

THE MEDIEVAL WORLD

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CHAPTER NINE
THE CRUSADES AND THE
PERSECUTION OF THE JEWS

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Persecution of Jews in the medieval world took many forms. One of the most threatening to the future survival of the European Jewries came with the war against Islam. The crusades brought to Jews violence of hitherto unparalleled ferocity. Holy War against one sort of unbeliever seemed reason to attack another. Why combat one set of God's enemies overseas, the argument ran, and yet leave unscathed an even worse set of enemies at home, living among us? It was a logic which at the time challenged the orthodoxies of Church and State, and which now confronts the historian of that age with a particularly significant phenomenon in the history of medieval anti-Semitism. 'A microcosm of medieval Jewish disasters' (Stow 1992: 115. Cf. Liebeschütz 1959; Abulafia 1996).

CHURCH, STATE AND THE PROTECTION OF JEWS

Even before Urban II formally launched the First Crusade in 1095, the alternative, baptism or death, had been presented to Jews by Christian warriors on campaign against Muslims. It had happened in Spain some thirty years earlier. In 1063, Pope Alexander II told the whole of the Spanish episcopate that he had been gratified to learn that they had defended Jews against those who, while waging war against the Muslim, had sought 'either through foolish ignorance or possibly blinded by greed' to kill them. For it was divine justice itself which protected Jews, Alexander asserted, God having predestined them for salvation. The pope obviously had in mind St Paul's assurance that Israel's blindness to the truth about Christ was temporary and would end when 'the fullness of the Gentiles should come in. And so all Israel should be saved' (Rom. 11: 25-6). He continued:

So thus blessed [Pope] Gregory restrained certain men who were on fire to annihilate Jews, declaring it offensive to God to kill those whom God's mercy had preserved, dispersed though they were through all regions of the earth, having lost fatherland and liberty in lasting penance enjoined by the sentence passed on their fathers for shedding the blood of the Saviour.

The cases of Saracens and Jews were very different, he continued. The former sought to persecute Christians and drive them from their cities and estates; war against them was therefore just. But Jews 'are everywhere prepared to serve'. The letter concluded with his forbidding an individual bishop to destroy a synagogue. In other letters, Alexander II was to commend both the archbishop and the viscount of Narbonne for protecting Jews against those intent on killing them. He also reprimanded the lord of Benevento for seeking to convert Jews to Christianity by force: nowhere (he affirmed) is it recorded that Jesus Christ ever compelled anyone to his service by violence. The Saviour had persuaded by humble exhortation, respecting the free will of each individual person.¹

The truncated nature of the texts of Alexander's letter as they have come down to us (they are obviously only summaries) makes them read somewhat cryptically and not without obscurity. But it is clear that Alexander II was condemning, as contrary to God's will, the killing of Jews, baptism by force, and denial of Jewish freedom of worship by attacks on synagogues.

What is not clear is what precisely he had in mind when he spoke of Jews 'being prepared to serve'. What it *might* mean, however, at least to Europe's rulers at the time, is apparent from another sort of response to attacks on Jews in this immediate pre-crusade period. Jews could serve Christians in a very practical, economic way. The *Hebrew Chronicle* which recorded the transfer of Mainz Jews to Speyer in 1084 explained why they had moved: 'the whole of the Jewish quarter was burned down and we stood in great fear of the townsmen'. In Speyer, by contrast, they were warmly welcomed by its ruler-bishop who, according to the chronicle attributed to Solomon bar Simson, 'pitied us as a man pities his son' (Eidelberg 1977: 71–2). But the bishop had more than paternal compassion in mind, and frankly admitted as much. He wanted to expand his settlement and build it up into a city. He thought the glory of Speyer would be 'increased a thousandfold if I were to bring in Jews'. In return for this service, he granted them what he claimed to be 'a better legal position than any other Jewish community in any city of the German kingdom'. And so he allocated to them a fortified area, with responsibility for their own defence, a cemetery over which they had autonomous jurisdiction, full trading rights within Speyer and on its Rhine wharf and a number of particular legal privileges, the most important of which was that of having disputes within their community settled by their own leader (Aronius 1902: 69–71).

Some six years later, the Speyer Jews, with the cooperation of the same bishop, successfully petitioned Henry IV for a more comprehensive charter of privileges. It proved to be more detailed than any such charter hitherto granted to any European Jewry. Jews and their properties were accorded royal protection from arbitrary violence. They were granted freedom of trade throughout the kingdom. Their position at law was safeguarded: when there was litigation between a Christian and a Jew each could swear on his own sacred book and Jews were not to be subject to the proof-tests of hot iron or water. They were at liberty to settle disputes within their own community in their own court, and – and in view of what was to come this was of especial relevance – they were protected against forced baptism. The removal of Jewish children from their parents in order to baptise them was proscribed. If a Jew expressed a wish to be baptised, three days should elapse before the administration of the sacrament in order to establish that the wish was sincere

and unforced. There was even a deterrent set against conversion to Christianity: a baptised Jew forfeited his property to the royal treasury (Aronius 1902: 72-3).

