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MATTHEW PARIS'S *CHRONICA MAJORA* AND ALLEGATIONS OF JEWISH RITUAL MURDER

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Synopsis:

Robert Nisbet recognized Matthew Paris as “admittedly one of the greatest historians, if not the greatest in his day.” Matthew provided “the most detailed record of events unparalleled in English medieval history” from 1236-1259. Within the chronicle, allegations of Jewish ritual murder rested alongside classical sources in various languages, including Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew.

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Allegations of Jewish ritual murder in medieval European chronicles rested alongside classical sources in various languages, including Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew. Hartmann Schedel's *Weltchronik 1493* (2001) depicted Simon of Trent's alleged murder by the local Jewish community in 1475 in a manner that mirrored alleged Jewish ritual murders in England in 1144 and 1255.¹ Between 1144 and 1493, allegations of Jewish ritual murder spread and flourished. Matthew Paris's *Chronica Majora* emerged at historical crossroads where allegations of Jewish ritual murder spread beyond England and into continental Europe. Before the century finished in 1290, England had expelled its Jewish population inspiring many regions on the continent to follow suit in the coming years.²

In offering a written record, chroniclers bridged narrative history from ancient times (largely Biblical) with contemporary culture, history, society, politics and nascent legal systems, employed, in turn, by both church and state in the High Middle Ages. Interspersed into the chronicles and early law codes, folklore, regional theological disputes, triglossic exchanges, and local history resonate nuanced interests. Given the relative paucity of original documents, chronicles often serve as our only primary sources despite their agendas. Mississippi State University's Repertorium Chronicarum provides access to many of these online.³ Distressingly mono-causal, Galbert of Bruges (d. 1134) interpreted the political chaos of the twelfth-century century as opening with the pending dynastic crises and the assassination of Charles the Good, Count of Flanders, in 1127.⁴ However, chronicles rarely addressed causation, motive, or even anything particularly Christian.⁵ Otto of Freising (1114-1158) as chronicler fits this model perfectly.⁶ On the other hand, within Toledo, Abraham ibn Daud (1110-1180) defended Rabbinism against Karaism (and indirectly against Islam and Christianity) in his chronicle as anchored in objective historical (Jewish and non-Jewish) sources.⁷ Centuries later, Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) stepped beyond chronicling into selecting historical examples from Greek and Roman history as evidence of natural law governing war and peace between states.⁸

Contemporary historians engage the discipline along much the same lines as found in popular histories and historians, including Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1789), Peter Massie's *Nicholas and Alexandra* (1985), and Barbara Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror* (1978), which all display tendencies medieval chroniclers employed with comparable effect.⁹ Embodying an alternative approach, Carlo Ginzburg and Erich Auerbach probed historical accounts for accuracy in pursuit of the pulse of injustice. Ginzburg and Auerbach isolated authentic historical narratives, avoided formal universal claims extending beyond the event in question, but in a manner not that dissimilar to medieval hagiographies and ritual murder (blood libel) allegations against the Jews.¹⁰ Our primary twelfth-century subject, Matthew Paris, according to Robert Nisbet, deserves recognition as “admittedly one of the greatest historians, if not the greatest in his day.”¹¹

As the first step in approaching as allegations of Jewish ritual murder a teaching tool, one should review the blood libel allegations from 1255 preserved in Paris's *Chronica Majora*: "In this same year, about the time of the festival of the apostles Peter and Paul [July 27], the Jews of Lincoln stole a boy of eight years of age, whose name was Hugh; and, having shut him up in a room quite out of the way, where they fed him on milk and other childish nourishment, they sent to almost all the cities of England where the Jews lived, and summoned some of their sect from each city to be present at a sacrifice to take place at Lincoln; for they had, as they stated, a boy hidden for the purpose of being crucified. In accordance with the summons, a great many of them came to Lincoln, and on assembling, they at once appointed a Jew of Lincoln as judge, to take the place of Pilate, by whose sentence, and with the concurrence of all, the boy was subjected to divers [sic] tortures. They beat him till blood flowed and he was quite livid, they crowned him with thorns, derided him, and spat upon him. Moreover, he was pierced by each of them with a wood knife, was made to drink gall, was overwhelmed with approaches and blasphemies, and was repeatedly called Jesus the false prophet by his tormentors, who surrounded him, grinding and gnashing their teeth. After tormenting him in divers [sic] ways, they crucified him, and pierced him to the heart with a lance. After the boy had expired, they took his body down from the cross and disembowelled [sic] it; for what reason we do not know, but it was asserted to be for the purpose of practising [sic] magical operations. The boy's mother had been for some days diligently seeking after her absent son, and having been told by the neighbours [sic] that they had last seen him playing with some Jewish boys of his own age, and entering the house of one of that sect, she suddenly made her way into that house, and saw the body of the child in a well, into which it had been thrown. The bailiffs of the city having then been cautiously assembled, the body was found and withdrawn from the well, and then an extraordinary sight was presented to the people, whilst the mother of the child by her cries and lamentations excited the grief and compassion of all the citizens who had flocked together to that place. There was present at this scene one John of Lexington, a man of learning, prudent and discreet, and he thus addressed the people : "We have already learned," said he, " that the Jews have not hesitated to attempt such proceedings as a reproach and taunt to our Lord Jesus Christ, who was crucified;" then addressing a Jew who had been seized upon, and the one whose house the boy had gone into whilst at play, and who was therefore an object of greater suspicion than the others, he said to him: " Wretched man, do you not know that a speedy death awaits you? Not all the gold of England will avail to ransom you, and save you from your fate. However, I will tell you, undeserving as you are, how you may preserve your life and prevent your limbs from being mutilated. Both of these I will guarantee to you, if you will without fear or hesitation disclose to me, without any falsehood, all that has happened on this occasion." The Jew, whose name was Copin, thinking he had found a means of escape, then said, "My lord John, if by your deeds you will repay me for my statements, I will reveal wonderful things to you." Then, being urged on and encouraged by the eloquence of John to do so, he continued: "What the Christians say is true; for almost every year the Jews crucify a boy as an insult to the name of Jesus. But one is not found every year, for they only carry on these proceedings privately, and in out of the way places. This boy Hugh, however, our Jews crucified without mercy, and after he was dead, and when they wished to hide his corpse, considering the body of a child useless to draw an augury from (for which purpose they had disembowelled [sic] it), they could not hide it under the ground as they wished to do ; for in the morning, when they thought it was hidden from sight, the earth vomited it forth, and the corpse appeared unburied above ground; which circumstance struck the Jews with horror. Finally, it was thrown into a well; but even there it could not be kept

