Vulcan Historical Review

Volume 27 Article 15

2023

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Many of the antisemitic stereotypes found in contemporary popular culture originated or were popularized during the Middle Ages, particularly in Europe. Often, these antisemitic mindsets were disseminated and popularized through literature. This literature reflects the antisemitic attitudes and anxieties that were widespread among the ruling classes, the clergy, and ordinary citizens. In this paper, I will examine the Venerable Bede's homilies, the writings of Gerald of Wales, Chretien de Troyes' grail narrative, and *The Ballad of Hugh of Lincoln,* an Anglo-Norman blood libel ballad. By examining the antisemitic attitudes found in these sources, I will explore how they recorded and affected the antisemitic attitudes found in England and France during the Middle Ages. Further, I explore how these sources shed light on the evolution of antisemitism in England and France, due to events such as the Norman Conquest, the entry of the Jews into England, and the Crusades. While the texts examined are varied, they all conceptualize the Jews in one of three ways: using the Jews as an Other to demarcate a different identity; marking the Jews as a threat to a people group or identity and sometimes calling for the mitigation of that threat; or identifying the Jews as both an Other and a threat, thereby interpreting them as both necessary and necessarily expendable.

Until the Norman Conquest of 1066, most historians agree that Jews did not live in England. If some did live there during the early Middle Ages, their numbers were incredibly small. However, when William the Conqueror subjugated England in 1066, he invited the Jews of Normandy to join him. Once in England, the Jews worked as tax and debt collectors for the king; they also worked as merchants, moneylenders, and shopkeepers. Medievalist Geraldine Heng writes that they "dominated credit markets…and were vital to the development of a commercializing land market in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries."[1] Their financial role in England fueled a great deal of resentment, which is reflected in the blood libel stories that emerged during this period, the widespread dissemination of antisemitic stereotypes in a variety of written and oral media, as well as sporadic violent attacks that were committed against them. Eventually, these antisemitic persecutions reached a head with Edward I's 1290 edict of Jewish expulsion from England. The Jews did not return to England until 1656.[2] However, even before the Jewish people migrated to England, English writers considered and wrote about the role Jews and Judaism played in their world. Early English literature is rife with examples of antisemitism being utilized for a variety of religious and secular purposes; this utility of antisemitism is especially prominent in the Venerable Bede's writings.

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Bede was an English monk who lived during the seventh and eighth centuries. From the age of seven until his death, he resided at the joint monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow and wrote all his texts from there. Between 720 and 730

C.E., he utilized antisemitism in his homilies to discredit contemporary Judaism and validate English Christianity. He wrote that the Jews "continue to be like a tomb still closed by a stone."[3] Because Bede was a monk, his antisemitism is, unsurprisingly, grounded in religion.[4] For example, his characterization of the Jews speaks to the well-known image of Christ's tomb being closed by a stone, prior to his resurrection.[5] However, Bede's antisemitism was more than the repackaging of religious tropes. While he did not live in the secular world, Bede's writings on the Jews utilize elements of English secular culture. This secular element is intertwined with Christian tropes and ideals—as virtually everything in post-conversion England was—and it takes the basic antisemitic setpieces found in early Christian thought and personalizes them specifically for English culture and attitudes.

In early English culture, tombs and graves carried a variety of complex and sometimes contradictory connotations; in comparing the Jews to a tomb, Bede speaks to the idea of tombs as monuments honoring the past and indicates that Judaism is obsolete. Early English literature, such as the epic poem *Beowulf*, reflects the idea of tombs and barrows standing as monuments to the past, a concept that was most likely shaped by the many Bronze Age burial mounds that dotted the early English landscape. While *Beowulf* was written down about a century after Bede was writing, the poem is based on much earlier influences, and so the attitudes depicted resonate with the attitudes of Bede's contemporary audience. In the poem, tombs and barrows represent what past people and cultures have left behind. Just before Beowulf dies, he states, "The brave in battle will bid a tomb be built/ shining over my pyre on the cliffs by the sea;/ it will be as a monument to my people."[6] While Beowulf's death and the erection of this monument is narrated in present tense, the text makes it clear that the events of the poem happened in the distant past.[7] Thus, a contemporary audience would have understood Beowulf's barrow as one of the markers of a bygone era, a marker that existed to commemorate the existence and accomplishments of a long-gone people group. Outside of the literary realm, early English people would have repeatedly associated tombs and burial monuments with the distant past, as they encountered Bronze Age burial mounds scattered across the landscape—a permanent tribute to a long-gone culture.[8] Thus, in comparing the Jews to a tomb, Bede suggests that there was some glory and merit in the Jewish faith initially—as burial monuments were built to *celebrate* the glory of past cultures—but the Jews are now clinging to that long-dead glory, rather than moving forward into the new, glorious Christian future. Medievalist Kathy Lavezzo notes that Bede was not unequivocally antisemitic about all aspects of Jewishness, but showed respect for Biblical Jewish sanctuaries.[9] Thus, Bede's writings reveal his respect for Biblical Judaism, acknowledging that there was glory to be found in the bygone days of Jewry. However, his writings depict contemporary Jews acting as an outdated monument to the glory of past Jewry instead of embracing the present glory of Christianity.

