

Krzysztof Pilarczyk

# **Bibliological and Religious Studies on the Hebrew Book**

Collected Essays

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# Eastern and Central European Voices

Studies in Theology and Religion

Edited by

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Krzysztof Pilarczyk

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Collected Essays

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## Abbreviations

- BH *The Bibliography of the Hebrew Book 1470–1960: a Bibliography of All Printed Hebrew Language Books before 1960* (Hebrew: *Ha-bibliografiah shel ha-sepher haivri 1470–1960*) (CD-Rom – online bibliography)
- GoffHeb *Incunabula in American libraries; a third census of fifteenth-century books recorded in North American collections*, ed. F.R. Goff, New York 1964, p. 316–325
- LDKHP Pilarczyk K., *Leksykon drukarzy ksiąg Hebrajskich w Polsce z bibliografią polono-judaików w językach żydowskich (XVI–XVIII wieku)* [*Lexicon of Printers of Hebrew Books in Poland with Bibliography of Polono-Judaica in Jewish Languages (Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries)*], Kraków 2004
- Offenberg *Hebrew Incunabula in Public Collections. A First International Census*, ed. A.K. Offenberg, C. Moed-Van Walraven, Nieuwkoop 1990
- SOcar Freimann A., Marx M., *Otzar li-melech ha-defus ha-ivri ha-rishona ad shenat 260*. Part. 1, Supplement, Jerusalem 1967–1969
- Schaeper Schaeper S., *Inventory of Hebrew Incunabulas*, [in:] A. Coates [et al.], *A catalogue of books printed in the fifteenth century now in the Bodleian Library*, vol. 6: T-Z, Oxford 2005, p. 2715–2740
- SzU”T Moshe Isserles, שאלות ותשובות [*She’elot u-teshuvot*]
- Thes Freimann A., Marx M., *Thesaurus typographiae Hebraicae saeculi XV*, Berlin–Jerusalem 1924–1969



## Table of Hebrew and Aramaic transcription

|   |   |        |    |   |           |
|---|---|--------|----|---|-----------|
| א | - | silent | פ  | - | ph        |
| ב | - | v      | צ  | - | tz        |
| ב | - | b      | ק  | - | q         |
| ג | - | g      | ר  | - | r         |
| ד | - | d      | ש  | - | s         |
| ה | - | h      | שׁ | - | sh        |
| ה | - | h      | ת  | - | t         |
| ו | - | w      | -  | - | a         |
| ו | - | o      | ז  | - | a or o    |
| ו | - | u      | זׁ | - | a         |
| ז | - | z      | זׁ | - | e         |
| ח | - | ch     | זׁ | - | e         |
| ט | - | t      | זׁ | - | e         |
| י | - | y      | זׁ | - | e         |
| כ | - | kh     | זׁ | - | i         |
| כ | - | k      | זׁ | - | i         |
| ל | - | l      | זׁ | - | o         |
| מ | - | m      | זׁ | - | o         |
| נ | - | n      | זׁ | - | u         |
| ס | - | s      | זׁ | - | [sound] e |
| ע | - | silent | זׁ | - |           |



## Introduction

Nearly forty years of academic work at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków have provided an opportunity to share my scholarly achievements in bibliology and the history of religions with English-speaking scholars for whom Polish, the language in which most of my work was written, is a barrier rarely crossed. The articles collected in this book constitute a small part of my output, focused on Hebrew books, which I would like to make recognizable in the international circle of scholars. My most significant bibliological and religious studies are books that have not been translated from Polish. These include: *Talmud i jego drukarze w pierwszej Rzeczypospolitej* [*The Talmud and its Printers in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*] (1998), *Leksykon drukarzy ksiąg hebrajskich w Polsce, XVI–XVIII wiek* [*Lexicon of Printers of Hebrew Books in Poland in the Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries*] (2004), *Literatura żydowska od epoki biblijnej do haskali* [*Jewish Literature from the Biblical Times to the Haskalah*] (first edition 2006; second edition 2009), *Katalog judaików – starych druków w zbiorach Biblioteki Jagiellońskiej z dawnej Pruskiej Biblioteki Państwowej w Berlinie: z faksymiliami wybranych elementów opisanych druków* [*Catalogue of Judaica – Old Prints of the Collection of the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków from the Former Prussian State Library in Berlin: with Facsimiles of Selected Elements of the Described Prints*] (2011), *Drukowana książka hebrajska a religia: vademecum bibliologiczne* [*Printed Hebrew Book and Religion: Bibliological Vademecum*] (2012) and *Studia z biblistyki, apokryfistyki, judaistyki i syndonologii* [*Biblical, Apocryphal, Judaic and Syndonological Studies*] (2020). This publication mainly illustrates my own scholarly output, with the exception of one article, co-written with Paweł Filek, then a doctoral student, who was preparing a dissertation on Moshe Isserles, a rabbi from Kraków, under my supervision.

