RESOVIA SACRA
R. 31 (2024)

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THE LANGUAGES OF RELIGION IN MEDIEVAL BRITAIN – JUDAISM

1 Introduction

The religious landscape of pre-medieval Britain was complex, multi-layered, and by no means homogenous. For one thing, in parts of Britain affected by the Roman conquest, native cults were juxtaposed with Roman beliefs to the effect

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that the two religious systems both co-existed and produced a polytheistic hybrid Romano-Celtic cult (Watts 1991). Introducing Christianity to this mixture further added to the complexity by producing a specific form of Romano-British Christianity with elements of old native beliefs (Watts 1991: 224). On the whole, however, in the late 4th century the "Romano-Celtic cult was generally in decline" (Watts 1991: 226). The subsequent withdrawal of Romans weakened Christianity in Britain but did not erase it completely: the Church was firmly established by the 6th century among the British of the western parts of Britain which had not been subjugated by the Anglo-Saxons (Pryce 2009: 145). In the areas of the Anglo-Saxon conquest, the newcomers confronted the already mixed religious beliefs with their own fluid cult (Dunn 2009), which subsequently showed a variety of local responses to the existing Romano-British forms of worship (Pluskowski 2011).

Re-Christianisation of Britain, though proceeding at a varied pace, with occasional relapses into the old cult(s) and a period of co-existence of the differing religious systems (Pryce 2009: 154), was on the whole very successful (even if it meant incorporating the non-Christian cultic elements into Christian worship), so that "[t]he British Isles had apparently all embraced the new religion by the year 700" (Hutton 2013: 276; cf. also 334) and "it was invariably adopted [...] as one component of an extensive cultural package" (Hutton 2013: 334). It can thus be concluded that the worship of pre-medieval Britain died out "without leaving any lingering resistance movement or organised tradition of continued allegiance to the old deities in opposition to that to Christ" (Hutton 2013: 345), although the final stage was received via different routes in different parts of the British Isles. The influx of Scandinavians with their own specific form of beliefs was an additional but temporary complication (Pluskowski 2011): the newcomers were quickly absorbed into Christendom (Abrams 2001; Hutton 2013: 342), which once again demonstrates their extraordinary potential for assimilation.

Very little is known about the forms of traditional cults practised in Britain in the Middle Ages. The type of evidence available mostly comes from place names, written external sources, and archaeological data (Pryce 2009). Descriptions of the forms of worship are absent and our knowledge is very limited, but it seems clear, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, that traditional cults were practised in the local languages. In contrast, the two "religions of the book" practised in medieval Britain, i.e. Christianity and Judaism, have documented themselves in ways which allow an in-depth meaningful analysis. This contribution focuses on one of them – Judaism – in an effort to bring together the various pieces of knowledge accrued by researchers representing various disciplines with a view to recreating the linguistic landscape of the religious reality of Jews in medieval Britain.

To set the scene for this discussion, we begin with a brief survey of chronological, demographic, economical, and social aspects of Jewish presence in England (Section 2). Then we move on to discuss the languages of medieval Anglo-Jewry in general (Section 3), with further refinements concerning the languages of religion presented in Section 4, where we differentiate between the languages of God and authoritative writings (Section 4.1), the languages of prayer (Section 4.2), and the languages of sermons (Section 4.3). A brief summary of the findings is offered in Section 5.

2 Jewish presence in medieval England – an overview

The outlines of Jewish presence in medieval England are delineated by the Norman Conquest of 1066 (cf. for example Johnson 1987; Bartlett 2000; Stacey 2001) on the one hand and the expulsion of 1290 on the other (Abrahams 1895; Hyams 1974; Mundill 1998 [2002]).[1] The first Jewish settlers in England came from Normandy with William the Conqueror, which makes Normandy the major source of English Jewry (cf. for example Roth 1941 [1964]; Richardson 1960; Hyams 1974; Little 1978; Mundill 1998 [2002]; Stacey 2001; Fudeman 2010; Einbinder 2011; Sapir Abulafia 2013; Olszowy-Schlanger 2011; Goldy 2017; Krummel and Pugh 2017).[2] Although later migrations brought Jews from other places as well,[3] it was Norman Jewry on which the Jewish communities in England remained culturally, linguistically, and economically dependent to a very large degree (Roth 1941 [1964]: 4).

They formed urban communities estimated at their peak around 1200 at 4000–5000 people (Lipman 1968; Hyams 1974; Stacey 2001 and 2003; Mundill

1. Historians do not unanimously agree that there were no Jews present in medieval England before or after these dates, either on flying visits, or as permanent individual settlers or communities (cf. for example Picciotto 1875; Jacobs 1893; Roth 1941 [1964]; Mundill 2010; Hirschman and Yates 2014) but the type of evidence available to support the claims of Jewish presence outside these time frames precludes a meaningful discussion of the topic pursued here.
2. Olszowy-Schlanger (2011: 234) notes that the Jews who arrived in England with William the Conqueror originated mostly form Normandy but also came from other regions in northern France.
3. Some Jews came from Rhineland (Roth 1941 [1964]; Johnson 1987; Stacey 2001; Fudeman 2010), Angevin and Capetian territories (Stacey 2001; Goldy 2008), Germany (Roth 1941 [1964]; Stacey 2001: 341), Poitou and lands to the south (Hillaby and Hillaby 2013), and from further afield (Roth 1941 [1964]), for example from Spain (Olszowy-Schlanger 2011: 234), Marocco, Italy, the Holy Land (Hirschman and Yates 2014) and even an individual from Russia (Kulik 2012).

2011a; Goldy 2017; Tolan 2023; cf. also Dobson 1992), which constituted about 0.25% of the entire population and about 1%–2% of the population of the cities (Lipman 1968; Hyams 1974; Goldy 2008). Towards the end of the 13th century the population of Anglo-Jewry began to shrink while the overall populace of England was still growing, so by the time of the expulsion there were probably about 2000–3000 Jews (Lipman 1968; Hyams 1974; Stacey 2001)[4] in a country of about 6 million people.

Jews settled in towns,[5] where they tended to cluster together due to the intrinsic needs of the communal organisation (Abrahams 1896 [1993]: 62; Lavie 2011: 493). But medieval town dwellers generally settled in locations reflecting their financial status, which gave rise to Christian-Jewish neighbourhoods (Hyams 1974, 2013; Fudeman 2010; Hillaby and Hillaby 2013; cf. also Johnson 1987) and both communities freely went about their daily business (Berman Brown and McCartney 2003: 60; Rees Jones 2013: 37, 42).