from sight, for the mother of the child, searching into all these misdeeds, discovered the body of the child and informed the bailiffs." After hearing these disclosures, John detained the Jew in close confinement. When these circumstances came to the knowledge of the canons of the cathedral church of Lincoln, they asked for the body of the child, which was given to them; and after it had been shown as a sight to an immense number of people, it was honourably [sic] buried in the church of Lincoln, as if it had been the corpse of a precious martyr. It should be known that the Jews had kept the boy for ten days, feeding him on milk all that time, so that during life he endured many kinds of torments. When the king, on his return from the north of England, was informed of this occurrence, he reproached John for having promised life and limb to such a wicked being; which he had no right to do; for a blasphemous and murderer like him deserved to die many times over. When the guilty man saw that unavoidable punishment was impending over him, he said, "My death is imminent, nor can John aid, or save me from perishing: now I will tell all of you the truth. Almost all the Jews of England agreed to the murder of this boy, of which they (the Jews) are accused; and from almost every city of England in which Jews dwell, some of that sect were selected and summoned to be present at the sacrifice of him, as at a paschal offering." After he had given utterance to these words and to other ravings, he was tied to a horse's tail and dragged to the gallows, where he was delivered over body and soul to the evil spirits of the air. The rest of the Jews who had participated in this crime, to the number of ninety-one, were carried to London in carts, and consigned to close imprisonment; and if they were perchance pitied by any Christians, they did not excite any tears of compassion amongst the Christians [see endnote], their rivals.¹²

As can be gleaned from this text, Matthew Paris's *Chronica Majora* serves as the ultimate crime scene. As a hermeneutic exercise, means, motive, and opportunity all raise numerous serious questions: What were the accusations? How did the charge of murder fit into existing legal practice? Did Matthew Paris make the story up? What evidence existed? Can one prove the accusations were false? Why place the blood libel in the *Chronica Majora* at all? Who else contributed to this work? Did crusaders and the Crusades set the stage?¹³ What sources might have been used in composing his account? How does the blood libel intersect with European ideas of demons? Christian mysticism? What did the historians, namely Ordericus Vitalis and William of Malmesbury, report? What of the writings of Peter of Blois?¹⁴ What else transpired about that same time? Who benefited from his account? What were the fiscal implications? What about the possible influence of Welsh mythology or the lingering legacy of the Danes?¹⁵ How did Jews fit into Angevin England?¹⁶ Into the England of King Stephen? King Henry III? What long-term consequences resulted? How much do we really know and how much is simply conjecture? Was the story credible? How did ecclesiastical authorities respond? These questions quickly reach beyond the *Chronica Majora* proper into legal sources, politics, people, literature, and more. Chroniclers intended their work to be exhaustive and the evidence streams from their writing. In this case, Matthew Paris's style of writing suggests a more refined audience, avoiding popular obscenities used in the medieval times.¹⁷

Antonia Gransden's *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to c. 1307* (1974) remains the best book on English chroniclers. Following Gransden, Matthew Paris lacked William of Malmesbury's "mental acumen" and the Venerable Bede's "wisdom." With St. Albans in close proximity to London, Matthew benefited from the extensive literary and official sources in his region. King Henry III and a host of highly placed nobles and church figures counted among his

contacts. Matthew's primary contribution to the *Chronica Majora* is limited to the years 1236-1259. Matthew probably used texts unfamiliar to Roger of Wendover, including an "authentic text of Magna Carta," and others lost over time. But while providing "the most detailed record of events in unparalleled in English medieval history," Matthew's "almost unlimited curiosity" lacked the critical faculty for assessing his sources. At heart, Matthew lived the life of a Cistercian monk, whose "panacea for the ills of his times was to limit royal and papal power."¹⁸ Matthew Paris's England allowed French and English in oral legal proceedings whereas legal documents also bore the marks of Norman French and Church Latin. Alongside a rudimentary jury system, oral custom and tradition claimed an authoritative nexus to the evidence presented in local courts and confirmed under oath. Applied to society, chronicles outlined social and legal relationships, understood *not* in terms of the individual but the *group* with which they identified. Jews and Danes constituted two of those groups. In 1066, William the Conqueror allowed the Jews of Rouen into his new capital, London, and then throughout his realm, where they largely remained until expelled in 1290. In addition, the Danish and Norse influence in the North and East connected English with Scandinavian, Baltic and German trade routes. England's Norman and Angevin kings countered invasions from the North with brutal invasions of their own. Ritual murder (blood libel) allegations against the Jews begin in 1144, according to Thomas of Monmouth. Popular hatred, monastic houses massively indebted to Jewish lenders, and legends of "boy-martyrdoms" unleashed "massacring, burning, and plundering" in London, Lincoln, Norwich, and then York. Jews perished by the hundreds.¹⁹ Yet that same year, civil war during King Stephen's reign devolved into a savage chaos, generating virtually mythical accounts of atrocities perpetrated by Geoffrey of Mandeville's troops against women and children. As for the Jews, chroniclers tended to wait until the blood libel allegations of 1255 before characterizing Jews as a mysterious and dangerous *other*. The *Chronica Majora* is itself evidence of the transformation of the blood libel myth into a fact of history.²⁰

An English Benedictine monk, historian, and manuscript illustrator, Matthew Paris (1195-1259) observed the events of his age up close. Beginning in 1217, Matthew Paris resided at St. Albans in Hertfordshire, England (north of London), where from 1235 until 1259 he extended the chronicle *Flores Historiarum* of Roger of Wendover. St. Alban's fourth great chronicler, William de Rishanger (1250-1320), would extend the work to 1273. Within this work, we find the account of the reign of Henry III, the death of so-called Little Saint Hugh of Lincoln on August 27, 1255, and the ensuing blood libel against the Jews. In its final form, the *Chronica Majora* provided readers with a history of England from 1066 to 1273. Its third part, however, is better known as the *Historia Anglorum*.²¹ The *Historia Anglorum* appeared in print in 1571 in Paris and later in London in 1640. It opened doors to interpreting the place of Jews in English history in the twelfth-century and thirteenth-century centuries and especially in sustaining the legacy of blood libel allegations into the seventeenth-century century. What we do not find, however, is any reference to William of Norwich, who had allegedly been crucified by Jews in 1144 and whose history provided a foundation for the subsequent story of Hugh of Lincoln in 1255, which we do find.

