARLY YIDDISH LITERATURE

The image of Yiddish literature that it created for itself is *di goldene keyt*—the golden chain. The image arose from the understanding that each of the various stages in its development were not merely abstract points, but were directly linked to its predecessors and its successors. Here, in brief, are the key links in the golden chain that stretches across the thousand years of Yiddish culture that we are heirs to.

- Approx. 10th century, C.E.**—According to the most widely accepted theories, Old Yiddish begins developing in the Middle Rhine area of Lorraine, called *loter* in Yiddish. Contending theories propose the banks of the Danube or Slavic-Turkish areas as the birthplace of the folk-language
- 13th-15th centuries**—Minstrels/bards performing in Yiddish at weddings, other celebrations and gatherings. First *ms* extant: 1382.
- 16th century**—*Bovo Bukh* (written 1507-8, printed 1541) Eliahu Levita Habokher. *Shmuel Bukh* (1544) Moyshe Esrim Vearba (20+4=24 [books in Bible]). *Torah translations* (1544, 1560, 1583) ostensibly directed to *women*. *Tsene Urene* (written 1590, printed 1616) *women's version* of Torah, commentaries, fables, etc. *Thines* (began appearing 1590), prayer booklets written for women; most famous: *Shloyshe Shearim* (Three Gates) by Sore Bas Tuvim who became a subject of veneration. *Ku Bukh* (Verona, 1595?), adapted Aesopian and Arabic fables.
- 17th century**—*Brantshpigl* (1602) and *Musar* books of moral preachment. *Mayse Bukh* (Basel, 1602), stories with morals implied or tacked-on. *Glikl of Hameln* (written 1689-1719), biography, current events, plus legends, influenced by *tchines*. *Seyfer Mosholim* (Frankfurt, 1697), revision of *Ku Bukh*.
- 18th century**—*Khasidic* stories of and by founder Balshemtov (Israel ben Eliezer, 1700-1760), Levi Yitskhok Berditshever (1740-1809), Nakhman Bratslaver (1772-1810) *Leytsim* (jesters) at Khasidic Rabbinic courts: Hershele Ostropolyer (1770-1810), Motke Khabad (18290-1880), Reb Yosifl of Khelm. *Magidim* (preachers) e.g., the Dubno Magid, Yankif Krants (1740-1804).
- early 19th century**—*Badkhonim* (folk singers/entertainers/wedding masters of ceremony) e.g., Berl Broder (1815-1886), Velvl Zbarzher (1826-1883), Elyakum Zunser (1836-1913)