I was aware that the Hebrew book as a subject of scholarly research has a long and extremely complicated history. The focus was on a type of book which is barely known in our cultural area, although it has been present there for centuries; namely, a printed Hebrew book, produced and reproduced mainly by Jews, but also Christians. The Hebrew script and the languages in which the book was printed using Hebrew fonts in various Jewish languages are a difficult barrier to overcome in order to gain insight into its specificity, history and function. The Hebrew book (both manuscripts and in print) for centuries has been inseparably connected with the Israelites/Jews. When delving into its history, we should first refer the concept of a book to this work which is spelled with a capital letter – “The Book”; this singular term comprises numerous books that were already considered sacred by the ancient Israelites and Judeans (Jews) and therefore held in high esteem. The

identification with the traditions they preserved and passed on has helped them maintain their ethnic and religious separateness and a specific collective memory for centuries. Hence, since the Middle Ages, Jews have often been referred to as “the people of the Book”, a term coined by Muslims, though inadequate because the biblical account presents Israel as a people into whose history God has entered and who have experienced His revelations. This Book (the Bible of Judaism) is a derivative of those theophanies and a reflection on them, in contrast to Islam, whose followers believe that revelation was given directly in the form of a book (the Koran) through the Prophet Muhammad.

Obviously, when speaking of the “printed Hebrew book” one cannot narrow the term exclusively down to the Bible of Judaism (*Kitve ha-Kodesh*) and Christianity (Old Testament). In our understanding, the term means a more extensive, permanent printed document, a record of human thought, created (and read) in the period from the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of modern times until today mainly by Jews identifying themselves with the ethos shaped by *halakhah* (manifested in religiousness), as well as people connected to Jewish culture by ethnic and historical ties (including Christians), the specificity of Jewish life, language (or languages) and ethical values throughout the world. The subject matter of the book is irrelevant in this context; the decisive criterion is the method of production using a printing press with Hebrew type.

The Hebrew printed book was and still is an information medium intended for public circulation, whose content is reproduced using easily moveable type. The external form of the book improved over the centuries (material, shape, size), which especially influenced the layout of the content. Nevertheless, the printed Hebrew book in reference to the sacred scriptures of Judaism, the religion of the Jews, did not replace the scroll reproduced by hand for use in the synagogue liturgy by the local Jewish communities, which take great care to maintain this ancient tradition.

Understood in such a way, the Hebrew printed book has been produced in many languages, which illustrates at the same time the history of the dispersion (diaspora) of Jews around the world and the influence of many cultures on them. Its linguistic historical thread can be reduced to the following Jewish languages, recorded in print using Hebrew type: 1. Hebrew, which evolved from Canaanite and Aramaic; 2. (Judeo)Aramaic (Jewish forms of Aramaic); 3. Judeo-Greek, which was used by the Jews of the Hellenistic world (the Balkans, Cyprus, southern Italy, the Black Sea region and Egypt); 4. Judeo-Roman (Judeo-Italian); 5. Judeo-Provençal (*Shuadit*); 6. Judeo-French (*Laáz*); 7. Judeo-Alzatian; 8. Judeo-Spanish (*Ladino*, *Judezmo*, *Spaniol*); 9. Judeo-Catalan; 10. Judeo-Castilian; 11. Judeo-Portuguese; 12. Judeo-Arabic; 13. Judeo-Berber; 14. Judeo-Persian (Judeo-Iranian); 15. Judeo-Tadjik (Uzbekistan); 16. Judeo-Tat (Dagestan); 17. Karaim (Karay in Poland and Lithuania and Chaltay in Crimea); 18. Gruzinic (Judeo-Georgian); 19. Krymchak (Crimea) and 20. Yiddish. Undoubtedly, the Hebrew book was most frequently printed by Jews

(and partly by Christians) in these four languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, Ladino and Yiddish. They were also the main focus of the research work of bibliologists.