Matthew Paris's *Historia Anglorum* offered no reference to blood libel accusations in the death of William of Norwich in 1144 suggesting Thomas of Monmouth's account composed in the 1150s lacked credibility in the eyes of Roger of Wendover (died 1236, Buckinghamshire). Paris continued the work of Roger of Wendover's *Flores Historiarum* or *Flowers of History* (1235).

Roger of Wendover died in May 1236. Leaning on Roger of Wendover, Paris continued an old tradition in drawing upon older sources (described as *flowers*) of other chroniclers, including, the Venerable Bede (672-735), Thomas of Monmouth (1149-1172), Henry of Huntingdon (1088-1157), Geoffrey of Monmouth (1100-1155), Roger of Howden (1174-1201, Yorkshire), and Ralph de Diceto (d. 1199/1200).

Although Roger acknowledged Thomas of Monmouth, Thomas's account of the blood libel is not mentioned, namely Thomas's *The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich*.²² In contrast, Paris apparently believed the blood libel allegations in the case of so-called Little St. Hugh of Lincoln in 1255 and included it in his *Historia Anglorum*, composed in St. Albans (Canterbury) and Westminster Abbey (London) by Paris until his death in 1259. Blood libel or ritual murder allegations exemplified the danger and vulnerability of English Jewry. As subsequent authors extended Paris's *Chronica Majora* into 1273, coupling the blood libel with the expulsion of the Jews in 1290 would seem to require additional resources. In looking at *Chronica Majora*, students confront a number of challenges regarding the place and marginalization of the Jews in England.

Various shades of opinion exist among scholars. Miri Rubin argued that Thomas of Monmouth dipped into local fictional contemporary hagiographies along with possibly Welsh mythology and Christian mysticism.²³ Joshua Trachtenberg and James Parkes suspected a combination of medieval folklore and the expected profits generated from shrines.²⁴ Cecil Roth traced blood libel allegations after 1144 into France, namely, Blois (1171), Paris (1180) and Valréas (1247) in southeastern France, Germany, namely Erfurt (1199), Fulda (1235) and Wolfsheim (1235), and back in England in 1255 at Lincoln. In *Two Nations in Your Womb* (2006), Israel Jacob Yuval placed in Jewish ritual murder in the public consciousness as a consequence the calling of the First Crusade in 1096.²⁵ "The ritual murder libel is a distorted echo of the Christian exegesis, which demonstrated awareness of Judaism's battle Against Christianity as a universal struggle with a messianic dimension. Its current manifestation – the blood libel – was inextricably connected to its end – eschatological vengeance." The proliferation of allegations strengthened convictions about the authenticity of the first allegation in 1144.²⁶ Or is this what John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) would label the "despotism of custom"?²⁷

What of the context before 1255?

In Imperial Roman times, ritual murder allegations fell on Christians and "savages" but not Jews.²⁸ Writing in the early fifth century, Augustine of Hippo's (354-430) *Adversus Judaeos* (*Against the Jews*) admonished Jews for failing to comprehend the prophecies embedded in their own sacred writings but he directed his voice to early Christians. Augustine also held that "beings that suffer corruption are nonetheless good."²⁹ Augustine's friend, biographer and fellow bishop, Possidius positioned Augustine's struggle with doctrines and heresies as primary concerns, not Jews.³⁰ According to Jeremy Cohen, Augustine's message to the Christian community entailed recognizing "the Jews as the living letters of biblical law, whose survival, not whose destruction best served God's plan for the triumph of the Catholic Church."³¹ Yet even during his lifetime from 417-418, inspired by the relics of St. Stephen, Christians razed the synagogue on Minorca and forced 450 Jews to convert to Christianity.³² Shortly after the arrival of John Chrysostom's bones in Constantinople in January 438, Theodosius issued his last decrees

against “pagans, Samaritans, and Jews” leading to popular violence against them.³³ Several centuries later, the Venerable Bede’s (672-735) *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, composed in 731, revisited the basic separation of Judaism from nascent Christianity while his histories and homilies say relatively little about the Jews of his times.³⁴ Preceding the Jews in English history, King Aethelred ordered the extermination of Danes within his realm on St. Brice's Day (November 13, 1002).³⁵ The alleged futility of preaching to the Jews stretches from Horace (65 BCE – 8 BCE) to Erasmus (1466-1536) and beyond. Didymus the Blind (313-398), Coptic theologian in Alexandria, coupled Jewish blasphemes and “opposition to the prophecies.”³⁶ Borrowing from Horace, Erasmus counted among his adages the ancient proverb “To fart in the face of a pack of curtal Jews,” meaning there’s no point in preaching to the obstinate.³⁷ Odo of Tournai (d. 1113) believed Jews could be converted if presented the proper evidence.³⁸ Medieval Christians, however, coupled Augustine’s Manicheans with Jews as enemies.³⁹ Numerous authors contributed their own *Adversus Judaeos* manuscripts for circulation in medieval Europe. Similarly, Abbot Rupert of Deutz (1075-1130) composed his *Annulus sive Dialogus inter Christianum et Judaeum* in the years 1126-1128.⁴⁰ His work touched the apocalyptic nerve of his age.⁴¹ Cluny’s Abbot Peter the Venerable (1092-1156) placed Jews alongside the followers of Islam among those seeking to undermine Christian beliefs.⁴² Ending in 1155, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* recorded these events, the rein of King Stephen, and the alleged blood libel involving William of Norwich.⁴³ *When* these entries fell into the Chronicle appears to be much later. Students looking to *Wikipedia* will find a reference to the Peterborough Chronicle as the oldest known source for the latter portion of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, including a link to Oxford University’s Bodleian manuscript collection. Known also as the Laud Misc. 636, it ends with the year 1140 while the 1849 edition of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* ends in 1154.⁴⁴