Furthermore, in comparing Jews to a tomb, Bede associates them with eternal damnation. Early English texts about death and dying suggest that early English Christians had complicated views about the subject; often, their conception of death centered on the eternal destruction sin caused, rather than the end of a body's life. For example, Vercelli Homily IX states that a person can experience three deaths, with the first death being "the man who has been overcome by many sins" and the third death being "those souls who must dwell in hell."[10] This homiletic text demonstrates that conceptions of death frequently meant eternal damnation, rather than physical death, though the two types of death are visually and conceptually linked. Thus, in associating Jews with tombs,

Medieval manuscript illuminated initial showing Bede at work. Source: The British Library Illuminated Manuscripts.

Bede alludes to the ultimate death—damnation in hell—and makes it clear that Jews cannot be understood as anything but damned souls and agents who threaten to bring about the damnation of others. Further, the visceral materialism of imagining Jews as stone tombs highlights the sinful worldliness of their unbelief. Early English Christianity often focused on the importance of spiritualism over materialism. Many medieval texts, including Blickling Homily X, warn readers to "turn away from the affairs of this world"[11] because all worldly materialism is transitory in comparison to eternal life. Bede himself wrote frequently about the importance of forsaking material wealth and turning to God, as illustrated in several stories he tells about saintly figures who forsake their worldly wealth and turn to monastic life to earn eternal life in heaven. So, associating the Jews with worldly materialism, Bede frames them as the antithesis of Christianity. Christians, in contrast, are characterized as "living stones built up, a spiritual house."[12] In contrast to the Jews, who are visually associated with a place of death, Christians are visually associated with a place devoted to life. This imagery of life over death and spirituality over materialism places Judaism and Christianity in stark contrast to each other and validates the superiority of Christianity. This seemingly simple image of a tomb versus a house, then, is loaded with secular and religious implications that construct the Jews as an entirely undesirable Other and use them as the margins to define and exalt English Christianity.

Bede did not limit himself to comparing Jews to tombs; in other homilies, he imagines the Jews as exiles from God, again suggesting the superiority of Christianity through a negative depiction of Judaism. Lavezzo writes that Bede thought, "Contemporary Jews shut themselves away from God through their hardened and resolutely carnal hearts."[13] The concept of exile was central in early English culture. Depictions of secular exile can be found in texts such as *Beowulf*, *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *Christ and Satan*. Thus, it is unsurprising that Bede utilized this concept in his writings, nor is it surprising that he utilized the concept for an antisemitic purpose. Medievalist Leonard H. Frey writes that exile was viewed as "the ultimate in hardships."[14] He explains that one reason a person could become an exile was because they rebelled against their ruler, an idea that resonates with the Christian belief that Jews rebelled against God.[15] Throughout the Bible, Jews are depicted as rebels against God because of their pride or stubbornness. Their label as Christ-killers also contains the idea that they blatantly defied God in killing Jesus Christ. Bede, then, used the secular concept of exile to highlight how the Jews were spiritually

exiled from God, thus putting an abstract, spiritual condition in concrete terms his contemporary readers could understand. Bede's depiction of the Jews as spiritual exiles also builds on a larger tradition of blending the secular concept of exile with the Christian concept of alienation from God. In the Christian poem *Christ and Satan*, Satan is also depicted as an exile because of rebellion against God.[16] Satan states, "I must now set myself/upon the ways of exile, sorrowing, upon these wide paths."[17] This passage demonstrates how, in many early English texts, the language used to describe alienation from God was exceptionally similar to the language used to describe secular exile. Similar language was used in *Beowulf* to describe the monster Grendel's alienation from God: "The other, misshapen,/ marched the exile's path in the form of a man."[18] Thus, Bede marks the Jews as more than ordinary people alienated from God; he places them in the same role as Satan himself and other monsters alienated from God, thereby marking the Jews as monstrous through their spiritual alienation. Even the pagans Bede writes about are not marked as spiritual exiles with the same intensity, demonstrating how Bede's vitriol was reserved solely for the Jews. Further, the idea of Jews as exiles may also be tied to the idea of them being like a tomb. Another reason someone could become an exile was because they were part of a clan that died out, leaving them alone. This condition is depicted in both *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer.* Though Bede does not explicitly suggest that the Jews are exiles because their clan—the Biblical Jew—is dead, it is hardly a stretch to interpret his writings in this light. Bede may have viewed the Jews as exiles, both because they were rebellious and because he thought they were clinging to a dead tradition—a tradition that had left them without a spiritual community to find solace in—rather than converting to and assimilating into the Christian community.