What follows from the above is that Jews lived in close proximity to Christians, which had important social consequences. Although medieval Jews formed closed communities in their host countries,[6] the daily reality of two groups in England (and elsewhere) was that of close interactions (Watson 2013: 11–12). English Jews must have blended seamlessly into their host communities, as evidenced by the strict introduction of the tabula badge in England in 1218, which clearly indicated that there was hardly anything in their outward appearance that distinguished Jews from Christians (Roth 1941 [1964]: 95, 99; Sapir Abulafia 2013: 209; Little 1978: 42–43). The original role of the badge was to prevent sexual contacts between Jews and Christians even *per errorem* (Resnick 2019). Interestingly, England was the first country to have consistently enforced the Jewish badge and it was

4. For higher estimates, see Golb (1998: 147), who repeats after Jacobs (1896: 179) that the Jewish population of London itself at the time of the expulsion was around 2000 people over the age of twelve. Jacobs (1896: 179) estimates the overall population of Jews at 15 060 in 1290 (in line with contemporary chroniclers). Hirschman and Yates (2014: 108) claim that the majority of Jews stayed in England, "declaring themselves Christian and forming a vast underground crypto-Jewish community". Without commenting on the numbers, let us remark that as far as conversions are concerned, Stacey (2003: 51) notes that a large number of these occurred in the last decades before the expulsion due to the collapse of the social networking system, which left many Jews without financial support.
5. For detailed data concerning individual locations and their timing, see Jacobs (1896), Roth (1941 [1964]), Hyams (1974), Lipman (1968), Little (1978), Streit (1993), Stacey (1999), Bartlett (2000), Hillaby and Hillaby (2013), and Goldy (2017).
6. Cf. Lilley *et al*. (1994) and Kowaleski (2014) for DNA data. For features that underscored Jewish distinctiveness as a minority community, see for example Berman Brown and McCarty (2003), and Hyams (2013).

also most strict in its execution (Roth 1941 [1964]).[7] This vigorous enforcement testifies not only to the outward resemblance of Christians and Jews in medieval England but – importantly for this discussion – may perhaps signal some degree of linguistic amalgamation with the local community (cf. Olszowy-Schlanger 2023: 235, 236), especially on the part of women who would need to communicate with their English-speaking neighbours, servants, tradespeople, etc. on every-day domestic matters (cf. also Section 3.2 below).[8] This is, however, not to imply that medieval Anglo-Jewry developed community-scale bilingualism and could thus choose to be fully integrated into their host community but to signal what must have been a possibility in some cases at least. Otherwise, the enforcement of the *tabula* would have been of lesser significance there than in the rest of Europe.

Contrary to the predominant view that all medieval English Jews were exorbitantly rich, Anglo-Jewry represented three classes: the patriciate, the middle class, and the proletariat (Lipman 1968: 68)[9] and their typical occupations were determined by class membership. There was naturally the money-lending, but there were also other occupations generated by money-lending: assistants, agents, clerks, and household servants of the great money-lenders. Then came the whole range of service trades: doctors, teachers, vintners, fishmongers, cheese mongers, goldsmiths, jewellers, ironmongers. And there were also traders in commodities, pawnbrokers, servants, and wet nurses (Lipman 1968; Mundill 2011b).

3 The languages of the Jews in England

3.1 Hebrew and Aramaic

Jews around the world adopted the language of their host community as their mother tongue (Little 1978: 42; Chazan 2010: 182–183[10]) and used Hebrew as a father tongue, on which they relied for religious purposes. However, Jews in

7. Cf. also Roth (1941 [1964]: 95), Benbassa (2014: 32), Hillaby and Hillaby (2013: 47), and Sapir Abulafia (2013: 209).
8. For more on contacts between Jewish and Christian women, see Trotter (2000), Hoyle (2008), Carruthers (2015), and Boyarin (2020, 2021); for the growing enmity and increasingly propagated hostile perceptions of Jewish women in medieval England, cf. Fenster (2017).
9. For the relative wealth of Jewish communities as distributed throughout England, see Lipman (1968).
10. Chazan (2010: 183) points out that "the rapid loss of prior language culture was a striking feature of Jewish life in eleventh– and twelfth–century Europe" and remarks that this readiness to communicate with the host community in its language at the cost of Jews' mother tongue illustrates the adaptive potential of European Jewish communities.

medieval England diverged slightly from this dominant paradigm when it comes to the local vernacular, as will be shown in Section 3.2 below.

The former, i.e. the mother tongue, is both diachronically and formally complicated as it entails first the use of Aramaic,[11] which had been replaced in this function by the High Middle Ages with a variety of local languages. For Jews in Western Christendom, these were Germanic and Romance dialects (Wasserman 2023: 95). But the replacement of Aramaic with other vernaculars in the communicative function does not mean that Aramaic lost its significance for Jews. On the contrary, it continued to hold an important position both in the Jewish ritual and in the intellectual life (Wasserman 2023: 95). The question is what status was accorded to it? Who understood it, why was it used at all and what contexts was it used in? In the Middle Ages, "the vast majority of Jews did not speak Aramaic in their daily interactions, nor was it their usual language in religious matters" (Wasserman 2023: 101). But Aramaic was preserved in the uses to which it was put in Late Antiquity, when it was a most popular common language of Jews (who no longer spoke Hebrew). In other words, Aramaic was a forgotten vernacular, which – paradoxically – gave it a near-sacral status (Wasserman 2023: 102, esp. note 18). In effect, medieval Jews spoke a variety of vernaculars (determined by their geographical location) as their mother tongues but they also retained the formalised use of Aramaic (cf. Section 4.2.2), a former shared vernacular, whose status in the Middle Ages was certainly lower than that of Hebrew but higher than that accorded to the vernaculars of the time.

But while it is clear that the vernaculars used by Jews differed in the medieval period, it is not immediately obvious, though equally true, that medieval Jews around the world did not form a linguistically homogenous community with respect to Hebrew. Due to migrations, the Middle Ages saw the emergence of the three major divisions of Jews: Ashkenazim, Sephardim, and Mizrahim, each group having not only its own distinctive liturgical customs and social practices, but differing Hebrew pronunciations and vernacular languages as well (Friedman 2011: 94). Apart from geographical considerations, the development of differing pronunciations was related to the consonantal nature of the Hebrew script, which received various vocalisations. The Hebrew of pre-1290 England (as well as of France and Germany, i.e. of the broader region of Ashkenaz) was based on the Tiberian pointing.