After the Venerable Bede, Gilbert Crispin (1045-1117), Ordericus Vitalis (1075-1142), and William of Malmesbury (1095-1143), authored detailed accounts of life in Norman England. Abbot of Westminster Abbey, Gilbert Crispin, authored a friendly exchange/debate between himself and a Jew.⁴⁵ Chroniclers Ordericus Vitalis and William of Malmesbury composed meticulous and exhaustive accounts of their times, wherein Christian aspirations to convert the Jews of England faded for presenting Jews as money-lenders and as obstinately rejecting the objective authenticity of Christianity – when they were mentioned at all.⁴⁶ Crossing the line of the first blood libel allegation of 1144, Geoffrey of Monmouth’s (ca. 1100-1155) *Historia Regum Britanniae* added very little to our knowledge of English Jewry. Geoffrey of Monmouth’s chronicle drew the critical attention of over thirty Latin chroniclers between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries.⁴⁷ As with many medieval figures, researching Geoffrey of Monmouth includes being aware of alternate spellings of his name, including, Galfridas, Gottfried, Jeffrey, and Gruffudd in his native Welsh. Geoffrey’s history counted the mythical Arthur as a major historical figure.⁴⁸ Other early English chroniclers also mixed myth and legend with pieces of history.⁴⁹ Emerging from a similar Welsh heritage, Thomas of Monmouth’s (1149-1172) *The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich* may well have served a similar purpose.⁵⁰ Beyond altering the political landscape, King Stephen’s war with the barons spurred popular tales of supernatural sightings throughout 1143-1144.⁵¹ The young boy and future martyr, William, allegedly died in Norwich during Eastertide in 1144. As the provincial capital, Norwich witnessed devastation caused by King Stephen’s men. According to the *Gesta Stephani*, a contemporary chronicle focused on King Stephen, Stephen rescinded Henry I’s infringement of

church “liberties” while church authorities sanctioned his coronation.⁵² After taking control of Norwich’s provincial mints, Stephen deposed the local bishop, Everard of Norwich.⁵³ Among the miracles of St. William recorded by Thomas of Monmouth, St. William appeared in a vision to “Ralf the Moneyer” and cured him of a “very serious illness.” It appears that Norwich’s mints attracted demons requiring the intervention of St. William.⁵⁴

Who would be the likely target audience of Thomas of Monmouth? In the largely illiterate medieval society, as described by Aron Gurevich, “an enormous distance existed between high theology and the vulgarized, common version of Christianity.”⁵⁵ Theological-philosophical heavy-weights gathering around nascent universities, including Peter Abelard (1079-1144), Peter Lombard (1096-1164), Robert Grosseteste (1168-1253) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), scrutinized and redefined an already highly sophisticated Christian theology. Streaming from Islamic Spain into Northern Europe, Averroës’s (1126-1198) commentaries on Aristotle appealed to Christian students and scholars drawn to theological speculation.⁵⁶ Peter Abelard’s *Sic et non* would send more tradition-minded theologians into a tail-spin with such assertions as “By doubting, in fact, we come to inquiring, and by inquiring we perceive the truth.”⁵⁷ Similarly, Abelard’s *Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian* assumed a scholarly audience.⁵⁸ Furthering the rational methodology necessary for science, Robert Grosseteste engrossed himself in translations from the Arabic of Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics* and Ptolemy’s *Almagest*.⁵⁹ Intended as a guide to understanding Christian doctrine, Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* governed medieval scholastic discourse in Western Europe.⁶⁰ Commenting on Lombard’s *Sentences*, Thomas Aquinas infused Aristotelian philosophy and a notable toleration of Jews and Judaism into his *Summa Theologiae*.⁶¹ This renaissance of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries signaled a growing wedge between scholars and popular culture.⁶²

On the other hand, once Matthew Paris’s chronicle included the blood libel, it broke with its secular narrative for an account better understood as popular religion of *suffering* in the here-and-now.⁶³ *Suffering*, as Thomas N. Bisson put it, is troubling for historians as it “taxes our powers of comprehension.”⁶⁴ *Suffering* contradicts Claude Lévy-Strauss’s presumed societal focus on a “thirst for objective knowledge” whereas a “prelogical” or “mystic” mentality, as proposed by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857-1939), weaves popular religion, mythology, and magic with high theology in an everyday reality.⁶⁵ Similarly, Roland Barthes probed the signs and signified in mythology.⁶⁶ As a purging and purification ritual, drawing upon Sir James George Frazer, allegations of Jewish ritual murder enveloped two victims onto whom “the sins of the people were transferred.”⁶⁷ In *The Cult of the Saints* (2015), Peter Brown connected Roman patronage institutions with the emergence of the cult of saints in an “impressive continuum of beliefs.”⁶⁸ Daily life furthered this continuum. Jews and Christians lived, died, and were buried in close proximity. However, Christian ideas about death preserved the spirit of the dead as though asleep in the grave. Graves moved from beyond the city walls to the cemetery, meaning a place of rest but within the city.⁶⁹ Christianity became “the first religion without the sacred, a religion whose unique achievement is precisely to demystify the Sacred.”⁷⁰ Within *Saracens, Demons and Jews* (2003), this achievement is evident in popular medieval Christianity, which “linked the Passover to the blood libel accusation, as they believed that Jews required the blood of a Christian for use in their own religious rituals.”⁷¹ *Magic in the Middle Ages* (1989) and *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (1991) are replete with examples of Christian ideas about Jews as sorcerers.⁷² Christian millenarianism fueled popular fears of an imminent

apocalypse.⁷³ Furthering popular hysteria, the Golem of Prague signified the evil and black arts inherent in Jewish magic and mysticism.⁷⁴ Church and state routinely suppressed most shades of heresy. Papal condemnations of Cathars and Waldensians led to their brutal suppression. Foreshadowing English Puritans, the Catharist heresy excluded Jews from possible salvation.⁷⁵ Taking a page from civil law, Pope Gregory IX equated heresy with treason against the Church and proscribed the death penalty in 1231.⁷⁶ Christian hagiographies recounted the miracles, including resurrection of the dead, associated with the martyrs and their relics while anti-Jewish iconography offered illustrations of Jews as active collaborators with devils and demons.⁷⁷