Connected to the concept of exile is imagery of wintry weather, which is another metaphor Bede uses to demonize the Jews. In one of his homilies, Bede writes, "Why did the evangelist trouble to record that it was winter time, except that he wished to indicate by the harshness of the winter winds and storms the hardness of the Jews' unbelief."[19] The comparison of the Jews to wintry weather highlights the common antisemitic conception of Jews as coldhearted, both because of their refusal to accept Christianity and because of their reputation as Christ-killers. Imagery of wintry weather is often linked to imagery of death in medieval texts. For example, one section of *The Wanderer*, an Old English elegy, reads, "Long ago I hid my gold-giving friend/ in the darkness of the earth and went wretched/ winter-sad over the ice- locked waves/ sought, hall-sick, a treasure-giver/ wherever I might find, near or far."[20] In this passage, the wanderer buries his dead lord (the gold-giving friend), an event that is visually and conceptually linked to winter, which the phrases "winter-sad" and "ice-locked waves" demonstrate. In comparing the Jews to wintry weather, Bede again ties contemporary Judaism to the concept of death—the death of Biblical Judaism and the eternal spiritual death that comes with rejecting Christianity. Furthermore, imagery of wintry weather is often connected to the concept of exile. Another Old English elegy, *The Seafarer*, reads, "I, wretched with care, dwelt all winter/ on the ice-cold sea in the path of exile/ deprived of dear kinsmen/ hung with icicles of frost while hail flew in showers."[21] This passage demonstrates that, for early English Christians, wintry weather and exile were visually and conceptually linked; in fact, the language of the elegy constructs winter as the force that keeps the seafarer isolated and exiled, far more than any human social construct does. While a social command may have cast him out of society, the winter works to continually isolate and torment him. The idea of winter perpetuating or highlighting

exile was not reserved solely for texts dealing with literal social exile. Medievalist Thomas Rendall writes that Old English poets also conceptualized spiritual estrangement from God in terms of wintry weather.[22] Thus, Bede associating the Jews with wintry weather ties them back to the concept of spiritual exile from God. However, the strength of Bede's antisemitism is displayed in how he does not merely say the Jews are *like* exiles, stuck in the wintry weather by their refusal to accept eternal spiritual life; instead, he compares the Jews to the wintry weather itself, not only dehumanizing them, but also implying that they are actively contributing to others' alienation from God. Wintry weather would have been one of the biggest threats to survival in early medieval England; thus, in associating the Jews with this threat, Bede strongly Others the Jews and highlights them as an enemy to everything Christians in England value— including their literal and spiritual lives.

The way Bede's writings treat Biblical Jews versus contemporary Jews reveals a tension between conceptualizing the "mythical Jews" versus the "Jew next door." Historian Jonathan Sarna coined these terms, writing about the struggle many people face as they try to reconcile their conception of the stereotypical "mythical Jew" of the Bible with their encounters with real, everyday Jews.[23] Bede's appreciation for the sanctuaries of Biblical Judaism fits neatly into Sarna's concept of the mythical Jew. In Bede's case, these mythical Jews represent virtue, as they created the foundation Christianity would later build on. However, when Bede writes about his conception of the Jew next door—contemporary Jews (who do not even live in his country)—he is far less respectful. Writing on how people relieve these cognitive tensions, Sarna writes that the dissonance can be resolved in four different ways, including suppression,[24] which he defines as "ignoring feelings of dissonance and living with the resulting inconsistency." [25] Bede's writings demonstrate this suppression. However, Bede's suppression may have been ignorance, rather than ignoring the dissonance. As previously discussed, "If…there were Jews in England in Saxon times [the period during which Bede was writing], their numbers could not have been great."[26] Therefore, it is unlikely that Bede, isolated at Wearmouth-Jarrow, ever met a real Jewish person. So, while his works display a clear divide between respecting biblical Jews and denigrating contemporary Judaism, he was probably never forced to confront this dissonance in the same way someone living next to and interacting with a Jew would have to. Beyond being ignorant of the dissonance, Bede's works seem to assume that the divide is rational: biblical Jews were respectable because Christianity had not yet been formed, but after the formation of Christianity, anyone who chose not to convert was clearly hardhearted, bestial, and—worst of all—a threat to those who did accept the Christian religion.

Bede's writings raise a question of why he decried Judaism so vehemently, since, given that they did not live in England, they did not present a direct physical or political threat to the English people. Further, Jews could not truly be a pervasive *spiritual* threat, as they were never in contact with English Christians. Realistically, the bigger threat to Christianity during this period was continuing paganism that resisted conversion efforts and, a few years later, pagan Viking raiders, who often sacked monasteries and murdered clerics. One way to understand Bede's apparent hatred for Jews and Judaism lies in understanding his goals as a monk. As a Christian monk writing soon after the English conversion to Christianity, one of Bede's main goals was to convince his audience—both in England and abroad—of the legitimacy of English Christianity. Thus, framing Christianity in contrast to the Jewish Other is one way his writings work to legitimate

English Christianity. Historian Linda Colley writes, "Men and women decide who they are by reference to who and what they are not. Once confronted with an obviously alien 'Them,' an otherwise diverse community can become a reassuring or merely desperate 'Us'."[27] In this way, Bede's Othering of the Jews highlights the supposed superiority of Christianity and draws boundaries around Christianity as a comforting in-group. Because the Jews serve a necessary function, then, Bede's writings never call for their destruction or even advocate very strongly for their conversion; instead, they illustrate how Judaism is diametrically opposed to Christianity, thereby emphasizing the validity and desirability of Christianity in the process.