The phenomenon of polyglotism of the Jewish printed book was connected primarily with the history of the diaspora in modern times, i.e. the dispersion of Jewish communities around the world. Migration mainly to countries in Asia, Africa and Europe caused the formation of Jewish linguistic history, although – when it reached its zenith – its influence on linguistic evolution ceased, e.g. with regard to the development of Eastern Yiddish and Ladino. The Hebrew book printed in Jewish languages reached a growing market of readers, shaping the ethos and forms of religious life of Jewish society and their collective memory. It also gave the community to which it was addressed a sense of the continuity of tradition, especially through the preservation in halakhic works and devotional literature in Hebrew and Aramaic, languages closely related to Judaism, the national religion of the Jews. This continuity of national traditions since ancient times is also attested to by the language of contemporary Hebrew books, which, apart from its cognitive and educational function, has also a cultural, social and political function: it sustains and strengthens collective memory and a sense of ethnic or national belonging.

Against the background of the whole history of the Hebrew book, which is almost three millennia old, the history of its printed form covers over 500 years. Although it is of interest primarily to contemporary bibliologists, the works that dominated the printing production were created as manuscripts during the period from the so-called First Temple of Jerusalem (ninth to eleventh centuries BC) to the completion of the last edition of the Talmud (sixth to seventh centuries CE) and from the period of the Gaons (second half of the seventh century) to the end of the fifteenth century. From the first period come the books of the Bible of Judaism (Old Testament) written in Hebrew and Aramaic, Jewish apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, targums, Midrashic literature as well as the Mishnah and the Palestinian and Babylonian Gemara. In the second period, Hebrew manuscripts were primarily copies of biblical books and Talmudic tractates, commentaries to them, religious and philosophical tractates, collections of poetry, prayer books, collections of laws and responsa (*halakhah*) and edifying stories (*haggadah*) about the history of ancient Israel; moreover, nature books, secular poetry, fairy tales and fables were produced. In the modern sense of the word the Jewish book is considered to be created by Sa'adiah ben Yosef Gaon (892–942), who wrote mainly in Arabic with Hebrew letters. We know part of the literature from that period, mainly in the form of manuscripts, from the titles and fragments quoted in the responsa, as well as from the collections preserved in the Cairo Genizah discovered at the end of the nineteenth century.

From the end of the fifteenth century, the invention of the printing press and the dynamic development of Hebrew printing (Jewish and Christian) had a revolutionary impact on the Hebrew book. That event became the starting point from which



the Hebrew book began to shape the history of Judaism and the Jewish community with new dynamics, becoming their icon and a medium of collective memory and axiology. On the one hand, it exposed the Jewish connection to the Torah (Law) and the whole religious system, providing important support for it; on the other hand, it departed from the system, especially since the time of the Jewish Haskalah (from the second half of the eighteenth century), taking part in the redefinition of Jewish identity and in the process of the secularization and liberalization of Jewish life. In each period, the power of its influence is great, because the community of its recipients was attached to this medium, and illiteracy in this community was a marginal phenomenon. This feature of Jewish culture was already formed in antiquity because the Book was considered by the Israelites part of the sacred sphere, as was the language in which it was written. In this language, according to the biblical accounts, God himself was to write the laws that the people, with whom he had made a covenant, were obliged to observe. This sacred language (*Lashon ha-Kodesh*) transferred holiness into a medium that recorded God's theophanies and communicated to the people the will of their patron deity. Through the message contained in the Book, this people who had developed into Israel, generations, a kingdom, a nation and a religious community, had access to these "primeval moments" of constitutive importance. Even if, in the light of historical criticism, many of the biblical accounts may be called into question, they remain an extremely important document of the epoch, in which we recognize the models of thinking adopted by the elites of that community and the will to transplant them to the majority in order to build institutions of religious and social life that ensured the vitality of the entire community of believers in Yahwism and their ability to achieve the objectives that stemmed from the covenant with Yahweh; the message of the Book helped to renew and preserve the fidelity. Therefore, the Book was becoming less historical and more mythological, though not detached from history.

