

Corpus Christi College was founded at a time when universities were putting considerable effort into providing better facilities for the study of Greek and Hebrew. Bishop Richard Fox, the founder of Corpus Christi, and John Claymond, the colleges first President, therefore ensured that the library should be adequately stocked with the necessary printed books and manuscripts. In a famous letter to Claymond in June 1519, Erasmus predicted a great future for the College and alluded to its well-stocked library. Although few in number, the Colleges Hebrew manuscripts are outstanding in rarity and value. Seven Hebrew manuscripts donated by Claymond were probably produced in Oxford in the thirteenth century. They include texts from the Hebrew Bible - the Tanakh - presented in parallel Hebrew and Latin versions, often with a literal translation into Latin written directly above the Hebrew text. It is thought that the manuscripts were the product of co-operation between Jewish and Christian scholars, and were used by non-Jews to learn Hebrew and understand the primary texts of a shared scriptural tradition. In addition to the Claymond bequest, the collection contains a second, nearly complete copy of Rashis commentaries, and an Ashkenazi prayer book both produced in northern Europe in the twelfth century. The prayer book is one of the oldest surviving prayer books produced in Europe. It later came into the possession of a Sephardic Jew who settled in England, and who used some of its blank pages to record business. He did this in Judaeo-Arabic (Arabic written in Hebrew letters). This document is the only one written in this language in England during the Middle Ages to survive. Taken together, the Corpus collection forms one of the most important collections of Anglo-Jewish manuscripts in the world.

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