Several centuries after Bede, a cleric named Gerald of Wales incorporated antisemitism into his writings for his Norman patron, Henry II of England. Gerald hoped to be appointed bishop of St. Davids in Wales, so he was deeply invested in securing the king's favor. Thus, his use of antisemitism is politically motivated and meant to demonize the Britons (Welsh) Henry II was attempting to subjugate. In his *Speculum Ecclesiae*, he scorns how the Britons expect King Arthur to return and fight for them, stating, "They really expect him [Arthur] to come back, just as the Jews, led astray by even greater stupidity, misfortune, and misplaced faith, really expect their Messiah to return."[28] This passage is part of a much larger piece of anti-Welsh propaganda, intended to aid Henry II in his campaign to conquer Wales and subjugate the Welsh people. As Henry II's forces struggled with the Welsh, the Welsh rallied around the legend of King Arthur, claiming that he would return to lead them to victory.[29] Gerald of Wales did his best to destroy Welsh morale by undermining the Welsh people's faith in Arthur's return. Building on the distaste for the Jewish religion, found in works like Bede's, Gerald compares the Welsh to the Jewish Other to augment the inferior identity assigned to the Welsh.

Gerald's writing demonstrates two important things. First, it suggests that, by this period, antisemitism was so widespread in England that an antisemitic stereotype could be included in a text without any further explanation, and readers would still understand it. Jews were living in England during the time Gerald was writing, as the Normans invited the Jews into England after the conquest of 1066. So, English antisemitic attitudes were no longer directed at a distant people group; now they were directed at individuals who lived alongside Gerald of Wales—and this antisemitic rhetoric often fueled the flames of much more violent antisemitic actions. This text also demonstrates how far antisemitic attitudes had spread beyond the religious sphere. Just like Bede's writings, this text alludes to the belief that Christianity is the one true religion, but, unlike Bede's writings, the goal of the antisemitic rhetoric is political in nature, rather than religious. Second, this text demonstrates a principle that medievalist Geraldine Heng discusses in her book on race in the Middle Ages: namely that, "Jews functioned as the benchmark by which racial others were defined, measured, scaled, and assessed."[30] Though Gerald is not making a point about race, he does use the Jews as a benchmark to measure the transgressive beliefs of the Welsh. Further, Gerald's text shows how Othering the Jews had become politically expedient, rather than just religiously useful. I would argue that the political usefulness of demonizing the Jews developed as the Jews moved into England, gaining power and influence. When they did not live in England, their usefulness as an Other remained largely ideological; Jews and Judaism as a *concept* was something Christian writers could effectively use to legitimate Christianity. However, when the Jews joined English society, rhetoric against them became more concrete and more explicitly political—not just

French medieval manuscript depicting the crucifixion of Christ. Source: The British Library Illuminated Manuscripts.

as a way of disempowering other social groups, such as the Welsh, but also as an attempt to halt the growing social and economic power of the Jews. Thus, Gerald belittles the Jews, not just to invalidate the Welsh cause, but also to encourage and affect the social disempowerment of the Jews.

Across the English Channel, French poet Chrétien de Troyes—a moniker that simply means "a Christian from Troyes" and, I would argue, positions his works as explicitly religious—also included antisemitic stereotypes in a grail narrative titled *Perceval: The Story of the Grail*. Like Gerald of Wales, Chrétien's religiously-charged antisemitism was influenced by politics, notably, the Crusades. Chrétien's first mention of the Jews, in a speech from a mother to her knightly son, states that Jesus "suffered at the hands of the Jews—/betrayed and falsely judged."[31] The next mention of the Jews comes from a Christian knight who, on Easter, gives a speech about the crucifixion. He states, "The Jews, in their wicked jealousy/ (They ought to be killed like dogs!)/ setting Him high on the Cross,/ Harmed themselves but helped us,/ For they were lost, and we/ Were saved."[32] Both of these invectives against the Jews are religiously charged, citing the Jewish deicide as the grievance that fuels antisemitic hatred. These passages also highlight the Jew as an Other, one that is characterized by a loss of salvation, in counterpoint to Christians *gaining* salvation. Within this text, Chretien illustrates how the Jewish Other could be used for Christian salvation, as his knight, Perceval, who has lost his memory and forgotten God, is brought back to Christianity through his hatred for the Jews and his remembrance of the deicide. Thus, the narrative suggests that Jews, as an Other, continue to play a role in Christian salvation: through being enemies of Christianity, they galvanize Christians to remain faithful and seek eternal life. Though Chretien's characters express hatred for the Jews, his narrative structure also implicitly acknowledges the necessity of the Jews for Christian identity formation and salvation.