Christian mysticism pressured an opening in the door of divine revelation for the masses. The voice of Christian mysticism, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) forcefully rejected the intellectual revival personified by Albertus Magnus and Peter Abelard.⁷⁸ Known for his charm, eloquence and political influence, Bernard preached and recruited passionately for a second crusade (Second Crusade, 1147-1149) believing, it seems furtively, that the excesses of the first could be averted. Opposed to new ideas spreading through the Church, Bernard obtained a Papal condemnation of Peter Abelard's works in 1140.⁷⁹ Bernard's contemporaries broadened the expansion of Christian mysticism into the masses, including three from the monastery of St. Victor in Paris, namely, Hugh (1096-1141), Richard (d. 1173), and Adam (d. 1192) and Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179).⁸⁰ George Boas (1891-1980) suggested such events be viewed through the "collective unconscious" where Christian abstractions galvanized behind the emblem of the cross, "analogous to the veneration paid to relics." Endowed with supernatural authority, Christians perceived a "purposive Creator" alongside humanity confronting mythological "devils, witches, ogres, and maleficent giants." Following the argument out, Jews served as the point where myth engaged the "non-rational in rational language."⁸¹ Christian martyrs, Augustine asserted, should be imitated but Christians from all classes and stations in life "came to touch – to rub themselves against the tombs." Medieval Christian congregations "wished to be touched, if only for a blessed moment, by the burst of glory associated with heroes and heroines."⁸² According to Norbert Elias, "people who ate together... taking food and wine from the same dish, wine from the same goblet, soup from the same pot or the same plate... such people stood in a different relationship to one another than we do."⁸³ Their lives need to be understood in the context of a society virtually devoid of personal privacy and whose humor "runs on humiliation and comeuppance rather than on obscenity."⁸⁴ While life expectancy was pegged at thirty-two, everyday life in the Middle Ages centered on the family and the village. In contrast, Jews remained distant while their religious and social practices seemed dangerous and mysterious. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the manorial system weakened, pushing peasants into urban environments. Ecclesiastical authorities provided manuals to guide common behavior. Demographic pressure and economic shifts, in turn, drove popular religion and domestic unrest in burgeoning cities. This volatile mixture, in turn, contributed to the growing acceptance of the myth of Jewish ritual murder.⁸⁵

Daniel Boyarin's *Border Lines* (2004) demonstrated clearly the limits of rationality and the disputation as decisive tools for theological disputes as far back as the fourth-century Council of Nicaea. Anti-Jewish violence spotted the landscape of Louis IX's (1214-1270), realm. Jews were expelled from Brittany in 1240.⁸⁶ Sara Lipton's *Images of Intolerance* (1999) demonstrated the clear depiction of Jews as heretics in a massively illustrated Bible for the king. Dated to the 1220s, the *Bible moralisée* could hardly have been intended primarily for a lay audience given its

size alone. Nevertheless, it clearly reflected contemporary views on the Jews and those presumably shared by the monarch.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, blood libel allegations find no support in most twelfth-century century chronicles. Ralph de Diceto mentioned only the 1189-1190 violence against London's Jewry.⁸⁸ Henry of Huntingdon's *Chronicle* extended into 1155 without mentioning William of Norwich or the Jews of Angevin England.⁸⁹ Borrowing significantly from Henry of Huntingdon, Roger of Hoveden (or Howden) never mentioned the blood libel allegations from 1144. Shortly before Eastertide, Pope Celestine II died on March 8, 1144. Papal authority generally waned until the election of Pope Innocent III (1198-1216). Roger of Hoveden's chronicle recorded the unrest under King Stephen (r. 1135-1154), a minor reference to "Judas, the seller of our Lord to the Jews, the buyers of Christ" from 1167, a royal grant allowing Jews to bury their dead on royal lands in 1177 outside London, new restrictions on Jews in 1179, but also a royal edict in 1180 extending royal protection to the Jews.⁹⁰ The late twelfth-century English chronicler, Robert of Divizes (ca. 1150-1202), however, opened his *Cronicon* with Richard I's coronation in 1189 and the ensuing massacre of Jews in London inspired by the Third Crusade, whereby Londoners "despatched [sic] their blood-suckers with blood to hell."⁹¹ Further into the *Cronicon*, readers encounter an unnamed French Jew who allegedly crucified and then cannibalized a Christian boy. As recognized by Nancy F. Partner, parallels with Thomas of Monmouth's allegations of Jewish ritual murder are hard to miss.⁹² According to Roger of Wendover's *Flores Historiarum*, English King Henry III held his Christmas Court at Westminster in 1235. Seven Jews were brought before the king. Charged with forcefully circumcising a kidnapped Christian boy from Norwich during Easter, the king found them guilty and had them imprisoned. According to Raphael Holinshed (1529-1580), a similar event took place in Norwich in 1145. Matthew Paris identified four Jews, who were executed for the same offence in 1240 while Jews in Lincoln suffered similar allegations in 1253.⁹³

