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## HIGH TIME TO TALK ABOUT *NOON*\*

**Abstract.** The paper re-examines a well-known semantic change observed in the history of the English word *noon*. The received academic opinion is that the word originates from the Latin phrase *nōna hora* > *nōna* ‘the ninth hour’ and was originally used in the medieval context to denote the ninth hour of the day, i.e. about three o’clock p.m., and, by metonymy, also the prayer at the ninth hour of the day prescribed by *The Rule of St Benedict*. Due to the central role of *The Rule of St Benedict* in the organisation of daily monastic life in the Middle Ages, the Latin word *nōna* was borrowed into vernaculars of the countries which adopted *The Rule*. It appeared in Old English as *nōn*, in Middle Dutch as *nōne*, *noene*, in Old Saxon as *nōn*, *nōna*, in Middle Low German as *nōna*, etc. The available historical and etymological dictionaries of English date the beginning of change in the English word *noon* to the 12/13th century and claim that it was complete by the 14th century. In effect, the word started to denote ‘midday’ rather than ‘three o’clock p.m.’, and the change is traditionally associated with “anticipation of the ecclesiastical office or of a meal-hour.” The paper reassesses the strength of these assertions on the basis of an examination of the medieval system of time-keeping and the analysis of the monastic *horarium*, in particular the relationship between meal times and prayer times. It is shown that the explanation for the change put forward in the current sources relies on a misinformed view of medieval reality. I put forward an alternative explanation of the change, which is consonant both with the medieval system of time-keeping and with the monastic daily regime.

**Key words:** semantic change; metonymy; *noon*; medieval time-keeping; monastic *horarium*.

### INTRODUCTION

The objective of this paper is to re-examine a well-known semantic change observed in the history of the English word *noon*. The received academic

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opinion is that the word originates from the Latin phrase *nōna hora* > *nōna* ‘the ninth hour’ (Holthausen 1974, Klein 1971, Partridge 1958 [1966/2006], Room 1986, Skeat 1888, *Online Etymology Dictionary* the *Middle English Dictionary* and the *Oxford English Dictionary*) and was originally used in the medieval context to denote the ninth hour of the day, i.e. about three o’clock p.m., and, by metonymy, also the prayer at the ninth hour of the day prescribed by *The Rule of St Benedict*. In view of the central role of *The Rule of St Benedict* in the organisation of daily monastic life in the Middle Ages, quite naturally the Latin word *nōna* was borrowed into vernaculars of the countries which adopted *The Rule*. It appeared in Old English as *nōn*, in Middle Dutch as *nōne*, *noene*, in Old Saxon as *nōn*, *nōna*, in Middle Low German as *nōna*, etc.

Zooming in on English, from the available historical and etymological dictionaries of English we learn that the semantic change in the English word *noon* started about the 12/13th century and was complete by the 14th century. In effect, the word started to denote ‘midday’ rather than ‘three o’clock p.m.’ and the change is traditionally associated with “anticipation of the ecclesiastical office or of a meal-hour” (the *Oxford English Dictionary*). Both the change and its motivation are generally presented along these lines in all major dictionaries of the English language which offer the relevant information.<sup>1</sup>

It will be the objective of this paper to reassess the strength of these assertions on the basis of an examination of both the medieval system of time-keeping (Section 2) and the meal-hour in the monastic *horarium* prescribed by *The Rule of St Benedict* and its relationship to prayer times (Section 3). This will show that the explanation for the change put forward in the current sources relies on a misinformed view of medieval reality. Section 4 will offer conclusions and an alternative explanation of the change which will be consonant both with the medieval system of time-keeping and with the monastic *horarium*. The final section (Section 5) will place the proposed analysis in a broader context, which will encapsulate the multilingual situation of medieval Britain. In this section I will also propose a set of desiderata for a new paradigm for semantic analyses.

<sup>1</sup> It has to be stated that the latest edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* online (<http://www.oed.com>) additionally alludes (via a reference to Rothwell 1991) to the impact of continental French (where the same change was observed in the 14th century) and Anglo-French (where the change was attested earlier, i.e. in the 13th century) on the semantic development of the word in English. Moreover, it notes that the change was also recorded in Dutch in the 16th century.