When it comes to the language of record, researchers exhibit differing opinions concerning the situation that obtained in medieval England. According

11. Aramaic was spoken by the majority of Jews "from the mid-first century CE through the seventh-century Muslim conquest and beyond" (Wasserman 2023: 95). For more on Aramaic, see Kaufman (1997).

to Rabin (1985: 88), rabbinic Hebrew was the language for all written purposes there. Fudeman (2010: 151) is more cautious, stating that although French was the oral vernacular of most Jews living in northern France and England in the Middle Ages, "[t]hey sometimes also *wrote* [emphasis ours] in French, but for the most part, they wrote in Hebrew". In a similar vein, Stacey (2001: 352) notes that Hebrew was the predominant language of record of English Jews in the Middle Ages, but "there are a number of French letters and notations and a few references to Jews writing in Latin". The most recent contribution to the field is that by Hajek and Olszowy-Schlanger (2024), who seem to clarify the apparent contradiction between Rabin (1985) on the one hand and Fudeman (2010) and Stacey (2001) on the other. Hajek and Olszowy-Schlanger (2024: 122) note that there are extant La'az[12] glossaries "used to explain difficult Hebrew and Aramaic words in the commentaries on the Bible, the Talmud or the liturgical poems (*piyyutim*)"[13] and even science texts in La'az. Importantly, the authors note that "[v]ery few extant Hebrew script manuscripts are composed entirely in Old French" (121), which fine-tunes the stance of prior researchers, at the same time making it clear that the vernacular was used in a wide variety of texts, associated both with religious and secular contexts.[14] However, due to the close ties between French, German, and English Jewry it is hard to determine the provenance of certain Hebrew manuscripts as continental or insular (Fudeman 2010: 11).

Hebrew – both spoken and written – had to be acquired and its acquisition was to a great extent determined by the contexts and uses to which it was employed. Due to the contrasting roles accorded to men and women and the expectations imposed on them with respect to both their social roles and religious observances and obligations, Hebrew studies affected boys and girls in different ways and to different degrees, so men's and women's linguistic abilities were different. Education was not a privilege of any particular caste (Abrahams 1896 [1993]; Reif 1990: 145; Kanarfogel 2011). On the contrary, it was an obligation of every male Jew regardless of his socioeconomic status to study Hebrew via the Scriptures.[15]

12. For the clarification of the term, see Section 3.2.3 below.
13. For a comprehensive survey of *piyyutim* from the pre-classical to the late medieval period, see Weinberger (1998); for the structural development of the *piyyutim*, see Fleischer (1975); for a general overview, see Lieber (2015).
14. The focus of Hajek and Olszowy-Schlanger's (2024) discussion is on northern France but, as shown below, most observations made for the French medieval Jewry can be extended to Jews living in England in the same period.
15. For an interpretation of the term *scripture*, see Sommer (2012a). For the financial implications and conditions of the unconstrained access to education, see Reif (1990). For more on learning to read Biblical Hebrew in the Middle Ages, see Khan (2017).

In England under Henry III, educational institutions for Jews flourished. Stacey (2003: 41) notes that each major town had a school of Jewish learning.

Formal education of boys began at the age of five (Marcus 1998), when their father would hire a teacher. Before that age, all children were in the care of a mother, who was typically not well acquainted with Hebrew – a fact which had important consequences for the topic at hand. In particular, the fact that a mother was not fluent in Hebrew "rendered it necessary for her to pray in the vernacular, and to teach her children to pray in the same language" (Abrahams 1896 [1993]: 344).

While women had no obligation to learn Hebrew, they were not prohibited from studying it either. At the early stage girls were occasionally permitted to take active or passive part in home education (Goldin 2011: 429–430). On the whole, however, the education of girls did not focus on the study of Hebrew and the Scriptures but on the acquisition of domestic skills and those aspects of the law which were directly related to their duties: halakhic rules, such as dietary laws and other practical commandments related to family life and ritual purity, as well as household and personal religious observances. Some girls (especially from rabbinic families) did study Hebrew and their education went beyond the necessary minimum[16] so they learnt essential Hebrew prayers, for which purpose their parents often hired private teachers. But it was generally not the case that women were proficient in Hebrew.

Regardless of the differences in roles, obligations, and hence educational opportunities and curricula, "those who learned to read and write did it in Hebrew for the purpose of reading Hebrew and Aramaic texts", as noted by Olszowy-Schlanger (2011: 235). The author emphasises that the study of Aramaic "was probably also an important requirement of a curriculum" (Olszowy-Schlanger 2011: 235).

3.2 The vernacular

Reliance upon the vernacular of the region of settlement was a common characteristic of medieval Ashkenazi Jewish communities (Stacey 2001). This linguistic arrangement characterised the Jews of Normandy so those Jews who originated there and migrated to England in the wake of the Norman Conquest

16. For the literacy and numeracy of Jewish women in medieval Ashkenaz as compared to their co–territorial Christians, see Baskin (2011: 144).

used Norman French[17] as their mother tongue (Golb 1998: 461; Goldy 2008: 132).[18] Later migrants were also predominantly Francophone,[19] which aligned them all with the French-speaking aristocracy in England, at the same time alienating them linguistically from the majority of the country's population. This alienation became even more acute in the late 12th century, when the descendants of Norman aristocracy shifted to English (Machan 2003), which ultimately became the first language of all Englishmen, regardless of family origins and of social status.

17. Whether the language of the medieval Jews of France differed from the French of the surrounding Christians remains to a large extent an unresolved issue. Levy (1964), Weinreich (1955 [1956]), and Wexler (2002) claim that Judeo-French constituted a different linguistic entity. In contrast, Darmesteter (1890), Banitt (1963), Möhren (1993), and Banitt and Aslanov (2007) observe that the French spoken by medieval Jews did not show any specifically Jewish traits and was, in effect, indistinguishable from the language spoken by the co–territorial Christians, with whom they lived in close contact. Fudeman (2010: 36) takes a middle ground and notes that Jews used French "in a distinctively Jewish way" marked for instance by the writing mode but withdraws from classifying the difference (cf. also Fudeman 2003). In a slightly similar way, Kiwitt (2014: 52) redirects the discussion from the status of Judeo-French as such to the fact that "[t]he primary linguistic distinctiveness characterizing the Jewish communities of medieval northern France lies (...) in the specific linguistic repertoire these communities had at their disposal". In the most recent contribution to the topic, Hajek and Olszowy-Schlanger (2024: 122) discussing the status of *le'azim* (sg. *la'az*; cf. below) note that its properties differ depending on the genre of the text, with productions intended for oral performance (such as wedding songs or liturgical poems) very likely representing "the Old French variety actually spoken by their authors and/or copyists" but commentaries would typically recreate the spelling of earlier manuscripts, and hence their language was more distant from the local vernacular. Liss and Dörr's (2022: 25) observation that "Le'azim are a unique source, not only for exegetical and cultural-historical research within Jewish studies, but also for morphological, phonological, and lexical studies on the langue d'oïl" clearly corroborates Hajek and Olszowy-Schlanger's claim with respect to compositions intended for oral performance.
See also Liss and Dörr (2022) for an interesting overview of what they claim is "a thoroughly ideologically motivated dissent as to whether the Jews spoke and wrote the vernacular of their French-speaking (Christian) environment or whether there was a distinct French sociolect". As this issue falls outside the scope of our contribution, we will not take a stand in the matter, referring to the language of Anglo-Jewry as French, emphasising its distinctness from English, rather than *la'az* – a distinction more relevant for France.
18. By way of clarification, let us note that the language is occasionally referred to in the literature as Western Loez or Zarphatic but most modern scholars use the term *la'az* in English and French (from Hebrew *la'az* 'foreign language/word', as in Ps 114:1: *me'am lo'ez*, i.e. 'a nation of strange speech'); cf. Dahan (1999: 61), Isserles (2021: 12), Liss and Dörr (2022: 25), and Olszowy-Schlanger (2023: 16), following the modern tendency to use a community's own word.
19. As indicated above, English Jewry also derived from areas where languages other than French were spoken but these languages never became the common vernacular of medieval English Jewry.