Prior to the First Crusade, Jews and Judaism attracted a growing public apprehension and official critiques of Jewish life and beliefs. In response, Jewish religious leaders worked to preserve Jewish customs, traditions, and religious law. A French-speaking Jew from Troyes, Rabbi Shelomo Yitzhaki (better known as Rashi, 1040-1105) revitalized Jewish understanding of the oral tradition in the Mishnah.⁹⁴ Through his massive *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides (1138-1204) guided Jews without rabbinic training or local rabbinic authorities in Jewish legal issues.⁹⁵ Continuing in this tradition, Isaac ben Melchizedek of Siponto (1110-1170) and Samson ben Abraham of Sens (1150-1231) added their own extensive commentaries.⁹⁶ A convert in 1106 from Judaism to Christianity, Petrus Alfonsi's (1062-1140) *Dialogue Against the Jews* created a factious dialogue between a Jew and a Christian whereby Judaism appeared riddled with irrational and appallingly anthropomorphic beliefs.⁹⁷ Anti-Jewish Christian encounters with the Talmud first appeared in 1146. It is within this context that the Church appeared to have all but abandoned hope of converting the Jews. Thirteenth-century anti-Jewish violence and disputations emerged in a public arena with increasingly limited tolerance.

The Crusades parallel the timeline from the first blood libel in 1144 through its spread by 1255. Earliest waves of crusaders included peasants, knights, mercenaries, and monks. Clunaic reforms in the eleventh-century helped fuel their ranks during the Roman Synod of 1059. Researched by Jo Ann Kay McNamara, the Synod "condemned simony, clerical marriage, lay participation in papal elections, and the canoness rule of Aachen." It sundered connections between women and

the Catholic clergy. As a result, many monks and nuns would be expelled from their monastic orders into a life of poverty and despondency.⁹⁸ Joining other crusaders, they exacted a heavy toll on unreceptive communities while spreading their own beliefs and experiences. Returning crusaders, on the other hand, told ecstatic tales of conquest, piety and coming battles with the Antichrist during the Last Days. Inspired by God, Jerusalem's conquest signaled the "new chosen people of God; they had taken up the vocation that the Jews had lost." One of Jerusalem's conquerors, Godfrey of Bouillon (1060-1100), has adorned European tapestries, paintings, books, castle walls, coins, and statues for centuries ever since. Similarly, Matthew Paris's drawings captured the crusading zeal for a thirteenth-century audience.⁹⁹

Motivated by popular beliefs and the Church, crusaders gathering for the First Crusade (1096–1099) massacred Jews and Christians on their way to Jerusalem. Georg W. F. Hegel defined this moment as the "West against the East."¹⁰⁰ Archbishop Ruthard of Mainz confronted an angry mob of crusaders determined to baptize or kill the remaining Jews in Mainz. Jewish faith in the archbishop's promise of protection vanished as he declared himself unable to prevent further bloodshed lest they convert. Over the course of May 25-29, 1096, crusaders massacred Mainz's Jewish community, the city suffered, and the archbishop failed as a protector of the Jews.¹⁰¹ However, violence against Jews and their social isolation did not begin with the crusades. A medieval millennial eschatology propelled popular apocalyptic fears and violence against Jews as early as 1010.¹⁰² Archbishop Ruthard criticized Emperor Henry IV (1056-1106) for failing to acknowledge Pope Gregory VII's (1072-1085) authority during the Investiture Controversy in 1077. Church-state dependence on Jewish money-lenders, papal injunctions against the forced conversion of Jews, and Henry IV's 1090 confirmation of "privileges for the Jewish communities of Speyer and Worms, confirming their rights and ensuring their protection," failed to dissuade popular violence against the Jews in 1096.¹⁰³ Crusaders viewed all Jews as condemned by history: "Avenge the crucified one upon his enemies who stand before you; then go to war against the Ishmaelites."¹⁰⁴ In the shadow of the Church Schism of 1130, the Second Crusade (1147-1149) repeated the pattern of wonton violence, including the slaughter of Jews.¹⁰⁵ Adding to popular discord, crusades vastly increased the tax burdens of the entire population. Twelfth-century crusades proved notably onerous. With Saladin's (1137-1193) reconquest of Jerusalem in 1187, Western Europe launched its Third Crusade (1187-1192) and imposed the so-called Saladin tithe in 1188 to fund it. Church and non-crusaders alike detested the "unprecedented rate of 10 per cent on movables."¹⁰⁶ The Saladin tithe doubled annual royal revenues.¹⁰⁷ King Richard I (1157-1199) helped swell recruitment by exempting crusaders and their "non-crusading vassals and tenants" from the Saladin tithe and suspended payments on their debt until their return.¹⁰⁸ During Lent 1190, English crusading zeal led to the looting of Jewish property and credit bonds alongside with the massacre of Jews in York.¹⁰⁹ Domestic opposition to a growing tax burden ultimately forced King John (1166-1216) to sign the Magna Carta in 1215.¹¹⁰ King John's successor, Henry III (r. 1216-1272), obtained papal support for rescinding the Magna Carta.¹¹¹ Henry III's son, Edward Longshanks (1239-1307) exhausted royal coffers through war, crusades, excessive taxation and simple corruption.¹¹² The last three crusades (1217-1254) proved costly and abortive, failing ultimately to dislodge the Islamic Ayyubid dynasty founded by Saladin from Jerusalem and the Middle East.¹¹³ Perhaps a result of these circumstances, an individual appeared in Oxford in 1221 bearing the stigmata and accompanied by two women claiming to be the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalena. In 1270, a Jew in Oxford allegedly interrupted a public Christian procession in taking then breaking the

crucifix used in the procession.¹¹⁴ In search of revenue, inspired by existing prejudice, including Hugh of Lincoln's martyrdom in 1255, Edward expelled Jews from Gascony in early 1287 and England in 1290. Edward claimed all Jewish assets, property and the debts owed the Jews. Despite the long-term loss of Jewish revenue, Italian bankers could provide some accommodation.¹¹⁵