2. NŌN VS. MEDIEVAL TIME-KEEPING<sup>2</sup>

According to North (2007: 207) and Holford-Strevens (2005: 662), the medieval system of time keeping originated in Egypt, while Glennie and Thrift (2009: 25), following Macey (1994), point to Assyria and Babylonia as the place where the system was first introduced. The system was based on unequal hours, also known as seasonal. In this system the day, understood as a 24-hour period between two dawns, was divided into *day*, understood as the time between dawn and dusk, and *night*, understood as the time between dusk and dawn. Both *day* and *night* were divided into 12 equal units, which we can talk of as hours. In effect, one hour of the day equalled one twelfth of the daylight time, and one hour of the night equalled one twelfth of the dark period. Naturally, the two hours were not necessarily of equal length. This system was first adopted into ancient Greece and Rome<sup>3</sup> (Blackburn and Holford-Strevens 1999), from where it spread across the whole of medieval Europe. In this system the first hour of the day started at dawn, midday marked the end of the sixth hour and the last, i.e. the twelfth hour of the day ended with the setting of the sun. Special tables were required to calculate hour length in this system.<sup>4</sup>

This does not mean that the system of equal hours, also known as equinoctial, was not known in the Middle Ages. On the contrary, astronomers used it as early as eight centuries before Christ. It was indispensable in navigation and cartography but was considered impractical for every-day use.<sup>5</sup> Note that the division of the daylight time into 12 units of equal length, shorter in the winter and longer in the summer, signalled by the ringing of the bell,<sup>6</sup> greatly facilitated planning daily jobs (be they prayers or manual

<sup>2</sup> The information concerning the medieval system of time-keeping presented in this section comes from Blackburn and Holford-Strevens (1999), Glennie and Thrift (2009), Holford-Strevens (2005), Lippincott (1999), Macey (1994), North (2007; 2008), Whitrow (1988), and Wróblewski (2006).

<sup>3</sup> Holford-Strevens (2005: 4) remarks that the division of the night in ancient Rome followed a different scheme: night was functionally divided into four *vigiliae* or night watches.

<sup>4</sup> In this context North (2008: 45) mentions an ivory prism from Nineveh (dated to the 8th century BC or earlier) with tables for calculating the length of daylight according to seasons (cf. also Dalley 1998).

<sup>5</sup> “[C]onversion between the two systems of time-reckoning, equal and seasonal hours, was [...] conceived of as an astronomical problem” (North 2008: 45).

<sup>6</sup> Rothwell (1991) observes that the ringing of the canonical hours was the only mechanical indication of the time of day.

work within monastery walls and outside them) between dawn and dusk. This system of time-reckoning incorporated the natural limitations following from the length of the day for people living in a reality where candles were not only expensive but also carried the threat of fire.<sup>7</sup>

This system of time-keeping was in use in Europe until the invention of the mechanical clock in the 14th century<sup>8</sup> but it is important to note that the invention did not automatically replace the unequal hours with the equal ones: the two systems coexisted side by side for some time<sup>9</sup> (Glennie and Thrift 2009: 26 and Holford-Strevens 2005), with the old system lingering especially in the church (Glennie and Thrift 2009: 137 and Blackburn and Holford-Strevens 1999: 662).<sup>10</sup> What this means for our investigation into the semantic history of the word *noon* is that the original meaning of the word should be understood as the ninth hour of the day in the system of unequal hours. But what time precisely is that?

The length of the hour in the medieval system of time-keeping depends both on the time of the year and on geographic location, as both influence day length. In effect, it seems that the answer to the question posed above requires specifying the time of the year and geographical latitude, as these factors are necessary for calculating the length of the hour. In order to see the maximum range of hour length in medieval England I calculated the length of the longest and shortest day in England for its approximately northernmost and southernmost locations. As the place situated in the North I selected Lindisfarne out of sentiment for its cultural significance in Anglo-

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<sup>7</sup> Even *The Rule of St Benedict*, which is going to be discussed in more detail in Section 3, states explicitly that the time of the evening meal should be calculated in such a way as to avoid the use of candles. This indirectly testifies to the use of candles presenting an issue, either economical or safety-related, or both.