This development went hand in hand with the rise of English national identity,[20] the English language being its important mark. In effect, French-speaking Jews were perceived as hostile foreigners,[21] with their mother tongue itself identified as the language of the enemy (Stacey 2001: 344).[22] Even though French was still employed as the language of many professional domains in England for a long time, at this stage the only group in England who used French as their mother tongue was Jewry. This continued reliance on French increasingly set Jews apart from the majority population and made Anglo-Jewry unique on a European scale. The reason why English Jews relied on French until the expulsion (Stacey 2001: 341) rather than adopting English as their vernacular is that "[t]hroughout the two centuries of its existence English medieval Jewry remained [...] closely linked with northern French Jewry" (Bartlett 2000: 346). The communities' strong ties were sustained because many prominent English rabbis studied in northern France. Rabbinic answers to halachic questions (*responsa*) were quite frequently sought and/or promulgated back and forth. Rabbinic courts shared rulings. Families intermarried and manuscripts went back and forth. There were many connections of various types, as many as those French communities also had with the Speyer-Worms-Mainz region (cf. Kanarfogel 2012: 38–53).[23] In this way, English Jews were more alienated from the Christian host communities than other Jewish communities in Ashkenaz (Stacey 2001: 343).

While (continued) reliance on French was a natural linguistic settlement of English Jews, the question that remains is the extent to which English Jews could and would communicate with their host community in its own vernacular. An observation that tallies with the patterns of Jewish settlement in England and the type of relations Christians and Jews entered into in medieval England (cf. Section 2) is offered by Hyams (1974), who invokes general Jewish willingness to learn the languages of their host communities and notes that a knowledge of English was necessary for Jews to do their business. While the first generation of

20. For the formation of English national identity in the 12th and 13th centuries and the role of Jews in the process, see Richmond (1994) and Lampert-Weissig (2016); for the identity of Jews, see Hyams (2013).
21. While there were other immigrant groups in England (e.g. Flemings or Lombards), the differences between Jews and Christians in terms of custom, ritual language, and religion turned Jews into "more than just another 'outsider group'" (Hyams 1974: 280).
22. Stacey (2001: 345) intimates that English Jews were perceived as linguistically hostile and this attitude encompassed not only French but also Hebrew, which – regardless of their actual linguistic abilities – English Jews were believed to use conversationally with nefarious intent (cf. also Machan 2003).
23. In spite of this dependence, Kaufman (1891: 21) notes that the liturgical ritual of English Jews, albeit related to that of northern France, was "distinct and independent".

Jews may have been "successful financiers without understanding their clients' speech" (Hyams 1974: 273), at some stage speaking English must have been an advantage (if not a must), regardless of the actual occupation of Jewish men.

Observe that the same applies to women, whose home responsibilities exposed them to frequent contacts with the host community at the level for which it is hard to assume a knowledge of French on the part of the English.[24] Jews interacted with Christians "for many of the necessities of life, food and essential services" (Hyams 1974: 273; cf. also Section 2 above).[25] This close dependence frequently extended to employing Christian live-in servants – an impossible arrangement if the two communities did not share a language, especially that those Christians who had to seek employment with Jews despite the explicit prohibitions of the Church[26] could not be expected to have been fluent in French. Stacey (2001: 341) also sees the acquisition of English as a practical necessity but hastens to add that English was never the primary vernacular of Anglo-Jewry, who customarily used French to communicate with each other. A similar opinion is expressed by Hillaby and Hillaby (2013: 195), who state that Jews must have spoken "a degree of English, and were thus members of a trilingual society," an opinion which agrees with Hyams's (1974: 273) claim that "most Jews were bilingual or better".[27]

When it comes to writing in the *vernacular* (as opposed to writing in Hebrew; cf. Section 3.1), English Jews relied almost invariably on French (Stacey 2001: 341) as was the case with French Jewry, but written down with Hebrew characters (Fudeman 2010: 151), though Olszowy-Schlanger (2011: 243) claims that Jews did also write in Latin characters, as evidenced by extant letters, "but in all known cases the language of expression was not Latin but French". Most of the rabbinic texts of the English Jewry rely on the use of Old French glosses[28] (Hillaby and

24. For more on the role and position of Jewish women in medieval England, see Dobson (1992).
25. The fact that the rabbis in England widely discussed whether or not Jewish dietary laws permitted Jews to buy light pastries from Christians also testifies to a considerable extent of contact between Jews and their Christian neighbours (Sapir Abulafia 2013: 214).
26. The Third Lateran Council of 1179 explicitly forbade Christians to work as servants in Jewish homes. However, despite this and other prohibitions, "the reality of ongoing Christian presence in Jewish homes suggests once more considerable daily contact, which would translate into normal and normally amicable contact between Jews and at least some Christian neighbours" (Chazan 2010: 184).
27. Interestingly, Mundill (2011b) also claims that most male Jews were trilingual but he points to Latin as their third language, rather than English. As will be shown in Section 3.3, this stance does not seem tenable on a societal scale.
28. Christian glosses to scriptural texts in Hebrew or 'bilingual' Hebrew-Latin manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible from the pre-expulsion period are not our concern here. For more on that, see Loewe (1957) and Olszowy-Schlanger (2001) and (2007). For more on the use of Hebrew in Christian biblical scholarship, see Sapir Abulafia (1992).