Anti-Jewish violence in Blois (France) in 1171 may have provoked Peter of Blois's (ca. 1130-1211) *Against the Perfidious Jews (Liber Contra Perfidiam Judeorum, ca. 1198)*, penned for the Bishop of Worcester. In his opening statement, Peter equated Jews with heretics. Heretics faced punishment from secular authorities for denying the truth of Christianity. Jews, however, failed to recognize Old Testament prophecies, New Testament evidence, and non-Christian testimonies about Jesus. As with Augustine, Peter presented a Christian audience with the Jews as ignoring basic historical evidence of the truth of Christianity. Peter viewed attempts to convert Jews as little more than "foolish and vain zeal ... He has blinded them till the time when the heathen are converted to the Faith." Nevertheless, Peter departed from St. Augustine's dictum when he finished: "If therefore you wish to catch him and destroy his shifts, place the library of the Spirit between you so that he cannot escape or turn tail but must be slain like Goliath with his own sword."¹¹⁶ Whether considering England's King Stephen (also known as Stephen of Blois) or serving secretary to King Henry II (r. 1154-1184) in his campaign against Thomas Becket (1118-1170), Peter appeared unaware of the 1144 blood libel allegations coming from Norwich but well-versed in existing prejudices against the Jews.¹¹⁷

A Thirteenth-century Disputation: Paris (1240)

Disputations functioned as public devices for defining orthodoxy, conversion, but not debate. The Disputation of Paris in 1240 turned the attack directly on the Jews and the Talmud, the written record of rabbinic commentary on the Torah, composed of the Mishnah and Gemara. The Disputation of Paris traces its origins to the efforts of Nicholas Donin.¹¹⁸ Leaning on initiatives emanating from Pope Gregory IX (pope from 1227-1241) and Louis IX (1214-1270), the Franciscan Nicholas Donin led the call for the burning of the Talmud. Pope and king alike endorsed Donin's accusations against the Talmud and ordered the confiscation of the Talmud in March 1240. On June 17, 1244, Talmudic manuscripts by the thousands perished in flames before the eyes of the public in Paris.¹¹⁹

Pope Gregory IX's successor, Pope Innocent IV (June 28, 1243-1254), reversed Church statements on the Talmud and extended papal protection to the Jews and the Talmud in 1244. On July 9, 1247, Pope Innocent IV clarified the point even further: Faithful Christians should not "accuse them of using human blood in their religious rites." Referring to recent events in Fulda and elsewhere, he lamented that "many Jews were killed because of such a suspicion, we, by the authority of these letters, strictly forbid the recurrence of such a thing in the future ... or be placed under a sentence of excommunication."¹²⁰ England's Henry III faced massive indebtedness to Jewish lenders and fiscal uncertainty caused by "speculation in silver." Minting a new coinage could start in December 1279. However, political security appeared to be slipping away.¹²¹

What of the context after 1255?

Crusades, terror and trials provoked a new Jewish quest to understand their place in the cosmic process: namely mysticism. Gershom Scholem located the origins of Jewish mysticism in the High Middle Ages and in Jewish responses to Christian attacks, e.g., in the works of Maimonides (1138-1202).¹²² Similarly, Abraham Abulafia (1240-1292), the founder of the ecstatic Kabbalah, had been inspired by Islamic mysticism (Sufism) in Spain.¹²³ Jewish Messianism found a ready receptacle in Sabbatai Sevi (1626-1676) until his conversion to Islam.¹²⁴ Composed in the late 14th century, Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* included the poem *The Prioress's Tale*. Paralleling contemporary chronicles, Chaucer recounted the blood libel accusations and the death of Hugh of Lincoln in 1255 but without reference to William of Norwich in 1144.¹²⁵ Six centuries later, William Wordsworth (1770-1850) reintroduced Chaucer's blood libel account to a new audience through his own poem of the same name.¹²⁶ During the fourteenth-century, highly public images of the so-called *Judensau* or "Jew's Sow" offered visual confirmation of Jews as heretics. A tolerated minority, Jews had become a persecuted foe.¹²⁷

The *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487), also known as the *Witch Hammer*, served as the source for identifying witches in its day. A closer look, however, reveals a close coupling of Jews, pagans, heretics, and witches. Technically, Jews are singled out for their "infidelity" but it is defined as more onerous than that of either pagans or gentiles.¹²⁸ But within its pages, the rebellious Swiss peasant leader Tell is also depicted as a "male witch."¹²⁹ On the other hand, *maleficae* (plural form of *maleficium* and commonly translated as *witches*) can be more generally understood to mean anything "injurious, noxious or pernicious."¹³⁰ The sixteenth-century print and visual media placed Jews, Waldensians, the Antichrist, and *synagoga* together. "Though Jews could never be technically accused of witchcraft, they were the traditional children of Saturn and disciples of Satan, and the discourse of witchcraft, with its Sabbaths, was shot through with the anti-Jewish rhetoric and polemic of Christianity."¹³¹

Within his *Chronicon*, Johann Carion (1499–1537) wrote sparingly about the Jews.¹³² On the other hand, within his popular *Of The Jews and Their Lies* (1543), Luther depicted Jews as murderers and the blood-thirsty enemies of good Christians, who made martyrs of Christian children.¹³³ But Luther's enemies of his Church also included the pope (the Antichrist) and the Turks (as metaphor for sin and evil). Luther's catechism repeated this message.¹³⁴ Within Martin Brecht's biography of Luther, Luther rejected engaging Jews on matters of scripture or possible conversion. Luther viewed the expulsion of Jews from Bohemia in 1541 as a model for others to follow. In his writing and sermons, Luther envisioned a Christian audience.¹³⁵

Back in England, John Speed (1552-1629) mined Matthew Paris, William of Malmesbury, Roger of Howden, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and many sources now lost in composing his *Historie of Great Britaine* (1611). Speed recorded the capitulation of Oxford to King Stephen in 1144, the slaying of Jews after Richard I's coronation in 1199, and extortionate Jewish usury as the reason for their expulsion in 1290. Jewish ritual murder and the martyrdoms of William of Norwich and Hugh of Lincoln failed to draw any comment.¹³⁶ At about the same time, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) brought the image of the Jew onto the stage. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock adds a Jewish voice for an audience devoid of Jews in a country equally devoid of Jews. As flesh and blood, Shylock's comic character amalgamates everyday experiences and attitudes shared with Christians. He is a Jew but he also sees, hears, smells, eats, is "healed by the same means,

warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us shall we not revenge?" As played out in *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country* (1991), the movie dialogue moves from Shylock to General Chang's clipping from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: "Cry 'Havoc!', and let slip the dogs of war" in opening his war with the Federation.¹³⁷ General Chang, like Shylock, exemplified hidden, deceitful, and sinister machinations.¹³⁸