<sup>8</sup> The shaping of the modern system of equal hours took some time: decisions had to be made as to when to start counting the beginning of the first hour of the day. In Italy, for example the day started in the evening, while in Majorca at dawn (Holford-Strevens 2005: 6). There were also other problems inherent in this system: counting the beginning of the day from dusk or dawn meant that twelve o'clock fell at different times of the day, depending on the season. Therefore, the clocks had to be adjusted occasionally until it was finally decided to dissociate the beginning of the day from natural phenomena, but the process took several decades (Glennie and Thrift 2009: 27).

<sup>9</sup> The existence of astronomical clocks produced in England in the 14th-16th centuries testifies to this coexistence.

<sup>10</sup> The situation began to change outside the monastery already in the 14th century but Wróblewski (2006: 11) notes that the unequal hours were still in use in some places in Europe as late as the 18th century.

Saxon England; for the South, I made the calculation for Bournemouth, placed on the same geographical longitude with Lindisfarne. The longitude does not affect day length but calculations executed for two places which are situated on the same latitude lend themselves to easier comparisons.

I checked the sunrise and sunset times for the summer and winter solstice for the two places at [www.sunrisesunset.com](http://www.sunrisesunset.com). This allowed me to calculate the length of the longest and shortest day of the year for Lindisfarne and Bournemouth and the results are the following. The longest day in Lindisfarne lasts 17 hours 32 minutes<sup>11</sup> and the shortest day is 7 hours long. In effect, the longest hour in Lindisfarne is 88 minutes and the shortest is more than twice shorter, i.e. 35 minutes, reflecting the proportion of day-lengths. The data for Bournemouth are similar: the longest day is 16 hours and 30 minutes, the shortest day is 7 hours and 58 minutes. This translates into hour length ranging between 82 and 40 minutes.

It is only with these data that we can actually answer the question concerning the ninth hour of the day in England. For Lindisfarne the ninth hour of the day started between 13:12 (on the winter solstice) and 16:09 (on the summer solstice), with the rest of the year falling in between these two extremes. For Bournemouth, the earliest time of the ninth hour of the day was 13:27 and the latest was 15:50. This shows clearly, that the ninth hour of the day cannot be directly related to three o'clock p.m., or to any other hour in a system of modern time-keeping, which relies on equal (i.e. equinoctial) hours.

In conclusion, the dictionary information showing three o'clock p.m. as the original meaning from which the new sense developed is wrong, as it does not factor in the difference between the medieval and the modern time-reckoning systems. A correct explanation of the denotation of the ninth hour of the day which would not require an introduction into the medieval system of time-keeping would be 'time half-way through between midday and sunset.' And this should be the starting point of the investigation into the history of meaning changes attested in this word.

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<sup>11</sup> Naturally, all these exact calculations are inherently representative of the modern system of time-keeping, where even microseconds can be accurately added up to seconds and these into minutes. The medieval system was not that precise, but as I am trying to translate the medieval system into the modern one, I am, by necessity, resorting to the categories of each system even though they are inherently incompatible.

### 3. THE OFFICE OF THE NINTH HOUR IN THE MONASTIC *HORARIUM*<sup>12</sup>

As noted in Section 1, the daily life in a medieval monastery was dictated by *The Rule of St Benedict*. *The Rule* was originally composed in the 6th century for the monastery in Monte Cassino in Italy and was intended for beginners. However, it was ultimately generalised for all monks across Europe, regardless of the length of their stay in the monastery.<sup>13</sup> *The Rule* consists of 73 chapters to be read on a daily basis during a chapter meeting in a chapter house (hence the use of *chapter* in the two terms). The importance of *The Rule* in monastic life is best illustrated by the fact that it received a translation already in the Old English period, though Latin was an official language of the Church and both monks and nuns received instructions in Latin upon entering the monastery and convent respectively.<sup>14</sup> Each chapter described one aspect of monastic life. So, there are chapters devoted to topics as disparate as obedience, restraint of speech, humility, individual celebrations, the ordering of Psalms to be sung during the offices, mistakes in the oratory, even the proper amount of food, and a separate chapter on the proper amount of drink. Likewise, there is a chapter devoted to meal times.