Hillaby 2013: 194). There are no extant records written by Jews in English, not even glosses or references to Jews writing in English, and only a few references to Latin documents (Neubauer 1891: 12; Stacey 2001: 352). Fudeman's (2010: 16–17) position is stronger: there are no Jewish writings from England (or in northern France) in Latin or Latin script (but cf. Olszowy-Schlanger 2011: 243 above), which the author takes to reflect the fact that few French Jews studied Latin in the 11th to 14th centuries (Fudeman 2010: 15), so this observation can be taken to imply the same for England. This takes us to the next language – Latin.

3.3 Latin

Fudeman's (2010) conclusion concerning Jews' limited literacy in Latin agrees with Hyams's (1974: 285) claim, who contrasts "a wide measure of adult literacy in the Hebrew" with only "some extent" in the Latin alphabet. Olszowy-Schlanger's (2011) position is stronger. The author points to the bilingual nature of the financial documents signed between Jews and Christians, which she takes as indicative of the mutual familiarity of Christians and Jews with the other community's language of record and customs (2011: 241, 249–250). However, the implication here is also for a non-societal scale of this linguistic repertoire. It was exhibited by the Jewish as well as Christian clerks, who were provided with sufficient mutual opportunity for learning the language and the legal traditions (Olszowy-Schlanger 2011: 250; cf. also Boyarin 2021: 119). In view of this, to account for the bilingual nature of the extant financial documents, Olszowy-Schlanger (2011: 243) claims that the Latin documents were perfectly understood by Jews, while the use of Hebrew there was meant to "facilitate the functioning of the documents". A much stronger view is presented by Mundill (1998 [2002]: 28), who acknowledges that the legal language of Jews and the language of their contracts was Latin, which he takes to mean that "[t]he majority of males were probably trilingual in Latin, Norman-French and Hebrew", further stating that Jews' knowledge of Latin was both conversational and written.

4 The languages of religion of Anglo-Jewry

4.1 The languages of God and authoritative writings

The Jewish Bible, the *Tanakh* consists of the Torah (i.e. the Written Law), the Prophets, and the Writings, and is written almost exclusively in Hebrew, with some parts in Aramaic. The same applies to the *Mishnah*, i.e. the Oral Law edited in the

mid-3rd century CE (Sommer 2012b: 65), which lays out Jewish law in a systematic manner; in a concise, largely elliptical style, reduced to bare statements without references to the source, possibly designed so in order to facilitate memory (Weiss Halivni 1985/2014; Fraade 2012). Due to its style, the *Mishnah* generated rabbinical discussions, which resulted in the emergence of the *Gemara* written in Aramaic and Hebrew. The *Mishnah* and the *Gemara* comprise the *Talmud*, which is – as a result – in Hebrew and Aramaic (Weiss Halivni 1985/2014: 100). In addition to these texts, there is the *Midrash*,[29] i.e. texts which offer interpretations of Scripture found in classical rabbinic texts produced in the first millennium of the CE or shortly thereafter (Sommer 2012b: 64). Alongside the Midrashic literature, there are hundreds of liturgical poems (*piyyutim*), which are believed to represent relics of actual synagogue practice[30] (Stern 2012: 28; cf. Section 4.2.2).

Moreover, Aramaic was also an important medium of Jewish exegesis: Aramaic Targum continued to be closely studied and frequently quoted in Rabbinical works. All Talmudic arguments are scaffolded by Aramaic (Weiss Halivni 1991; Boyarin 2009). Also, most rabbinic material slips in Aramaic words, phrases, or longer passages even when written mostly in Hebrew (Dr. Loraine Enlow p.c.). This continued focus on the Talmud and halakhic literature makes Aramaic an important traditional language (Olszowy-Schlanger 2011). Needless to say, these observations are not restricted to England (or Normandy) but the reliance on Aramaic in the contexts mentioned above makes it a secondary learned language in European Jewish culture (Wasserman 2023).

In conclusion, Judaic authoritative writings were predominantly in Hebrew but also in Aramaic. As we shall see below, Hebrew was required of ordinary (male) members of Jewish communities, and while, Aramaic was also important, its significance and status were different. As already noted (Section 3.1), it was originally a vernacular but when it ceased to be used by ordinary men, they continued to use it, even if only orally and perhaps without always understanding the distinctions.

29. The term *midrash* is multiply ambiguous but it is used here with capitalisation to denote the specific compilation rather than the method of reading itself, or a product of its application or any collection of such texts (Sommer 2012b).
30. For an interpretation of the history of the verbal aspects of Ashkenazi rites, see Langer (2005); for a comprehensive treatment of Jewish liturgy, see Elbogen (1993); for developments in rabbinic liturgy, see Kimelman (2005).

4.2 The languages of prayer

4.2.1 Hebrew

Standard Jewish prayers are performed many times on weekdays, Sabbaths, and holidays. They centre around two axes – major biblical passages on the one hand, and a set of praises and petitions to God, on the other (Chazan 2010: 28). The order of prayers is recorded in a prayer book, i.e. the *siddur*, which, in effect, also counts among the crucial books in Jewish history (Aberbach 2006: 139).[31] Despite the presence of local variants (which multiplied until the emergence of print brought about the centralisation of the prayer book production), the *siddur* should be seen as an important contribution towards the standardisation of the liturgy.[32] The prayers of the Jews of England are preserved in a compilation prepared in 1287 by Jacob ben Jehuda of London. The manuscript is "a collection of the prayers in vogue among the Jews of England, prepared in a literary and scientific spirit" (Kaufmann 1891: 24; cf. also Kaufmann 1893). And although Fudeman (2010: 34) observes that the surviving medieval French- and Ashkenazi-rite prayer books are written "almost exclusively in Hebrew", this does not mean that Hebrew was the only language of the prayer for Jews. The Jews of England (as those in France) prayed in French, i.e. their mother tongue, Hebrew, i.e. their father tongue, and in Aramaic, i.e. the ancient vernacular, which had been introduced into liturgy and prayers at the stage when it was understood by all. So, the status of Aramaic prayers was that of an ancient vernacular.

This fact has important implications for male and female prayer, some of which have already been hinted at above.[33] The broad picture emerging from the obligations concerning prayer imposed on men and women is that men could both read and understand Hebrew and were obligated to perform their positive time-bound commandments, while women could do neither and were not bound

31. The oldest extant *siddur* dates from the 9th century.
32. The general shortage of prayer books was a shared reality in Ashkenaz till the end of the 13th century and beyond (Kanarfogel 2011), which means that the entire period of Jewish presence in medieval England was characterised by this deficiency, even though the 13th century saw increased copying of prayer books. It is interesting to note in this context that "the earliest known Ashkenazi prayer book was copied in England at the end of the twelfth century, it and others like it could be found only in the hands of wealthy people" (Kanarfogel 2011: 256–257). In effect, an average Jew "had neither a prayer book nor a copy of the Torah or other biblical texts in his hands during synagogue services. In addition, no comprehensive collections of biblical verses were written on the synagogue walls" (Kanarfogel 2011: 257).
33. For the actual performance of prayers by male members of the congregation and its implications for male literacy, see Kanarfogel (2011).

by positive time-bound commandments (Taitz 1992). With respect to Ashkenazi women Grossman (2004: 167) remarks that it is possible that most women had "technical knowledge of reading Hebrew but did not understand the meaning of blessings and prayers". Obviously, this picture would have been inaccurate in many cases, as there were many men who could hardly understand Hebrew and were barely able to read. And there were women who excelled in both.