However, this text also identifies the Jews as a threat and calls for the violent mitigation of that threat. While the narrative constructs the Jewish Other as an important tool for Christian salvation, it also underscores the threatening nature of the Other and suggests that mitigating that threat contributes to Christian salvation far more than merely acknowledging it or allowing it to grow. When read in the context of the Crusades, this call for violent action suddenly becomes understandable. Chrétien wrote this narrative for Count Philip of Flanders, who was a crusader knight.[33] According to military historian John D. Hosler, "Philip was prone to bouts of extreme cruelty and violence"[34]—even

against his own people. During the First Crusade, he expanded this pattern of violence, arriving "with great promise (and a considerable military force) at Acre in the Holy Land in August of 1177."[35] Crusades historian Malcolm Barber writes that he brought "more resources than any other French baron and perhaps even than the monarchy."[36] Crusading was incredibly important to Phillip because he saw it as a way to prove his faith, reinforce his Christian identity, and venerate the Christian religion. In a letter to Hildegard of Bingen, a Benedictine abbess, he wrote that he wished to "exalt the name of Christianity…and to bring low the terrible savagery of the Saracens."[37] Violence through the Crusades, then, was one way to achieve his religious goals. Thus, in creating a character who calls for the mass murder of the Jews, Chrétien reflects the attitudes and actions of his patron: he highlights a knightly desire to reinforce or prove Christian identity and identifies violent action against a religious Other as one way to reinforce this identity. His text, therefore, condones Philip's own actions in the pursuit of being a better Christian.

Further, Chretien wrote *Perceval* just after the 1187 fall of Jerusalem, so the First Crusade as a whole also forms "an important backdrop for this material."[38] During the First Crusade, Christians perpetuated a great deal of violence against the Jews they encountered. While the official stance of the Catholic Church was toleration towards Jews,[39] anti-Jewish violence occurred even before the First Crusade.[40] For example, one medieval chronicler, Albert of Aix, wrote about how crusaders in the kingdom of Lorraine (a French holding), "arose in a spirit of cruelty against the Jewish people scattered throughout all the cities and slaughtered them cruelly […] asserting it to be the beginning of their expedition and of their duty against the enemies of the Christian faith."[41] Though Chrétien was not alive when the violence in Lorraine occurred, it arguably influenced his work, as it set the stage

> **"Thus, we see how Chrétien's text reflects the attitudes of the day by mirroring the way social definitions of acceptable (and expected) knighthood had expanded to include new types of socially-sanctioned violence."**

for the antisemitism that grew exponentially during the First Crusade and marked France as a region that was distinctly dangerous for Jews. Further, the figures most involved in propagating antisemitic persecution were "the bishop of Limoges, the king of France, [and] the duke of Normandy."[42] The attitudes and actions of these three French leaders would have influenced the material French writers like Chretien created during this period, as these writers required the approval and patronage of the nobility. Any writer who wished to retain their patronage (as Chrétien did) would have to promote the antisemitic attitudes of those in power and even condone their antisemitic actions. Thus, Chrétien's writing reflects not only the attitudes of Count Phillip, but also broader French attitudes regarding the Jews leading up to and in the wake of the First Crusade.

Chretien's suggestion (if such a strongly-worded statement should be called a suggestion) that the Jews should be killed like dogs demonstrates how those who committed violence against the Jews did not see them as truly human. Othering is virtually always dehumanizing, so the portrayal of Jews as animalistic is unsurprising (Bede also compared the Jews to wild animals[43]), but it becomes particularly notable when

considered in conjunction with the call to violence. While calling for violence against humans—no matter how alien they may seem—would probably cause moral quandaries, especially for knights claiming to be Christian, calling for violence against an inhuman threat would not cause the same moral conflict. In his book *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination*, psychologist Sam Keen highlights the idea that dehumanizing an enemy (or Other) makes virtually any level of violence possible, stating, "As a rule, human beings do not kill other human beings [...] A variety of dehumanizing faces is superimposed over the enemy to allow him to be killed without guilt."[44] This theory maps exceptionally well onto Chretien's writing. If Chretien can convince his audience (and perhaps himself) that the Jews are not humans, but the ultimate evil—the killers of Christ and the eternal enemy of Christianity—then any violence propagated against them during the First Crusade or in the future becomes much easier to justify. This justification, then, would prevent any internal conflict or cognitive dissonance for knights like Phillip of Flanders, who was part of that violence.