*The Rule* was adopted in Anglo-Saxon England by the *Regularis Concordia*, a document promulgated at the meeting of English abbots in 970 by king Edgar, Æthelwold, and Dunstan. The *Regularis Concordia* states explicitly that all monastic houses in England, male and female alike,<sup>15</sup> are to

<sup>12</sup> The information concerning medieval monasticism presented in this section comes from Burton (1994), Burton and Kerr (2011), Clark (2007; 2011), Ferzoco and Muessig (2000), Kerr (2009), Knowles (1940[1963]; 1955[2004]), Pfaff (2009).

<sup>13</sup> It has to be noted, though, that *The Rule* made allowances for older monks and *Infantes Capitulum*, as will be shown later, and was relaxed for monks during a time of illness and in some other specified cases.

<sup>14</sup> As discussed in detail in Charzyńska-Wójcik (2015), the knowledge of Latin within monastic walls was often less adequate than necessary for a proper understanding of the injunctions of *The Rule*.

<sup>15</sup> As the term *monastery* is ambiguous and can be used with reference to a religious house for monks but is also applicable to the house of a religious order with male or female members, I want to make it clear that it is in this second sense that I am using it in this paper. Also, I use the term *monks* rather than speaking of *monks or nuns* to simplify the discussion but also because many more records of male monastic establishments have survived and the existing sources tend to discuss the *horarium* with reference to monks rather than nuns.

follow exactly the same way of life, based on *The Rule of St Benedict*.<sup>16</sup> It does introduce some minor changes to it, the most important of which was the replacement of one mass a week by two masses a day. Moreover, it allowed an additional portion of drink (towards the evening in the winter and around mid-day in the summer) and two additional meals a week in the winter.

It is now time to see what *The Rule* says about meals and prayer times. Below I will quote selected passages from the chapter devoted to meal times as specified over the whole liturgical year.

(1)<sup>17</sup>

## a. From Easter until Pentecost

Fram þam halþan eastu[m] oð pentecosten eten ȝebroðru on twa  
 from the Holy Easter until Pentecost should-eat brothers in two  
 mæl. þæt is ærest on þære syxtan tide. and eft on efen;  
 times that is first on the sixth hour and again in evening  
 ‘From Easter until Pentecost, brothers should eat twice; first at the sixth hour and again in the evening.’<sup>18</sup>

## b. From Pentecost until mid-September

fram pentecosten ofer ealne sumar fæstan tweȝe daȝas on þære wucan;  
 from Pentecost over all summer should-fast two days in the week  
 þæt is wodnesdæȝ. and fringedæȝ ...  
 that is Wednesday and Friday  
 Oðrum daȝum etan on twa mæl. þæt is to middæȝes. and eft on æfen;  
 other days should-eat in two times that is at midday and again in evening  
 ‘From Pentecost over the whole summer they should fast two days a week, that is Wednesday and Friday; on other days they should eat twice: at midday and in the evening.’

## c. From mid-September to Lent

fram idus septembris. oð læntenes anȝinne. hy on  
 from 13th of-September until Lent’s beginning they in

<sup>16</sup> An aspect not relevant for our discussion here is the administrative procedures of selecting bishops and other church officials which this document substantially modifies.

<sup>17</sup> I am citing the examples from manuscript 197. Corpus Cristi College in Oxford. The manuscript is digitised and made available at <http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=corpus&manuscript=ms197>. The square brackets indicate a correction I insert over a scribal error. The original form in the manuscript (fol. 64r) is *eastrun*. The italics indicate abbreviated forms used in the manuscript which are expanded here.

<sup>18</sup> As indicated in fn. 4, the time of the evening meal was specified with respect to daylight (fol. 64v).

an mæl to nones ȝereorden;  
 one time to nones should-take-food  
 ‘From the 13th of September until Lent they should eat only one meal after the prayer of the ninth hour.’

d. Lent

Ofer eal lencten oþ eastron. hy oþ æfen fæsten  
 over all Lent until Easter they until evening should-fast  
 ‘They should fast until evening throughout the Lent.’

What transpires from the above excerpts with respect to meal times is that they were specified differently for four periods in the liturgical year, as summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Meal times specified in *The Rule of St Benedict*

	After the prayer at the sixth hour, i.e. around midday	After the prayer at the ninth hour	before dusk
Easter – Pentecost	+		+
Pentecost – mid-September	+ (*Wed/Fri)		+
mid-September – Lent		+	
Lent			+

This rigid scheme was relaxed for aged monks and the children of the cloister: *The Rule* allows advancing the first meal of the day for them. Likewise, monks responsible for liturgical readings were to eat *before* not *after* the service, in contrast to all other monks.