4.2.2 Aramaic

As pointed out above, the vast majority of liturgy was in Hebrew, but there are some liturgical passages and elements which introduced and continued the use of Aramaic in the synagogue. First of all, Aramaic was used in contexts typical of the vernacular, i.e. in situations where everyone was expected to understand what was said (originally a pragmatic purpose). Secondly, it was used in "situations that were supposed to evoke mystical feelings of revelation, such that a language even more special than Hebrew was needed" (Wasserman 2023: 95).

The most obvious example is the reading of the Torah and Hafṭara not only in Hebrew, but also in Aramaic, which came after each verse (Olszowy-Schlanger 2011).[34] It was originally introduced when the addition of the Aramaic text was a linguistic necessity: unlike Hebrew, Aramaic was understood by all. In the Middle Ages, due to the changed linguistic situation, the use of Aramaic no longer served its original function but, due to the conservative nature of the liturgy, which did not update the text to the current vernacular, the ritual was retained but it was reserved for certain holidays only. So, while the introduction of this ritual was motivated pragmatically, its retention did not serve that function. Moreover, these places in the liturgy where Aramaic was retained, were further adorned by other compositions in this language, as pointed out by Wasserman (2023: 97), who claims that European Jews, including those living in France, continued to *compose* new liturgy in Aramaic. As is clear by now, the observation can be extended to the Jews of England. In effect, in addition to the public reading of the Torah accompanied by recitals of the Aramaic Targums, there were additionally some poems in Aramaic.

34. Olszowy-Schlanger (2011: 235) notes that the continued liturgical role of the Targum is illustrated by the "traditional arrangement of a majority of Western European Pentateuch manuscripts, where each Hebrew verse is followed by its Aramaic translation".

Apart from accompanying the reading of the Torah, Aramaic was also used in some prayers. First of all, the Qaddish, which is recited in the language of Targum.[35] Next come *Yequm purqan* and *Kol nidré* on Yom Kippur. The former is a prayer for the welfare of the exilarch and the community, which is addressed directly, so it was crucial that it be understood. *Kol nidré* is "a legal declaration about the annulment of personal vows". Hence, reciting it in a language understood by the congregation ensured its validity. This was retained as part of the liturgy. There are also sections of the *Mishnah* recited as prayer during regular liturgies (such as *Bameh madlikin*), which is also in Aramaic.[36]

4.2.3 Vernacular

Importantly, however, the halakhic mainstream did allow prayer in the vernacular (cf. Baskin 2011: 144), emphasising the importance of prayer that is understood by the person who performs it. In view of the fact that women were not exempt from praying and considering the general educational patterns of medieval Jewish women of Ashkenaz, it is clear that women must have prayed in the vernacular.[37] For France and England, this would have been French, though no records of vernacular prayers from England have come down to us. Lavie (2011: 493) intimates that the general female deficiency in Hebrew, combined with the needs and difficulties of their lives "created an opportunity for liturgical creativity and for personal, private prayer," which, though not committed to writing, was passed down in families. In effect, there are no extant medieval vernacular prayers from before the age of print but vernacular prayer must have been a common experience of Anglo-Jewish women as well as women of other Jewish communities. So Jewish women everywhere, including France and England, did pray in the vernacular rather than in Hebrew "even in the synagogue," as noted by Fudeman (2010: 24). This agrees with a much broader picture presented by Abrahams (1896 [1993]: 345), who states explicitly that "the vernacular was [...] introduced into the synagogue for the benefit of women" and discusses it in terms of an *obligation* that some readings from the Torah and the Prophets before the end of the service were to be translated for women and read as a continuous passage after the text was delivered in Hebrew.

35. Reed Blank (2005: 91) refers to the use of Aramaic in Qaddish as "a reversal of ordinary, usual ritual language".
36. Wassermann (2023: 102) notes that the liturgical uses of Aramaic "caused medieval Jews pause, and required explanation and justification" (cf. Wasserman 2023 for his interpretation).
37. For more on women's prayer in medieval Europe, see Haut (1992).

The assumption concerning the reliance of medieval Anglo-Jewry on French in performing some religious obligations is strengthened by the available data concerning the reading of the *Haggadah* during Passover, which we know to have been presented in the vernacular for the sake of women, and (most probably) also those men who could not understand the text in Hebrew. Hyams (1974: 286) and Fudeman (2010: 24) report that a London rabbi, Jacob ben Judah translated the entire *Haggadah* into French and recited it at Passover in the vernacular to ensure that its message was fully understood by women and children (cf. also Mundill 2011b: 156). Moreover, at Passover, on the seventh day, the reading from the Pentateuch, i.e. *Parashah* and the reading from the prophetic literature, i.e. *Haftarah* were customarily translated in the synagogue into the vernacular (Abrahams 1896 [1993]: 344) but women's ignorance of Hebrew is not specifically mentioned as raison d'être of this practice (Fudeman 2010: 24).

Also supporting this practice are the surviving contemporaneous commentaries, which show that not just the *Haggadah*, but also *Megillat Esther* (on *Purim*) could be heard in the vernacular and did fulfil the obligation. The earliest source to mention in this context is *Mishnah Megillah* 2:1, and it states: "The *Megillah* may be read in any language". It sets the foundational halakhic possibility for vernacular reading, although the rabbis later qualify this permission in Babylonian Talmud Megillah 17a–18a, where the *Gemara* discusses the *Mishnah*'s statement and debates when and for whom this applies. The conclusion is that one may read in another language only if the listener understands that language. Rashi, in his commentary on *bTal Megillah*, supports the Talmudic statement that one can fulfil the obligation by hearing the *Megillah* in a language they understand. Similarly, Maimonides (Rambam), in his work *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Megillah* 2:4, also rules: "If one reads the Megillah in any language that the listeners understand, they fulfil their obligation". So, the emphasis is on reading the *Megillah* in any language the listener understands. Importantly, there is no explicit emphasis on limiting this practice to cases of necessity, which indicates that it was seen as a valid option not a last-resort strategy. Although Hebrew is prioritised as the ideal and reading in Hebrew is universally valid, even if the hearer does not understand it, Maimonides allows for the vernacular without hesitation.[38] Additionally, obligatory prayers (like the *Shema*) have always been allowed in the vernacular.