The end of the first and the beginning of the second century CE became the caesura in the influence the Book exerted on Jewish and Christian life. A small group of Judeo-Christians, followers of Jesus of Nazareth as the risen Lord and Messiah, kept Sacred Scriptures of Judaism as their own, adding to them over time a collection of New Testament writings. Henceforth the Book of Judaism (in the Alexandrian version) entered the new religion and through it spread all over the world. Christians attached extraordinary importance to it, counting it among their sacred writings. They tried to read the *veritas Hebraica* in their own way, in the light of Jesus' teachings and deeds, differing in this from the Jews associated with the Synagogue, who did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Most of these Jews, at the same time as the Church was established, underwent a profound religious, social and political transformation, under the influence of various factors, which led to the formation of a new type of their religiosity, which in time came to be called rabbinic or Talmudic Judaism. The cultural transformations among them

demanded a modification of their collective memory. An important role in this process played the book called Talmud. Along with the Tanakh, it became the record of the new paradigms of Jewish religiousness, which determined the direction of social and religious development until the mid-eighteenth century (the end of the Jewish Middle Ages). That is why, these two Hebrew books were reproduced so persistently, despite the obstacles, even at the cost of lives. Other Hebrew books in various Jewish languages were added with time: there the Bible and the Talmud were commented on and analysed in detail and conclusions were drawn to shape religious life. The dispersion of Jews throughout the world and the lack of their own state meant that both the Books, the Talmud and literature that grew up around them were icons of Jewish culture and at the same time keystones of social and religious life. Jewish culture can therefore be termed, as it were, a “paper culture”. Jewish thought was reflected in parchment and paper books, which then shaped and educated generations of Jews, who sought in them answers to existential questions. And although the answers were not exactly the same, the fundamental message they contained about the permanence of God’s covenant and the need to live up to God’s will remained unchanged. In this way, out of the multiplicity of Jewish cultures, there arose a particular Jewish civilisation whose characteristic feature is a community of goals, for the realisation of which appropriate institutions of social and religious life were created as well as customs and customary law of religious origin. Without the Hebrew books, especially printed books, this would have been impossible.

In contemporary research it is important to trace the history of the printed Hebrew book, both Jewish and, to a lesser extent, Christian, back to its beginnings (the second half of the fifteenth century) up to the present day, and to grasp its multiple functions. Thousands of people were involved in its production and reproduction. That is why, attempts are being made to, at least partially, identify them, describe their milieux and goals. Jews used to live in dispersion as minorities among Muslims and Christians, at times enjoying freedom and the possibility of self-determination, at other times – most often – experiencing enslavement, humiliation, persecution and even martyrdom. Christians, on the other hand, associated the Hebrew book with different goals, often using it to fight the Jews or to propagate religious ideas that were foreign to Judaism.

I was aware that a description of the history of the Hebrew printed book in the Jewish and Christian cultures is a difficult task, exceeding the capabilities of a single researcher. Therefore, during many years of academic work I had to not only discover and study new sources, but also refer to many earlier findings in the field of bibliology, especially those made by Jewish and Christian Hebraists. My contribution was also the original composition of my published studies, essays and books. The objective was to create a broad panorama of the history of the

Hebrew printed book, a panorama we lacked in Polish historiography, but which was extremely needed.

My studies were intended to be syntheses of previous achievements of bibliology concerning the Hebrew printed book, reconstructing its history, describing its formal features and multiple social and religious functions. They were not historiographical studies because they drew on rather than documented individual or collective research in this field but. Bearing in mind the non-academic audience, I sometimes refrained from adding detailed scholarly apparatus to the text. Instead, I added illustrations that were supposed to complement the historical narrative, recording it and giving a taste of the artistry of the Hebrew printed book. In the selection of engravings, I used mainly two Polish collections: the Saraval Collection from the University of Wrocław Library (with regard to incunables) and the collection of old Hebrew prints from the former Prussian State Library in Berlin, now in the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków. I have decided to share a fragment of this output with a wider scholarly and media environment by translating selected articles into English.

The selection of translated publications consists of three sub-groups, with a total of eight articles. The first one concerns the book produced by Jews in Central and Eastern Europe against the background of the world production of Hebrew book and two specific episodes in its history, i.e. the dispute between the Italian printers – Katzenellenbogen and Giustiniani – which had to be resolved by a young rabbi, Moshe Isserles, from sixteenth-century Kraków; and the printing of the New Testament in the Jewish language (with Hebrew type) in the first half of the sixteenth century in Kraków with the consent of the local bishop (the only full copy of this print has been preserved in the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków).