As remarked by Knowles (1940[1963]: 449), this scheme was the same across all Europe. It was followed to the letter, remarkably even where it was not particularly suitable. *The Rule*, as has already been said, was formulated for Monte Cassino, where the climate and hour length differ markedly from England and the side effects of these differences were often painfully felt by English monks.

*The Regularis Concordia* was a valid document until the Norman Conquest, and its function was taken over by the *Consuetudines* or *Statuta*, is-



sued by the new archbishop of Canterbury, Lanfranc. Lanfranc also declared *The Rule of St Benedict* binding for all Benedictine foundations in England.<sup>19</sup> The only change introduced into *The Rule* by the *Statuta* is the legislation for “a mid-morning breakfast for the children and those monks who were unable to fast longer” (Knowles 1940[1963]: 458-9).

What transpires from an examination of *The Rule* and the accompanying church documents is that all aspects of monastic life were clearly prescribed and all changes to the daily *horarium* had to receive a written form. Since I have found no indication there pointing to the advancement of the meal or prayer time postulated in the examined dictionaries as responsible for the observed semantic change, I turned to an analysis of monastic life in medieval England. I searched for reports testifying to changes being introduced into the daily routine in individual monastic houses which would support the interpretation of the change put forward in the dictionaries of English. However, none of the sources I consulted (Burton 1994, Clark 2007, Ferzoco and Muessig 2000 Knowles 1940[1963], Knowles 1950[2004], Pfaff 2009) confirms the existence of the alleged change in the *horarium*.

It seems, then, that either there was no shift in the daily regime, or the shift, if it took place, is not recorded anywhere, apart from the dictionaries which refer to it as a way of supporting their hypothesis, in which case the explanation they offer for the observed change of meaning is circular.

#### 4. SOME CONCLUSIONS AND A NEW PROPOSAL

The information presented in this paper concerning the medieval system of time-keeping and a study of *The Rule of St Benedict*, together with the accompanying documents regulating medieval monastic life, show that the dictionaries dealing with semantic change in the word *noon* make incorrect assumptions with respect to the original meaning of the word. Firstly, as shown in Section 2, the ninth hour of the day and the liturgy associated with

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<sup>19</sup> With the rise of new monastic orders in the 13th century, some of the new foundations adopted their own regulations, but to the best of my knowledge, these did not affect the *horarium*. Knowles (1940[1963]: 457) claims that “these arrangements persevered in the main unchanged throughout the Dark Ages, and are assumed so clearly all through the *Concordia* and Lanfranc’s *Statuta* that no particular references need be given.” My study of monastic habits in Norman England, presented in the remainder of this section, was not restricted to Benedictine foundations but it has to be admitted that these are the most well-studied.

it cannot be associated with three o'clock p.m.; hence a shift from three o'clock to twelve o'clock cannot reasonably be posited. Secondly, the dictionaries make incorrect assumptions concerning the motivation for the change: medieval monastic regime is invariable by definition and any changes within it require a written form. To the best of my knowledge, no such record concerning a general shift in monastic life in England is known to exist. However, in spite of the deficiencies of the existing accounts, it has to be admitted that the shift in meaning did actually take place: not from three o'clock p.m. to midday but from the time half-way between midday and dusk to midday as such. The question is: can we propose a reasonable explanation for this change on the basis of the available evidence?

As has already been noted, the word *noon* is a borrowing from Latin, and parallel loans from the same source are found in many European languages. Some of them were in intense contact in Norman England, namely Anglo-Norman, French, British medieval Latin, and French medieval Latin. The shift in meaning was also observed in other European languages: French, Anglo-French, and Dutch among others. The joint force of this evidence indicates that either the semantic change occurred several times, or that the change originated in one language which was influential enough for the change to spread. However, Rothwell (1991) points out that the change of meaning to 'midday' was first recorded in Anglo-French – the language which had prestige exclusively in England. It seems an impossible source for propagating the change, then.