Further, Chretien's text grapples with the common question of what it means to be a good knight and places antisemitic violence at the center of his response. In many medieval texts confession is an integral part of a knight's life; in these stories, knights go to confession when they wished to absolve themselves of sins that might harm their reputations or when they wish to remove moral roadblocks that could prevent them from constructing the ideal knightly identity. Thus, confession and absolution served the crucial social function of reinforcing knightly identities through symbolically removing "stains" that would diminish that identity. In a similar manner, Chrétien's antisemitic diatribe absolves both Chrétien's patron and any crusading knights who committed antisemitic violence of a possible moral stain that might

Medieval manuscript depicting the death of St. Robert of Bury, a young boy who was allegedly murdered by Jews in 1181.Wikimedia Commons.

undermine their knightly identities. The diatribe frames anti-Jewish violence as not just acceptable, but also *expected* of any good Christian knight. Thus, Chretien's language moves beyond absolution to argue that committing violence—particularly antisemitic violence—is crucial to being an ideal Christian knight. The First Crusade (and all subsequent Crusades) forced people across Europe to interrogate what it meant to be a good Christian and, specifically, what it meant to be a good knight. Many texts written during and after the Crusades question what knightly ideal men should strive to live up to. In his text, Chrétien's antisemitism outlines its own knightly ideal: that good Christian knights should destroy the threatening Jewish Other through violence. Thus, a knight who has lost his memory and subsequently lost his sense of

knightly identity is brought back to that identity through a call to do violence against the Jews—an act that promises to help him live up to the Christian ideal of knighthood once more. Thus, we see how Chrétien's text reflects the attitudes of the day by mirroring the way social definitions of acceptable (and expected) knighthood had expanded to include new types of socially-sanctioned violence.

About a century after Chretien composed Perceval, using antisemitism to grapple with questions of religious identity, the people of England composed "Hugh of Lincoln" to grapple with anxieties about the Jews in English political and social spaces. The Anglo-Norman ballad "Hugh of Lincoln" was composed between 1255 and 1272, [45] identifying the Jews of England as a threat to the Christian English and playing out the fantasy of mitigating this threat. The ballad also presents the Jews of England as an Other and grapples with how Christian identity is constituted and even strengthened through Jewish aggression. This ballad is one of the first written versions of the Jewish blood libel story, though it is most likely based on a much older oral tradition. Blood libel is "the false allegation that Jews used the blood of non-Jewish, usually Christian children, for ritual purposes."[46] The earliest European accusation of blood libel occurred in 1144, when the Jews of Norwich, England were accused of kidnapping and torturing a young boy the same way Christ was tortured.[47] Hugh of Lincoln's ballad merges both the religious and hagiographical elements seen in earlier versions of the blood libel story with allusions to real political and historical developments, such as the reign of King Henry, making the political purpose of this story particularly critical to examine and understand.

This ballad overwhelmingly suggests that the Jews are a threat to English Christians—not just physically, but also socially and politically. In this text, the Jews threaten to silence the Christian voice—literally and socially—and assert a Jewish voice over the Christian one. In the 368 lines of this ballad, the Christian characters get only forty-five lines of dialogue. In contrast, the Jewish characters (who are much less numerous than the many Christian characters) dominate over sixty-four lines of dialogue. One Jew alone speaks for eight unbroken stanzas, whereas a Christian speech never lasts for more than a stanza or two. Furthermore, the text is interwoven with examples of Christians being rendered speechless, while the Jews speak freely. For example, when the Jews are preparing to kill Hugh, the youthful blood libel victim, the text states, "The wicked Jewes of Lincolne *cried*, / With *one consent*, 'Whatere betide/ Come let the ladde be crucified.'"[48] This passage highlights a mob of Jews speaking with a loud, powerful, and united voice. This united voice stands in contrast to the speeches Christians have made thus far, where each Christian always speaks alone. So, the text juxtaposes singular Christian voices that are powerless to prevent evil against a powerful mass of Jewish voices that work in concord to commit evil and drown out the paucity of Christian voices. A few lines later, when describing Hugh, the text states, "The infant trembled from fote [foot] to head/ At the sight, bot [but] never a word be said."[49] And, just before Hugh dies, the text states, "No words but these he was herde [heard] to saye."[50] These two passages highlight Hugh's silence; even at the height of his suffering, his voice is never heard. While the Jews around Hugh discuss their evil deeds, the Christian child is entirely robbed of his voice. Once again, Jewish voices are highlighted in contrast to the lack of a Christian voice. Finally, Hugh is permanently silenced by death, a silencing that is highlighted when the Jews state, "The *silent* erthe shal our secret keep."[51] In this passage, the silent ground Hugh is concealed in further emphasizes Hugh's total lack of a voice. Again, the Jews—who even guide the narrative about Hugh's silence—have a prominent voice,

> **The intimate link between Jewish greed and Jewish violence, going all the way back to Christ's killing, critiques how Jews in England had been allowed to run the English financial engines.**

while silence and Christianity are conceptually linked. Even the brutal murder of a Christian child becomes a secret that is shrouded in silence. Hugh's permanent silence, then, can be read as a metaphor for the Christian community as a whole being silenced—perhaps permanently—by Jewish power and Jewish voices, an anxiety that is prevalent throughout the entirety of this text. Even the Christian *king* is given a marginal voice compared to the Jews; in one instance, the text states, "King Henrie said, and his words were few."[52] This line follows eight stanzas of Jopin the Jew speaking, placing the verbosity of the Jews in stark contrast to how little Christians—even the most powerful one in England—speak or are allowed a voice. In placing the King's limited lines next to Jopin's eight stanzas, the ballad demonstrates the belief that even an ordinary Jew has a more influential social voice than the most powerful Christian in England. This ballad would have been sung communally before it was written down, an oral tradition which the first line of the text highlights: "You shall *heare* a good song, if you *listen* to mee"[53] This opening line and the sung nature of the ballad more generally emphasize themes of speaking, and listening—who gets to speak and who must listen, whose voice is stolen and whose is raised? While the narrator of the ballad is clearly Christian (and thus the Christian voice ultimately triumphs), the narrative clearly expresses the fear that Christians are losing or have already lost their voices and, by extension, social influence to Jews who are taking power.