The second subgroup includes two articles on the Talmud. The first one, which is more extensive, presents the history of the reproduction of this book – extremely important for the religious message in Judaism – by printers in the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries) in three centres: Lublin, Kraków and Nowy Dwór. This article evaluates their work and its influence on the broadly understood spirituality of Jews, whose world centre was at that time the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, connected by a union. The first three annexes compile a list of tractates belonging to the four “Polish” editions of the Talmud and their individual editions; they also contain lists of people involved in their preparation and printing. The fourth one supplements the article with short biographies and bibliographical entries of particular printers involved in the reproduction of this important work. The second article shows the difficulties that Jewish printers had to face while dealing with the royal and ecclesiastical authorities, who censored their books, and the extent of the freedom that Jewish communities in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had in comparison with their legal situation in the western part of Europe.

The last part comprises an article that presents an outline of one of the most valuable European collections of Judaica: old prints, which after World War II were transported to the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków in order to protect them from destruction and robbery. They come from the former Prussian State Library in Berlin. Currently, they are the property of the Polish State Treasury. For many years, these prints were inaccessible, until I prepared their catalogue, published in 2011, which, in a way, made this collection accessible to researchers, providing insight into the “pearls” of Hebrew printing in Europe and enabling research into them. The second article describes part of the Saraval Collection i.e. the priceless Hebrew incunabula which were transferred from Prague to the Wrocław University Library. The third one describes the extraordinary history of the fourteenth-century *Wolff Haggadah*, a Hebrew manuscript which also had a “Polish episode” before it was donated to the National and University Library in Jerusalem.

The impulse to publish the studies presented in this book were the interests I developed as a graduate student at the Catholic University of Lublin and later deepened at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, where I obtained the doctoral degree and became an assistant professor (habilitated doctor) and finally a full professor. The affiliation to particular university units was also conducive, stimulating the research I had chosen. These included the Interdepartmental Institute of the History and Culture of Jews in Poland, later transformed into the Institute of Jewish Studies, and (until now) the Institute of Religious Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy, all within the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Furthermore, there were lectures delivered periodically at various Kraków universities and the cooperation with the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Polish Association for Jewish Studies, of which I was president from 1996 to 2011, and the Association of Polish Biblical Scholars. An additional impulse to undertake such work were scholarly internships at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (the longest lasted several years) and at the universities of Heidelberg and Tübingen. They allowed me to deal with the history of the Hebrew book to a serious extent. When I started my bibliological research, I was aware that I was entering an area of science which was almost unknown to the post-war generation of Poles, referring to the work of Jewish luminaries of the interwar period, such as Hayyim Dov (Bernhard) Friedberg, Majer Bałaban (Meir Balaban) or Emanuel Ringelblum. I learned contemporary bibliography mainly from Jewish specialists from Israel, North America and Europe, which was possible thanks to, among other things, scholarly internships and study trips to Israel, Germany, Great Britain and Ukraine.

The manner of presentation of the selected texts from my scholarly output and those distributed in the English language required several decisions, which have an impact on the formal shape of this book. As it usually happens in scholarly work, one would like to add, correct or omit something in old publications. The bibliographical note at the end of the book refers to the original texts and at the same time informs

about the dates of their creation. Most of the texts have been reproduced in their original form; they formed the basis of the English translation. As one can easily see, the acrybia of individual articles have also been unified and adapted to the publisher's requirements. Besides, the articles themselves have different forms, starting from a scholarly essay (without detailed source documentation), through a presentation of issues supplemented by a bibliography in an annex, to a scholarly dissertation with the scholarly apparatus and appendices. This concept makes it difficult to avoid certain repetitions, but thanks to this it is possible to read the works at will without following the proposed order.

Finally, I would like to thank the two reviewers of the book, Prof. Dr. Gideon Kouts from the University of Paris 8, specializing in Hebraist studies and Jewish and media studies, and Rev. Dr. Hab. Rajmund Pietkiewicz, Professor at the Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Wrocław, a bibliologist and biblical scholar of great renown in Poland and abroad; I extend my thanks to Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlag for accepting the book into the publishing plan and for publishing it and to my wife Jadwiga for her help in the composition, editing and proofreading of the texts for publication.