I would like to propose that the available data viewed from the medieval perspective lend themselves to a different interpretation than the one offered in the dictionaries and for which there is no additional support. As a matter of fact, no additional assumptions need to be made for the change to make sense. Let me go over the data once again and show how they can be interpreted.

Table 1 above shows clearly that with the exception of Lent, the monks had a meal during the day throughout the year. The time of the meal differed: it followed the office of the sixth hour in the spring and summer (i.e. from Easter to mid-September) and in autumn and winter the meal was scheduled for after the office of the ninth hour. What this means in the medieval monastic day is that in spring and summer, on hearing the midday bell, monks went to church for the office of *sext* after which *The Rule of St Benedict* scheduled the meal. In autumn and winter, the same happened, only

the hours were shorter while the prayers occupied the same amount of time. In effect, the mass followed right after the office of *sext*, and was itself immediately<sup>20</sup> followed by the office of the ninth hour, i.e. *nones*. The *nones*, in turn, were followed by the meal. In effect, the midday bell signalled prayers which throughout the year with the exception of Lent led the monks to the refectory. Therefore, it is not inconceivable to imagine the link between the midday bell and the day-time meal (as opposed to the evening meal).

The existence of the link is supported by the actual linguistic data. An examination of the *Middle English Dictionary* entry for *nōn* shows that the first new meaning recorded in this word is ‘a midday meal’:<sup>21</sup>

(2)

Me..sceolde..ȝiefe him his formemete, þat him to lang ne þuhte to abiden of fe [read: oð se] laford to þe *none* inn come.  
a1225(?OE) *Vsp.A.Hom.* (Vsp A.22) 231

The example of *noon* meaning ‘midday’ quoted in the *Middle English Dictionary* and the *Oxford English Dictionary* as predating this example does not show in any conclusive way what time of the day the word *noon* actually denotes. Consider the quote in (3).

(3)

Panne hie alles fasten sculen, ðane fasteð hie all þat none uneaðe; ðanne after *non* drinkeð all daiȝ.  
a1225(c1200) *Vices & V.(1)* (Stw 34) 137/25-6

In effect, the first semantic change recorded in the word *noon*, i.e. a shift from ‘the ninth hour of the day’ in the medieval system of time keeping to ‘the day meal’ seems to follow naturally from the daily *horarium*. Likewise, the metonymical extension of the sense from ‘the day meal’ to the time associated with it does not require additional stipulations.

<sup>20</sup> There are even precise indications that the monks should not leave the church between these prayers.

<sup>21</sup> This sense is generally perceived as lost, but it does seem to be preserved in the word *afternoon*, as has been pointed out to me by Professor Peter Trudgill. When I was discussing the semantic change in *noon* with him, he remembered an occasion from his early schooldays when he had learnt that *noon* meant the same as *midday*. He went into a local shop where he was greeted with *Good morning*. Knowing that it was past twelve o’clock, he cockily told the shopkeeper that it was actually afternoon. The shopkeeper replied: *It’s not afternoon until you’ve had your dinner* [i.e. midday meal].

A change viewed from this perspective could well have occurred independently in the languages where it was recorded or it could have spread easily, being naturally reinforced by the same interplay of hunger and promise of a meal, which must have been eagerly awaited in autumn and winter. Note that in spring, after the period of Lent, when the monks fasted till evening, the midday meal came early. But with the autumn shift of the meal by a quarter of the day's length, the announcement of the midday bell must have been especially welcomed. It seems, then, that the semantic change observed in the word *noon* made its way to the lexicon via the stomachs of hungry monks.

#### 5. A POST-SCRIPTUM

While I hope the mechanism of change sketched out above is clear, I am fully aware of the preliminary nature of this investigation. To make it exhaustive, I plan to examine the historical data in all other languages which recorded the word *noon* in either of the relevant senses.<sup>22</sup> As I note in Charzyńska-Wójcik (2015), the available dictionary data for English are extremely confusing. The confusion has been signalled above: with *noon* denoting two different times of the day, the context in which the word is used does not always make it clear which of the two senses is meant. In consequence, the classifications of some examples as representing the sense 'mid-day' are unfounded (cf. example 3 above). The situation is additionally complicated by the coexistence of another word: *none(s)*, also a romance borrowing, indicating the prayer for the ninth hour of the day. Considering the fact that consistent spelling conventions only emerged in the 17th century (Scragg 1974), the two words could be spelt in the same way. Moreover, the sense overlap between the two items makes the examination of the data especially difficult.

