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Book review:

Hebrew and Hebrew-Latin Documents from Medieval England: A Diplomatic and Palaeographical Study

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Hebrew and Hebrew-Latin Documents from Medieval England: A Diplomatic and Palaeographical Study, 2 vols., Judith Olszowy-Schlanger (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), ISBN 2-503-55101-2, pp. 845, €795.

Legal charters in Hebrew from medieval England, known as *starrs* (derived from the Hebrew term שטרות), were first made accessible in 1888, when Myer Davis, formerly a Hebrew teacher at the Jews' Free School, published a corpus of 208 Hebrew deeds that were mostly preserved at Westminster Abbey. The present two volumes offer a completely revised edition of an enlarged corpus of more than 300 documents, reflecting the major advances achieved in recent scholarship in diplomatic and palaeographical studies. Professor Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, recently appointed President of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, is one of the world's leading experts in medieval Jewish manuscripts, with medieval England as one of her many interests and ongoing areas of research (see most recently in this journal's previous volume her article with Sian Collins on a newly discovered *starr*, which must be added to those in this edition). She has produced an excellent edition that is at once readable, captivating, and highly authoritative.

All the documents date from the last 100 years of Jewish settlement in England prior to the expulsion of 1290. Written in Hebrew, they were produced by Jews for Jews but a large proportion of the commercial, financial, and other transactions which these documents refer to involved Gentiles; accordingly, they sometimes include Latin sections. Most of the documents are thus vivid testimonies of Jewish-Christian relations in medieval England. The Jewish population in England in this period was small but articulate, highly literate, and deeply engaged in the financial life of major urban centres such as London, Norwich, Lincoln, and Canterbury, where the documents were written. These documents are not only fascinating for what they are but they also afford a wealth of information and historical evidence on the social and economic life of Jews in medieval English society.

The first volume comprises an extensive introduction (pp. 15–152) on the documents and their legal and historical context. It begins with an assessment of the legal status of the Jews, of the Jewish courts in England, and of the legal documents that were produced by Jews in Hebrew. Then follows a detailed analysis of the documents, including a description of the materials used (whether written on parchment or tallies), and their palaeographical and linguistic features. The legal and economic substance

of the documents – land conveyances, financial deals, and, less commonly, family law and administrative documents – is then explained in detail with due attention to English common law and, more importantly, Jewish law and halakhic tradition. Attention is also given to the date, place, and other formulas used. There is a glossary, a chart of coins and measures, and the appendix to the second volume offers a chronological list of the documents and three indices.

The text editions that occupy most of the two volumes include highly legible colour facsimiles of the text side of the documents, with edited transcriptions, translations, diplomatic and palaeographical descriptions, and commentary. English translations are provided for the Hebrew texts, but not for the Latin ones. The decision not to translate the Latin is not explained or justified (see p. 155), and it is much to be regretted. Long gone are the days when fluent knowledge of Latin could be assumed of any educated reader; nowadays, many Jewish historians will be more familiar, if anything, with Hebrew. It must also be acknowledged that similarly to the Hebrew, the meaning of the medieval Latin is not always straightforward, not least for classicists trained in ancient Latin. Translation of the Latin – and hence, necessarily, its interpretation – would have added an important dimension to this study.

Another improvement might have been to indicate where (and why) the present editor disagrees with Davis's earlier edition. For example, in Westminster Abbey Muniments 6872 (no. 51 in this edition), Olszowy-Schlanger interprets יום צינדרא as "the day of Cinders" (*cendres*) or Ash Wednesday without mentioning or discussing Davis's different interpretation as "the day of St Andrew", which I agree should be rejected. (On the common use of saint days and other days of the Christian liturgical calendar for the dating of documents in this corpus, see p. 103.)

Aside from some glitches (p. 21 is left inexplicably blank), these two folio-size volumes are professionally produced. They come, however, with a hefty price tag: €795, no less. In the present climate, this will hardly be affordable even to libraries, which is a pity, given that this breathtaking work is now an essential resource for any researcher working on medieval English Jewry.

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