Krzysztof Pilarczyk  
Kraków, April 2021

# 1. Hebrew printed book in Central-Eastern Europe in the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries

## Topography, production size, and function

The invention of the printing press in the middle of the fifteenth century was to the culture of that time what the Internet, airplane and television are to modern civilization. It had a breakthrough effect on social change and turned the printed book into a medium that facilitated communication, and thus the flow and exchange of ideas; it helped disseminate religious ideas and shape forms of religiosity, all of which were of great importance in early modern times.<sup>1</sup>

In this context, one can first ask about the topography of the Hebrew publishing, then about the share of individual printing centres from Central and Eastern Europe in the global production of the Hebrew book, and, finally, about the role the Hebrew book played for three centuries, beginning in the sixteenth century. To answer these questions, it is necessary to: (1) trace briefly the situation of the Jews in Europe at the dawn of the modern era, determining at the same time how large their book market was, (2) describe the general function of the book in Jewish culture (especially religious and social) over the centuries, (3) show the topography of the major centres (Jewish and Christian) producing Hebrew books in Europe (excluding the Middle Eastern area) from the mid-fifteenth to the eighteenth century and the estimated volume of their production, (4) show the topography and production volumes of the Hebrew book in Central and Eastern Europe, (5) finally, indicate the profile of the production and the function of the Hebrew book in the religious message of Judaism in the Central and Eastern European diaspora until the end of the eighteenth century.

### 1.1 The situation of the Jews in Europe at the beginning of the modern era

Jews have been inhabiting Europe since ancient times. Demographic research shows their steady gradual increase in numbers on the Old Continent. At the end of the thirteenth century there lived nearly half a million Jews (about 1%) in Europe, which numbered 44 million people, and at the end of the fifteenth century these proportions were 600,000 to nearly 54 million (1.22%). The end of the seventeenth

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1 Cf. E.L. Eisenstein, *Rewolucja Gutenberga* [*Revolution of Gutenberg*], trans. H. Hollender, Warszawa 2004, passim (a detailed subject bibliography).

century saw an increase in the population of European Jews, which reached 700,000 (with a total of one million Jews in the world). In the first half of the nineteenth century, their number in Europe is estimated at nearly 4 million, with slightly over half a million Jews outside the Old Continent.<sup>2</sup>

No less important was the distribution of Jewish population in Europe in the early modern period. It was influenced by the anti-Jewish policy of the Christian countries, which from the second half of the Middle Ages aimed at the gradual removal of Jews from their territories. The first in Europe to get rid of Jews was Brittany in 1239. England followed suit in 1290. The process of their expulsion from France began in 1306, which was essentially completed between 1394 and 1395, although Jews lived in Provence until 1501, and were never removed from papal Avignon. In Spain, which was gradually being freed from Arab influence, they enjoyed numerous liberties and were even entrusted with public functions. Persecutions began there only at the end of the fourteenth century and ended a century later with the complete expulsion of Jews (1492). In the years 1496–1497, Portugal did the same.<sup>3</sup>

At the end of the Middle Ages the Jews remained in Western Europe, apart from the Church State, only in the German Empire, whose system did not permit their complete and simultaneous expulsion. Upper Bavaria got rid of them for the first time in the second half of the thirteenth century, and for the second time in 1442. Various German cities did so between 1478 and 1519, and eventually the Jews were expelled from the entire German area (except Frankfurt am Main) by 1551.<sup>4</sup>

The place in Europe where Jews could take refuge and practice their religion, were the lands belonging to the Ottoman Empire and the Papal States with the Neapolitan enclave in Ponte Corvo and Benevento and the French enclave in Avignon. The papal policy towards Jews attracted them especially to Rome. The Papal States were not without persecution, but in general Jews enjoyed relative protection there. It was only in the middle of the sixteenth century that Pope Paul IV limited the asylum function of Rome: he ordered the separation of Jews from Christians in districts or streets of cities (ghettoization), allowed Jewish communities to have only one synagogue, ordered Jews to wear distinctive hats, forbade using the services of

2 *Population*, [in:] *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, CD-ROM edn., Jerusalem 1997; sub verbo; K. Pilarczyk, *Literatura żydowska od epoki biblijnej do haskali. Wprowadzenie religioznawcze, literackie i historyczne [Jewish Literature from the Biblical Times to the Haskalah. Introduction from the Perspective of Religious Studies, Literature and History]*, Kraków 2006, p. 230.