The fear of Jewish voices drowning out Christian voices becomes understandable when viewed in a political context. Though the Jews were the ones robbed of a voice again and again during this period, Christian anxieties that Jews would eclipse their voices do make sense, given that the Jews worked for those in power. The Normans invited the Jews into England, and they utilized the Jews as debt/tax collectors and money lenders to bring capital into their coffers.[54] The Jews' financial position made the common people of England resent and fear them. Just a few decades before Hugh's ballad was recorded, this resentment exploded into an anti-Jewish riot in York, England. During this riot, "the city's entire Jewish population was massacred,"[55] demonstrating the vitriolic strength of Christian resentment against the Jews. Further, prior to the creation of this ballad, the Christians of England watched the Normans greatly diminish their social voice. When the Normans took over England, the language the English people had written, spoken, and even worshiped in for centuries was replaced by Norman French. Though many of the English common people persisted in using English to communicate with each other, the fact that this ballad is written in Anglo-*Norman*, rather than pure English, speaks to just how much French subsumed their native language. It is unsurprising, then, that common English Christians feared losing their voice to the Jews, as well as the Normans. Jews were incredibly visible in England during this period. Heng writes that they intermingled with Christians "in neighborhoods, markets, fairs, towns, and cities."[56] Further, many became quite successful and powerful as a result of their financial alliance with the Normans. Heng states that

"on a per capita basis, the community of English Jews has been identified as the wealthiest among all the countries of northern Europe."[57] This prosperity made the Jews—particularly Jews with a great deal of social power—even more visible and made many English Christians feel uneasy, as well as resentful. Jews had been constructed as a threat since the days of Bede and before—a threat to Christianity, a threat to national identity, and a threat to salvation. And, as English Christians watched the Jews become increasingly more prominent, they came to understand them as a financial, political, and physical threat—one that threatened to erase their voices and identities entirely.

Though the ballad focuses on the Jews as killers, it ties their homicidal tendencies to their greed, again highlighting English concerns over their financial foothold in England. For example, the text tells us that the Jews who plotted Hugh's murder were "the richest in all the land."[58] Further, the justification Jopin offers for the murder reads, "For thirty peeces,--like Jhesus of old—/ The child himself has freely sold."[59] Jopin adds, "My lawful purchase he [Hugh] will be."[60] In these lines, the focus on monetary gain, paired with homicidal desires that hearken back to the Jewish killing of Christ, highlights how Jewish access to wealth was viewed as a threat. By calling Hugh his "lawful purchase," Jopin uses money to legitimize his murder, thus depicting wealthy Jews as mercenary enough to place a price on everything, even human life. Furthermore, these lines demonstrate Christian worries that the Jews used their monetary connections to legally legitimate their atrocities. The intimate link between Jewish greed and Jewish violence, going all the way back to Christ's killing, critiques how Jews in England had been allowed to run the English financial engines. This critique suggests that a people group who are willing to place a price on a Christian child's life should never be given social power or control the financial engines of England.

This ballad also expresses anxieties about the relationship between the Norman overlords and the English common people through its critique of the Jews. Unlike the writings of Bede, Gerald, and Chretien, this text was not created for a noble patron or intended to flatter nobility. A ballad is a folk song,[61] which means that it is composed by and for common people, and it addresses their desires and concerns. During the 1200s, English commoners were often concerned about their relationship with their Norman overlords. Throughout much of the post- conquest period, the Norman relationship with the English people was fraught with tension. The Normans imported their own language to England, forcing English to "go underground" for centuries. They cemented the feudal system in England, placing most of the English people at the bottom of the feudal hierarchy as servants and peasant laborers. Furthermore, they often sought to control the English people through violence.[62] The *Peterborough Chronicle,* an English historical record that began before the Conquest and continued after, recorded many of the atrocities the English people suffered at the hands of the Normans, thereby demonstrating the fear and hatred the English felt towards their overlords. This ballad, then, depicts the tensions between the English and the Normans by demonizing the Jews, whom the Normans had invited in and shared a close working relationship with. The narrative suggests that in a manner similar to how the Normans terrorized the English, the Jews also terrorized the English people, often with the Norman's approval.