Back on the continent, Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) employed Jews as metaphors where his possible audience may have those opposed to the Jansenists. For Pascal, Jews served a public pedagogical purpose in representing what good Christians should not be.¹³⁹ As Papal statements confirming blood libel allegations appeared in 1700s, French deist the Marquis Jean-Baptiste d'Argens (1704-1771) accused Jews of committing "some offense... which justifiably angered the Divinity" while he also ridiculed ritual murder allegations.¹⁴⁰ In contrast, the Catholic Church resisted any change of attitude. Dated February 22, 1755, Pope Benedict XIV's Bull *Beatus Andreas* confidently accepted the historical reality of Jewish ritual murders of Christian children into the eighteenth-century. In 1700, Johann Andreas Eisenmenger (1654-1704) collected every available – conceivable and inconceivable -- anti-Jewish angle in his continually republished work *The Traditions of the Jews*.¹⁴¹ During his periodic residence in London from 1783-1793, the future French revolutionary Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, Comte de Mirabeau (1749-1791) composed hundreds of letters commenting on all aspects of life and politics in Britain. While possibly intended for a French audience, Mirabeau believed that within England at least, the "Jews will never witness a renewal of those bloody scenes, of which their nation was the object, and England the theatre, in the rein of Richard I; -- scenes of which we find a circumstantial description in the writings of Matthew Paris and William of Newbury."¹⁴² A little later, German theologian Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) coupled Jewish "egoism" and "materialism" with the "old accusations of deicide or ritual murder."¹⁴³ In 1878, Jewish ritual murder allegations were leveled at Jews in Kutais in the Caucasus. Although those defendants were acquitted, anti-Jewish riots (known as *pogroms*) became common in late Imperial Russia.¹⁴⁴ Countering waves of Jewish blood libel allegations, Hermann L. Strack's *The Jew and Human Sacrifice* (1908) brought existing scholarship to bear on the blood libel accusations. Historically, human sacrifice figured prominently in many religious beliefs and societies but had been "strictly forbidden to the Israelites."¹⁴⁵ Irish author, James Joyce, sprinkled his *Ulysses* (1922) with over eighty references to Jews, including existing negative stereotypes as well as a truncated blood libel with "Same idea those jews [sic] they said killed the christian [sic] boy."¹⁴⁶ James Carroll's *Constantine's Sword* (2001) threw caution to the wind with Marc Saperstein's ninety-six page commentary on Jewish-Christian relations presenting Jewish ritual murder allegations from 1144 as an established fact and where a "'Final Solution' was at least conceivable in the Middle Ages."¹⁴⁷

Conclusion

Circumstantial evidence abounds of the influence of chronicles. Legal codes served, on the one hand, largely the political and social elites. On the other hand, legal codes defined fines, procedures, oaths, testimony, and physical evidence. Contrary to a crime scene but with Frazer's lingering shadow, allegations of Jewish ritual murder represented one of many popular aspects of an evolving belief in the Jew as the mysterious *other*. As the plague heralded the world's end,

Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror* (1978) threaded the history behind the "Jew, as the eternal stranger" as society's *other*, responsible for current maladies. The Jew "was the outsider, who had separated himself by choice from the Christian world, whom Christians had been taught to hate, who was regarded as imbued with unsleeping malevolence against all Christians." The plague acted as a catalyst, wherein society reinvigorated, reinvented, and recycled the legacies of Jewish malevolence, including the blood libel.¹⁴⁸ Cecil Roth concluded "That the general hatred against the Jew expressed itself in the intervening centuries in some grim accusation of the sort is not by any means unlikely."¹⁴⁹ Speaking of Nazi Germany, Giorgio Agamben took an idea from Sigmund Freud that could as easily apply to the blood libel allegations: "The fracture that was believed to have been healed by eliminating the *people* – namely, the Jews, who are its symbol – reproduced itself anew, thereby turning the whole German people into sacred life."¹⁵⁰

Matthew Paris recorded events he believed significant for future readers seeking a comprehensive understanding of history. Or did he? Reviewing the handwriting in Matthew Paris's *Chronica Majora* in the mid-nineteenth century, Frederick Madden, Keeper of the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum, found clear evidence of three different authors, erasures, additions and Matthew Paris's contribution covering only 1189-1253 – not through his death in 1259. Madden claimed the original manuscripts disappeared from St. Alban's library before the Reformation. Robert Talbot, canon of Norwich from 1547-1548, apparently passed them to Sir Henry Sidney, who passed them to Archbishop Parker presumably between 1560-1570, whose handwriting (or his amanuensis) can be detected.¹⁵¹ An ambiguous provenance of these manuscripts could conceivably place the account of the blood libel allegations of 1255 in jeopardy. Long before the Renaissance, medieval scholars applied philological, historical, and linguistic tools to prove and test the authenticity and legal validity of important documents. Nevertheless, forged charters and chronicles aided monks and monarchs alike in establishing legal precedent as well as customary practices.¹⁵²

¹ Hartmann Schedel, *Weltchronik 1493* [Nuremberg Chronicle] (Augsburg: Taschen, 2001), p. 254.

² The sources and subjects cited in this article can often be found online in various places, including Google Books, the Internet Archive, Project Gutenberg, the Vatican Library Digitization Project, Bibliothèque nationale de France digital library Gallica, the Bayerischer Staatsbibliothek's Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Mississippi State University's Repertorium Chronicarum and the Virtual Manuscript Library of Switzerland; thereby facilitating student research along with computer literacy.

³ See <http://www.chronica.msstate.edu/>. Accessed June 4, 2015.

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