3 *Historical Atlas of the Jewish People*, ed. Sh. Ahituv, New York–London 2003, p. 209–213, 219–220, 238–243, 248–260.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 234–237.

Christians in their homes, trading in grain and any foodstuffs. These dispositions were extended and kept in force almost to the end of the Papal States (1870).<sup>5</sup>

At the end of the Middle Ages there were few areas in Europe where relatively humane relations between Christians and Jews prevailed. These included the lands of the Central East: Bohemia, Poland and Hungary, i.e. the places of settlement most frequently chosen by Jews in that period. Especially in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which was politically stable until the middle of the seventeenth century, the biggest centre of religious life for Jews at that time was established, with a much wider scope of freedom than anywhere else in Europe.<sup>6</sup>

From the sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century, a significant increase in the Jewish population in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth should be noted. After the mass exodus from Western and Southern Europe at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century, which caused the number of Jews in the Jagiellonian state to reach approximately 30,000, there followed nearly a century-long period of their intensive natural growth. If in 1576 they constituted 0.6% of the Polish population, then already in 1648 – about 5%, reaching the number of 400,000.<sup>7</sup> Jewish norms and customs, early marriages and durability of marriages were conducive to this. It was not until the time of the Khmelnytsky Uprising and the so-called “deluge”, i.e. the war with Sweden in the mid-seventeenth century, that the number of Jews fell to about 350,000. Those years of population decline also mark the caesura of the “golden age” of Judaism in the Commonwealth, which lasted about 150 years (from the sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century). At that time the number of Jewish communes increased, their structure was strengthened, the educational system developed, especially the Torah study flourished, native Jewish printing supported education, unique supracommunal organisational structures integrating Jews in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth developed, not to mention the progress achieved in trade and Jewish contribution to the development of Polish economy. And although the Jews living in the Ottoman Empire at that time outnumbered the diaspora in Poland, the position of the latter continually

5 Ibid., p. 272–274.

6 B.D. Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland. A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland from 1100 to 1800*, Philadelphia 1973, p. 107–176; S.W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. 16, *Poland-Lithuania 1500–1650*, New York–London–Philadelphia 1976, passim; D. Tollet, *Historia Żydów w Polsce od XVI wieku do rozbiorów* [A History of the Jews in Poland from the Sixteenth Century to the Partitions], transl. D. Zamojska, Warszawa 1999, p. 17–86; H. Haumann, *Historia Żydów w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej* [History of the Jews in Central and Eastern Europe], transl. C. Jenne, Warszawa 2000, p. 15–45.

7 Z. Guldon, W. Kowalski, *Between Tolerance and Abomination. Jews in Sixteenth-Century Poland*, [in:] *The Expulsion of the Jews. 1492 and After*, ed. R.B. Waddington, A.H. Williamson, New York–London 1994, p. 161–198; especially p. 164 and 173.



grew, and the influence of Polish Jewry on other European and Asian communities was so strong that rabbinic Judaism took on a distinctive “Polish” character, expressed especially in the interpretation of the Torah, in its adaptation to the new challenges of civilization, and in customary law, which was popularized in other Jewish communities as binding. These achievements made it possible to call the early modern period in the history of Jews in the lands of the Commonwealth a “golden age”. Although in that period one model of Jewish religiousness – the rabbinic one – was established and supported, and the horizons of Jewish intellectuality were reduced to the study of the Torah, which in turn postponed the advent of the Jewish Enlightenment until the mid-eighteenth century, nevertheless, it was approved by the majority of Jews at that time, and its critical evaluation appeared only later mainly among the supporters of a new direction – the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment).<sup>8</sup>

## 1.2 The function of the book in Jewish culture

The Jewish book, both in manuscript form or printed, as it is defined in bibliology, is a document containing a verbal text recorded graphically, created in the period between antiquity and modern times by Jews identifying themselves with the ethos shaped by *halakhah* (manifested in religiousness), as well as by people connected to Jewish culture by ethnic and historical ties, the specificity of life, language (or languages), and ethical values throughout the world.<sup>9</sup>

The history of the Jewish book, which is more than 3,000 years old, is inextricably linked with the ancient history of the people of Israel, and later with the Jewish people living in Palestine and dispersed in the diaspora, especially in Egypt, Babylonia, North Africa, Europe, Asia, and since the nineteenth century in the Americas.<sup>10</sup>

8 K. Pilarczyk, *Talmud i jego drukarze w Pierwszej Rzeczypospolitej. Z dziejów przekazu religijnego w judaizmie* [*The Talmud and its Printers in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. From the History of Religious Message in Judaism*], Kraków 1998, p. 266–268; H. Haumann, *Historia Żydów* [*A History of the Jews*], p. 43–45.

