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Judeo-French

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During the Middle Ages, the Jewish communities of Northern France - the territory of the *langue d'oïl* - developed an extensive Old French textual tradition written in Hebrew script, which is known as Judeo-French. Other designations for Judeo-French include Zarfatic (S. A. Birnbaum) and Western Loez (M. Weinreich). The Judeo-French texts are independent of Christian Old French literature both in their content and in their distinct writing system, which adapts the Hebrew script and the Tiberian system of pointing to the phonological characteristics of the Old French language.

The history of the Judeo-French literary tradition begins in the 11th century with the glosses of Rashi and Moshe ha-Darshan. It ends in the 14th century, after persecutions and repeated expulsions had virtually ended the Jewish presence in France.

The Judeo-French texts can roughly be divided into three groups:

Glosses: At first, isolated Old French glosses appeared in commentaries to the Bible and the Talmud. From the 12th century onward, such Old French glosses were common in the entire rabbinical literature of Northern France.

Biblical glossaries: From the beginning of the 13th century, the Old French glosses to the Bible were compiled into extensive biblical glossaries. Whereas the older glosses had been unvocalized and had lacked diacritical marks, the glossaries adopted the Tiberian system of pointing, partly adapting it to the peculiarities of the Old French language, e.g. by differentiating between the vowels [u] and [y] and by introducing additional signs and digraphs for affricates, palatalized consonants and the unrounded central vowel.

Secular texts: From the middle of the 13th century, Judeo-French literature was no

longer limited to the religious sphere - it now encompassed domains as diverse as poetry, medicine, astronomy and commerce. This secular literature generally adopted the graphemic system of the biblical glossaries, occasionally simplifying parts of it.

While some scholars regard Judeo-French as an Old French social dialect different from its Christian counterparts (e.g. R. Levy), or even as a separate Judeo-Romance language (e.g. M. Weinreich and S. A. Birnbaum), most linguists (A. Darmesteter, M. Banitt, F. Möhren etc.) seem to agree that the language of the Jews of Medieval France did not differ significantly from Old French. According to this view, the main particularity of Judeo-French lies in its distinct writing system, which allows new insights into Old French phonology, and in its independent literary tradition.

Indeed, the dialectal features in which Judeo-French texts differ from standard Old French are equally common in Christian texts that were written in the same regions as the respective Jewish texts. Thus, Judeo-French shares the regional distribution of Old French. In particular, manuscripts written in Champenois, Lotharingian, Burgundian and Norman have been preserved.

Hebrew loanwords are surprisingly rare in the Judeo-French texts. Most Hebrew elements occur within Bible quotations entirely in Hebrew and are not morphologically or syntactically integrated into the French text. Occasionally, the word *perush* "explanation" is used to introduce a French explanation of a foreign term, e.g. *ce sont les maladies qui sont de cholera nigra, perush cole noire* "these are the illnesses [caused] by *cholera nigra*, i.e. black bile" (Judeo-French medical treatise f. 84v., edited in Kiwitt 2001, 70). Morphological integration of Hebrew and French elements is only attested in a few isolated cases like *Zäh ha-cure mi-carteine mi-Thesaurus Pauperum, Otsar ha-'Aniyyim* "This is the cure of quartan fever from the *Thesaurus Pauperum*, the Treasury of the Poor" (ibid., f. 245v. / 86).

So far, no linguistic features have been shown to differentiate Judeo-French as a whole from the Christian varieties of Old French. It is probable, however, that the vocabulary of Judeo-French comprised additional registers pertaining to realities specific to Jewish culture and religion. An example of a lexical item limited to Judeo-French might be the verb *mainvestir* "appoint someone as high priest", which will be discussed under *investir* in F. Möhren et al. [1971] 1974-, volume I 3, forthcoming. The written form *Gé* "God" (< Latin *Deus*, cf. Levy 1964, 122) also seems to be restricted to Judeo-French and might hint at a phonetical realization different from the usual Old French *Deu*, *Dieu* etc. In addition, certain patterns of derivational morphology might also be specific to Judeo-French - for instance, the nominal suffixes *-eté* and *-at* appear especially productive in certain Judeo-French texts (cf. M. Kiwitt 2001, 53-56). The precise nature and scope of these linguistic phenomena have yet to be investigated.

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