38. As pointed out to us by Dr. Loraine Enlow (p.c.), the clearest evidence of actual medieval vernacular usage comes from the *Sefer ha-Manhig*, written by Rabbi Avraham ben Nathan of Lunel in 13th-century Provence. He records that in parts of France, the *Megillah* was read in the vernacular – French – so that women and the unlearned could understand it. This is not a theoretical allowance but a documentation of contemporary custom, showing that communities actively used the local language in ritual practice. Whether the whole practice (or the ruling) can be documented for England as well is another matter but English Jews would certainly have known Rashi and Rambam's rulings, and it is clearly permitted in the Talmud.

This is not to say that women never prayed in Hebrew and that men always did, but rather to indicate the linguistic repertoire of Jewish prayer in medieval England. Both in England and elsewhere there were women who prayed in Hebrew and men who did not. This is to be interpreted in the light of Fudeman's (2010: 24) remark that it was "possible to be proficient in Hebrew and yet choose to pray in another language". As observed by Fudeman (2010: 34), Banitt (1963: 256) also posits that the Jews in France did pray in French and even goes on to say that certain offices were performed only in French. Again, with respect to the broader scene, Abrahams (1896 [1993]: 344) notes that although boys were accustomed to easy Hebrew prayers at quite an early age, being raised up by their mothers they must have also become acquainted with prayers in the vernacular language. In view of the fact that praying in the vernacular was considered legal, the choice of the vernacular over Hebrew must have been natural especially for those individuals whose Hebrew was deficient (cf. also Hillaby and Hillaby 2013: 194).

4.3 The language of sermons

An important component of Judaic worship was the sermon. However, apart from the sermon which was part of the worship (Section 4.3.1), there were also Christian conversionist sermons aggressively imposed on Jews, which also need to be tackled here (Section 4.3.2).

4.3.1 Judaic (oral vs. written) sermons

Part of Jewish worship was vernacular preaching (Saperstein 1989: 2). Its primary purpose was "instructing the broad Jewish community in the basics of Jewish belief and practice" (Chazan 2005: 27–28; cf. also Chazan 2006). Medieval sermons could be delivered in the synagogue, as an integral part of the worship service, before or after the reading of the Torah from the scroll (Saperstein 1989: 46), "on a Sabbath afternoon before the resumption of formal worship, at a life cycle event (circumcision, wedding, funeral), or at a gathering for a special occasion or simply for study and mutual edification" (Saperstein 2010: 94). When it comes to the preacher, his status was not clearly defined in the Middle Ages (Saperstein 2010: 94). In theory, any (male) Jew was entitled to deliver a sermon. Therefore, a preacher could represent a wide array of backgrounds (Saperstein 1989: 44).

Likewise, there were no specific rules governing the distribution of languages in the case of preaching (Saperstein 1989: 43). The message was to be clearly understood, which dictated the choice of the local vernacular as the medium of

delivery (Abrahams 1896 [1993]: 20; Saperstein 1989: 2, 2011: 543) as the audience's fluency in Hebrew was insufficient for the message of the sermon to be conveyed through the medium of the sacred language. Also, the use of the vernacular means that women could benefit from the conveyed lesson. That was the idea: that the sermon be accessible to the entire population of Jews who prayed (Saperstein 2010: 96).

On the other hand, when it came to committing the sermon to the written form, rabbinic leaders would record the sermon in Hebrew – usually after it was delivered (Saperstein 2011: 543).[39] This was, again, driven by pragmatic purposes: the choice of Hebrew ascertained that the sermon became a common heritage, being recorded in the universal language of the world's Jewry.[40]

As far as the treatment of sources in a sermon is concerned, we need to note that in view of the fact that extant sermons from the relevant period are in Hebrew, it is not possible to be certain about that issue. Saperstein (1989: 43) suggests that either option was possible: the sources could be delivered in the original language or translated by the preacher, depending on the preacher and his congregation.[41]

4.3.2 Obligatory Christian conversionist

The stance of the Church on Judaism as such and hence on Jews as its adherents changed in the course of the later Middle Ages, with particular dynamics exhibited in the period between 1096 and 1300. In effect, the change of attitude of the Church towards Jews manifested itself in the period roughly coinciding with Jewish presence in medieval England – a shift bitterly experienced by medieval Anglo-Jewry (cf. Johnson 1987; Stacey 1999; Mundill 2010).

The position of Jews in medieval Christianity was to a great extent derivative of the theological interpretation of their role in the crucifixion of Christ on the

39. The practice of delivering a sermon in a vernacular and transcribing it in the sacred language finds its parallel in Christian preaching (Saperstein 1989: 42; cf. also Lis and Charzyńska-Wójcik in this volume).
40. Cf. also Saperstein (2011) for a brief discussion on the structure and purpose of the sermon in Ashkenaz and Saperstein (1989: 42–43) for the possible reconstruction of the oral-written sermon relationship. In particular, within this linguistic repertoire the author observes possible cases where the vernacular oral sermon started as a written text, either in Hebrew or in the vernacular itself.
41. Saperstein (1989: 43) notes that in extant vernacular sermons (from later periods) the sources are usually presented in the original. The same applies to Hebrew technical terms.

one hand and their part in the history of redemption on the other.[42] The changing perception of Jews in the pertinent period was also derivative of concurrent profound changes in economy (the rise of profit economy and subsequent emergence of financial tools) and demography (substantial population increase and growth of towns). The ensuing socio-political shifts played out against the backdrop of historical events and changing royal favours,[43] created tensions acutely experienced by Jewish communities in Europe (Little 1978: 41). All of these multiply interrelated developments which swept through Europe in the second feudal age worked hand in hand with the theological reorientation towards Jews and ultimately contributed to the position of Jews as "sub-human beings" (Little 1978: 51).[44] The legal position of European Jews "declined during the second feudal age from an insecure but negotiable status of virtual equality to one of abject servility" (Little 1978: 56) and Jews were subjected to a wide variety of discriminatory laws (Hood 1995: 106).

As a result, by the middle of the 13th century, European Jews, first in southern Europe and then elsewhere, were forced to listen to obligatory conversionist sermons[45] (Chazan 2010: 143)[46] as part of the proselytising initiative aggressively executed by members of Dominican and Franciscan orders (Cohen 1982: 43; Chazan 2006: 63; cf. also Abrahams 1896 [1993]: 46).[47] These conversionist sermons were delivered in the vernacular (Chazan 2004), as were Jewish sermons (Saperstein 1989: 2) – a choice dictated by the pragmatics of both parties: neither were Christian preachers able to preach in Hebrew (though some were educated in Hebrew in language schools sponsored by the Church; Chazan 2006: 63, 2010: 202), nor would a Hebrew sermon necessarily be understood by a Jewish audience. Latin was ruled out on similar grounds.