Another dimension which cannot be overlooked here is the multilingual character of Norman England, where languages mixed to such an extent that "[t]he multilingualism here is not just a matter of different languages alternating in the one text but is arguably of a different conception of how linguistic boundaries matter" (Wogan-Browne 2013: 174). In a monastic envi-

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<sup>22</sup> The sense also associated with this word relates to the ninth day (by inclusive reckoning) before the Ides of each month.

ronment, English, Latin, French and Anglo-Norman were in constant contact, with the borrowed items especially prone to semantic changes by mutual influence.<sup>23</sup> A valid aspect of the investigation concerns the level of mastery of these languages, an issue I discuss in more detail in Charzyńska-Wójcik (2015), which forces the question of which language was the means of communication within monastic walls? An additional element in this linguistic melting pot is the sign language used in monasteries at times when speech was not allowed. It is clear that the linguistic situation in which the change occurred was very complex and requires detailed investigations into each of its aspects.

On a more general plane, Rothwell (1991) posits that any discussion of semantic change in Norman England is incomplete without considering potential Anglo-Norman influence. Considering the deficient nature of the data available for English – the best studied of all the above-mentioned languages – the examination will naturally require considerable effort and collaboration from specialists in these languages. It seems well worth the effort, however, to work towards establishing a new paradigm for investigating semantic changes.

The desiderata to be formulated at this point are that semantic changes need to be analysed not only from a purely linguistic or sociolinguistic point of view but need also to be firmly rooted in the reality in which they occurred. In other words, a truly interdisciplinary perspective is what is needed to be able to really understand the nature of historical changes.

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<sup>23</sup> This is corroborated by the data on *noon* available in historical dictionaries of French (*Dictionnaire du Moyen Français* and Godefroy 1880–1895), Anglo-Norman (Steward, Rothwell and Trotter 2005), and British Medieval Latin (Latham 1983).

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#### PORA NA NOON

#### Streszczenie

Artykuł poświęcony jest zmianie semantycznej zaobserwowanej w słowie *noon* w historii języka angielskiego. Dostępne źródła podają, że słowo to pochodzi od łacińskiej frazy *nōna hora* > *nōna* 'dziewiąta godzina' i było oryginalnie używane w średniowieczu w znaczeniu dziewiątej godziny dnia, czyli około 3:00 po południu. Ponadto, na skutek metonimii, *noon* oznaczało również modlitwy na dziewiątą godzinę dnia (*nony*) podyktowane przez *Regulę św. Benedykta*. Jako że *Reguła św. Benedykta* odgrywała centralną rolę w organizacji życia codziennego w średniowieczu, łacińskie *nōna* zostało zapożyczony do języków narodowych w krajach, które przyjęły *Regulę*. W języku staroangielskim przyjęło formę *nōn*, w średnioniderlandzkim *nōne*, *noene*, w starsaksońskim *nōn*, *nōna*, a w średnioniskoniemieckim *nōna*, etc. Historyczne i etymologiczne słowniki języka angielskiego datują początek tej zmiany na przełom XII i XIII wieku, a koniec wieku XIV wskazują jako okres, kiedy zmianę należy uznać za kompletną. Na skutek tej zmiany słowo *noon* zmieniło znaczenie z godziny 3:00 na 12:00, a jako powód tej zmiany wskazywane jest przyspieszenie pory modlitwy lub posiłku. Artykuł bada poprawność tej interpretacji, odnosząc ją do średniowiecznego systemu pomiaru czasu oraz analizując wskazania *Reguły św. Benedykta* dotyczące pór modlitw i posiłków. Analiza tych aspektów wykazuje, że interpretacja przedstawiona w dostępnych źródłach historycznych i etymologicznych oparta jest na błędnym oglądzie rzeczywistości średniowiecznej. W artykule przedstawiona jest alternatywna interpretacja zaobserwowanej zmiany, która uwzględnia nie tylko średniowieczny system pomiaru czasu, ale i specyfikę średniowiecznego reżimu monastycznego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** zmiana semantyczna; metonimia; *noon*; średniowieczny pomiar czasu; *horarium* monastyczne.