9 K. Pilarczyk, *Poliglotyzm książki żydowskiej* [*The Polyglotism of the Jewish Book*], [in:] *Żydzi I judaizm we współczesnych badaniach polskich* [*Jews and Judaism in Contemporary Polish Studies*], ed. K. Pilarczyk, vol. 1, Kraków 1997, p. 401–412, especially p. 401.

10 For amore extensive discussion, see A.M. Habermann, *ההברמן, בהתפתחותו הספר העברי*, = *The History of the Hebrew Book. From Marks to Letters. From Scroll to Book*, Jerusalem 1968; *The Hebrew Book: an Historical Survey*, ed. R. Posner, I. Ta-Shema, Jerusalem 1975; A.M. Habermann, *ההברמן, פרקים בתולדות המדפיסים העברים ועניי ספרים* = *Studies in the History of Hebrew Printers* 1978; *A Sign and Witness. 2,000 Years of Hebrew Books and Illuminated Manuscripts*, ed. L. Singer Gold, New York–Oxford 1988; Y.Sh. Spiegel, *הגהות ומהיגים, עמודים בתולדות הספר העברי: הגהות ומהיגים* = *Chapters in the History of the Jewish Book. Scholars and their Annotations*, Ramat–Gan 1996.

Jewish books were written primarily in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and many other Jewish languages written in the Hebrew alphabet. Their history is divided into three periods: 1. from the earliest times to the completion of the last redaction of the Talmud (sixth/seventh century); 2. from the period of the Gaons (second half of the seventh century) to the end of the fifteenth century, when the first Hebrew printed books appear; 3. from the end of the fifteenth century to the present day.

From the first period come the books of the Bible of Judaism (the Old Testament), Judaic apocrypha, targums, Midrashic literature and the Mishnah, Palestinian and Babylonian Gemara. In the second period, Jewish manuscript books were primarily copies of biblical books and Talmudic tractates, commentaries to them, religious and philosophical tractates, poetry collections, prayer books, collections of laws and responsa (*halakhah*) and edifying stories (*haggadot*) about the history of ancient Israel. Natural history books, secular poetry, fairy tales and fables were also written. Sa'adiah ben Yosef Gaon (892–942), writing mainly in Arabic with Hebrew letters, is considered to be the creator of the Jewish book in today's sense of the word. We know some of the literature created in this period in the form of manuscript books mainly from the titles and quoted passages in the responsa, and from the collections preserved in the Cairo Geniza, discovered at the end of the nineteenth century. In the third period, the invention of printing in the second half of the fifteenth century and the dynamic development of Hebrew printing (Jewish and Christian) had a revolutionary influence on the Jewish book. The appearance of the printed book caused the opposition of Jewish copyists who wanted to keep their workshops. There was also a halakhic problem related to whether it was allowed to distribute the Torah, tefillin and mezuzahs (small fragments of the Pentateuch placed on doorframes) made in print. On the basis of rabbinical rulings from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with considerable participation of rabbinical authorities from Poland, it was decided that for the public reading of the Pentateuch and the *Haftarah* (excerpts from prophetic writings), *Chamesh megillot*, and for tefillin and mezuzahs, the handwritten text on scrolls would continue to be used (and it has been so until the present day), while printed books may be produced and distributed for use at home and in schools.

As can be seen, the book in the Jewish civilisation was from the beginning treated with special respect, becoming one of the elements of the spiritual life of the Jews. This was due to the sanctity attributed to the most important book of the Jewish world – the Bible, especially the Pentateuch. Its authority influenced the respect that later rabbinical literature was held in, not only because of the content, but also because of the language written in the sacred Hebrew alphabet. The process of book production was called “sacred craft” undertaken with a sense of responsibility; it was perceived as the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy that “for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord” (Isa 11:9). The rules defining the attitude of Jews towards books were written down in the Talmud and made more detailed by rabbis