In particular, this ballad contains an implicit critique of the Norman king by tying him to the Jewish people. Throughout the text, the implication that King Henry is either blind to the Jewish threat, and is thus an incompetent ruler, or is overly sympathetic to them, to the detriment of his Christian English

subjects, is present. For example, when Hugh's mother tells the king that the Jews have her son, the text states, "He replied to her words respecting the youth/… 'By the pitie of God, an this tale be sooth,/ These Jewes of Lincolne shal die withont ruth;/ But if the story falshode be,/ The Jewes you wrong most grevouslie,/ Then by Sanct [Saint] Edouard men shal see,/ Thyself the punishment shalte drie [You will experience their punishment]."[63] In this passage, the French king of England demonstrates a reluctance to believe Hugh's Christian mother, though the narrative establishes that she is more insightful than those around her. In one example of her insight, she knows that the Jews are up to some nefarious scheme long before anyone takes her claims seriously. Although the king is a Christian—and should thus side with the Christian woman appealing to him—he is ambivalent, almost taking the side of the Jews. He promises to investigate, but he never follows up on that promise. Furthermore, he threatens to punish Hugh's mother if she spoke in error, thereby slandering the Jews. In threatening Hugh's mother with punishment, the king operates as though the Jews have a legal right to be protected from defamation, which was not the case during this period. Geraldine Heng writes that even the Jews' rights to sue or be protected from mob violence were often ignored, and they certainly were not protected from malicious slander.[64] So, in behaving as though the Jews have the same legal rights as Christian subjects, King Henry awards the Jews a huge de facto right and strips his Christian subject of her de jure rights. The criticism of the king embedded within the ballad reflects longstanding Norman-English political tensions, while antisemitism provides a particularly visceral way to convey these critiques. Rather than critiquing the misrule of the Normans by telling a story about *their* brutality or corruption, the ballad highlights Norman misrule through making a Norman ruler sympathetic to and even willing to assist the Jews at the expense of the Christian English subjects.

This text, like Chrétien's grail narrative, also envisions mitigating the Jewish threat through violence. At the end of the ballad, the text narrates how Jopin was, "Dragged with strong horses, wel shoed and wel fed/ Til his bodie is dead, dead, dead!"[65] After he dies, his body is displayed as a warning to show "what the murderer gets for his pains."[66] The line describing Jopin's death illustrates a disconcerting amount of vitriol and an explicit desire to see Jopin, who may represent *all* Jews, die violently. Just like Chretien's text, the ballad paints this killing as acceptable and entirely expected, given what we know about Jopin's greed-fueled crimes. However, the other Jews—who committed the murder with Jopin—get away without punishment. Thus, the text creates the sense that justice was meted out unfairly and overly lightly and ends the story with a lack of resolution. The text calls for the Jewish threat to be mitigated, but it also reflects a historical moment when the Jewish threat was *not* being mitigated because the Jews worked for the king. Though the Jews were expelled from England just a few decades later (which, arguably, was an attempt to mitigate the Jewish threat), expulsion was far from the minds of Norman rulers when this ballad was recorded. So, while the text imagines an "ideal solution"—killing the Jews and thereby saving the Christians—it also depicts the less ideal reality—the ruler of England allowing the Jews to escape without punishment. Further, it hints at the resentment that came with that reality. By depicting this unpleasant reality, the text communicates contemporary English anxieties, while also containing a tacit call for action—a call for better leadership, and for utilizing violence to mitigate the Jewish threat.

Antisemitism did not begin or end during the Middle Ages. While it is tempting to call the stereotypes and attitudes examined in this paper purely medieval, none of these

stereotypes are a unique product of the Middle Ages. Some were first recorded then, but all build on much older ideas and concerns—and these attitudes live on in our present day. This distinction is important because, when discussing oppressive attitudes that are seemingly out-of-place in an ostensibly "progressive" world, people often attach the label "medieval" to them. This label presumes that barbarism arose and is contained within the Middle Ages. On this topic, medievalists Amy Kaufman and Paul Sturtevant write, "If we believe witch trials are one of the defining features of the Middle Ages, we can imagine that "civilized" cultures left torture and religious persecution behind in the Dark Ages."[67] In the same vein, if we assume that many antisemitic stereotypes arose during the Middle Ages as a result of some backwards "medieval" mindset, we miss both the much older history of antisemitism and how antisemitism is alive and thriving today because it is still useful and frequently utilized. So, understanding medieval antisemitism is not a comforting exercise in distancing ourselves from people of the past. Instead, it forces us to recognize just how similar we often are to medieval people, how we are often just as bigoted, just as suspicious, and just as quick to Other those who seem unlike us. In most regards, we are not more advanced than the people of medieval England. We are not less prejudiced or significantly more diverse. We still tell our own antisemitic tales and call them history. Examining medieval antisemitism, then, should never give us a sense of superiority. But, in understanding how these mindsets originated, why they developed, and what influenced them, we are better equipped to understand how antisemitism wove itself into the fabric of our present-day communities. And through gaining that knowledge, we are better equipped to combat and destroy those attitudes for future generations.

ENDNOTES

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