42. For more on that, see Jacobs (1892), Little (1978), Cohen (1983), Stacey (1992, 1998), Fredriksen (2008 [2010]), and Sapir Abulafia (2013).
43. The two centuries of Jewish presence in England in the Middle Ages show varying degrees of favour, freedom, and protection the Jews experienced from the successive ruling monarchs but the confines of the paper prohibit even an outline discussion.
44. It is worth noting that viewing representatives of minorities as inferiors was not restricted to Jews. Cohen (2008b: 81) observes with respect to the Welsh that they, like the Irish, Scots, and Jews "were being systematically dehumanized by the English". See also Cohen (2008a: 7) for the disproportionate presence of Jews in prejudiced medieval representations.
45. Chazan (2006: 38) observes that St. Augustine discussed the importance of "sympathetic preaching to the Jews" as an act of loving concern.
46. These sermons took place in a number of venues (Chazan 2006: 63), including the synagogue (Chazan 2010: 203) – a tendency illustrated in Chazan's earlier publication (2004: 110, 259) with a French example and two cases in Spain.
47. On the discussion of the papal bull *Vineam sorec* of 1278 and the status of imposing obligatory participation in conversionist sermons, see Stow (1995).

Whether, as claimed by Mundill (2010: 138), in January 1280 Edward I "endorsed the Dominicans' wish for the forced attendance of Jewish communities at their sermons" or, as noted by Stacey (1992: 268) and Hyams (1974: 276), the Dominicans acted on the command of the crown and financed by the king, in England conversionists sermons started in the 1280s. The Dominicans were to be supported by royal officials such as sheriffs and bailiffs (Hillaby and Hillaby 2013: 337) to effectively compel the Jews to attend the weekly sermons (Stacey 1992: 268) which they were to listen to "without tumult, contention, or blasphemy" (Stacey 1992: 267–268).

The key aspect of our discussion is how to interpret the "vernacular" in the case of the missionising sermons in England.[48] As signalled above, the idea behind these forced sermons lay in the expected conversions. So, the forced exposition to a carefully worked out set of arguments could only be hoped to produce the desired effect if the message was delivered in a comprehensible medium. This was the cornerstone of the whole enterprise. Therefore, if the preaching was to bring fruit, the vernacular had to be the mother tongue of the English Jewry, men and women alike, i.e. French, whose knowledge among religious orders has been sufficiently argued for (cf. Section 6 in Lis and Charzyńska-Wojcik in this volume).

5 Conclusion

In a broad outline, it can be said that medieval Anglo-Jewry resembled other Ashkenazi Jews in relying on a vernacular for daily business and on Hebrew and Aramaic for religion. On closer inspection, however, this is too simplified a picture on both counts. Neither is the vernacular an obvious entity when it comes to the Jews living in England in the Middle Ages, nor can Hebrew and Aramaic be viewed as the sole languages of religion. For one thing, while it was typical of Ashkenazi Jews to adopt the *local* vernacular and this was the case with the Norman Francophone Jews who migrated to England from Normandy, all subsequent generations of Jews born in England in the Middle Ages continued to use the language of their ancestors – French. And while English was clearly used by Anglo-Jewry in many social contexts (perhaps most so by women) and Latin was the language of written financial records (produced by clerks, i.e. men), the knowledge and use of these languages represented pragmatic adjustments to the linguistic reality. In effect, English and Latin were not acquired on a societal-scale and did not define medieval English Jews, in contrast to French, which they

48. This was part of a larger programme aiming at converting Jews to Christianity yet the confines of this paper preclude even an overview discussion of the topic.

considered their own mother tongue, a feature they shared with their original Norman community. This deserves recognition in the context of Jewish identity on the one hand, and its perception on the other.

On the level of identity, Christians did not consider Jews Englishmen, nor would Jews have thought so of themselves. Hyams (2013: 126) argues that 12th-century English Jews were "*in* but never quite *of* England", a perception fully reciprocated by the Angevin rulers, who "began in the last decades of the century to think of all inhabitants of the realm as its 'subjects'" (Hyams 2013: 126), but Jews "remain a category apart, across a gap that widened with every advance of Englishness" (Hyams 2013: 126). On a more practical level, considering the dynamic character of the linguistic repertoire of medieval England, with French gradually becoming nobody's first language, Jews' continued reliance on French as their mother tongue required of them some knowledge of English, which they, however, never adopted for their vernacular.

As a consequence of the above, Hebrew and Aramaic were supplemented with French, rather than English, as the languages of prayer and religious instruction. Importantly, the use of the vernacular in prayer was a valid choice rather than a last resort strategy relied on only by those whose knowledge of the sacred language(s) was insufficient to allow meaningful engagement in religious practices outside the purely ceremonial layer. The latter was the domain of Hebrew and Aramaic. Finally, the choice of the language of sermons, both Judaic and conversionist, was subjugated to their most important goal: the message they conveyed was to be understood, which dictated the choice of the local vernacular as the medium of delivery. Another pragmatic decision concerned the language in which to commit Judaic sermons to a written form. The choice of Hebrew as the universal language of the world's Jewry for that purpose ascertained that the sermon became a common heritage.

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Summary

The paper deals with the languages used by English Jews for religious purposes in the Middle Ages. It begins with an overview of chronological, demographic, economical, and social aspects of Jewish presence in England to set the scene for investigations concerning the general linguistic repertoire of Anglo-Jewry. Further discussion focuses on the languages of religion and is divided into three areas: the languages of God and authoritative writings, the languages of prayer, and the languages of sermons.

Keywords: Judaism, Anglo-Jewry, language of religion, medieval Britain, vernacular, medieval multilingualism.

JĘZYKI RELIGII W ŚREDNIOWIECZNEJ BRYTANII – JUDAIZM

Streszczenie

Artykuł poświęcony jest językom używanym przez angielskich Żydów w celach religijnych w średniowieczu. Rozpoczyna się od przeglądu informacji dotyczących chronologii oraz demografii, a także ekonomiczno-społecznych aspektów

obecności Żydów w Anglii, co nakreśla tło do przedstawienia repertuaru językowego angielskich Żydów w średniowieczu. Dalsza dyskusja koncentruje się na językach religii i jest podzielona na trzy obszary: języki Boga i pism, języki modlitwy i języki kazań.

Słowa kluczowe: Judaizm, Żydzi angielscy, język religii, średniowieczna Brytania, język wernakularny, multilingwizm średniowieczny.