Henry IV's charter was issued to only one Jewish community. But the incorporation of its substance into similar charters by Frederick I and Frederick II establishes its claim to be an authoritative formulation of Jewish rights as understood by the German monarchy. Henry IV had translated into practical juridical detail the principle of toleration and defined how Jews were to be protected in their persons, property, religion, status at law and economic activity.

There is no comparably detailed document from the Papacy in this period. Nothing from the papal registers has survived to take us beyond the letters of Alexander II. But the eleventh century had seen a notable advance in the number and quality of collections of canons, beginning with that of Burchard of Worms (c.1012) and reaching a notable peak on the very eve of the First Crusade with the *Decretum* of Ivo of Chartres and its summary, the *Panormia* (Gilchrist 1988; Gilchrist 1989). Ivo enjoyed particular authority in his own day, not least with the Papacy itself and his collections were to be very influential in the development of canon law. There need be little hesitation about adducing his work as representative of the orthodox ecclesiastical opinion of his day.

Ivo considered Christian-Jewish relations in two main contexts. His first book of the *Decretum* was a massive assembly of texts 'concerning faith and the sacrament of faith, baptism'. It included texts concerning the baptism of Jews and an examination of the rules concerning conversion to Christianity. Book XIII was of a more miscellaneous nature. The unifying theme of the texts concerning Jews may be put in this way: Jews, though tolerated, were nevertheless enemies of Christianity and therefore a threat to be controlled and contained. Thus safeguards must be erected against Jewish proselytism, against Jews exploiting Christians, against insult to Christianity, to all of which, traditionally, Jews were regarded as particularly prone. Broadly speaking, about one-third of the canons concerned with Jews which Ivo selected represented the teaching of Gregory I (590-604), another third that of the Visigothic Toledo councils, especially that presided over by Isidore of Seville (Toledo IV, 633). The remaining third is more varied, with the preponderance coming from Frankish councils of much the same period: all told, an authentic representation of what had become the standard canonical tradition, in somewhat fuller presentation than in any previous collection of canons.

What is of particular relevance here is that the canon law at this stage in its development reinforced the positions recently adopted by Alexander II. Indeed, Ivo reproduced all the Alexandrine letters. But he also reproduced additional authoritative texts, especially those of Gregory I, to establish that killing Jews, baptising them under coercion and interfering with the practice of their religion were all forbidden.

THE FIRST POGROMS IN EUROPEAN HISTORY

Behind such a barrier of principles and practices erected by the authorities of Church and State, it might be expected that Jews would feel safe. And indeed there is

evidence to suggest that they did. For the contemporary Jewish record often entitled 'Mainz Anonymous' reported that when the Mainz Jewish community was warned from France of attacks on Jews by crusaders there, they replied that though greatly concerned about the welfare of their French co-religionists, as to themselves they felt no cause for anxiety: 'We have not heard a word of such matters, nor has it been hinted that our lives are threatened by the sword' (Eidelberg 1977: 100). They were to be speedily and bitterly disillusioned, however. As the First Crusade gathered momentum, the Mainz community was annihilated.

As crusaders began their march to the Holy Land, attacks on Jews took place in Rouen, spread to Prague and elsewhere in Bohemia, and were reported by one contemporary chronicler as falling on the Jewries along the Rhine, Main and Danube rivers. Some historians think they have detected them also in Provence. But no one doubts that they fell most heavily in the Rhineland: on the Jewries of Cologne, Worms and Mainz most severely, with another half-dozen harshly treated (Riley-Smith 1984; Chazan 1987).

One strand of modern crusade historiography attributes these outrages to the crazed fanaticism of an ignorant and undisciplined peasantry, seized and deluded by a 'messianism of the disoriented poor' (Cohn 1993: 61), with the extreme views that led to violence 'restricted to small and marginal groups of popular crusaders' (Chazan 1987: 219). In fact, on the evidence of the Hebrew sources the army most clearly to be identified with 'popular' crusading, that led by Peter the Hermit himself, can be acquitted of responsibility for the killing of Jews. According to the *Chronicle* of Solomon bar Simson, Peter looked for nothing more than material help for his journey. Once provided with that, 'he would speak kindly of Israel' (Eidelberg 1977: 62). On the other hand, Godfrey of Bouillon, for example, the future first ruler of the crusader kingdom of Jerusalem, is marked down in the same source as vowing to proceed on his journey, 'only after avenging the blood of the crucified by shedding Jewish blood and completely eradicating any trace of those bearing the name "Jew"' (Eidelberg 1977: 25).

It was not only important crusade leaders who promoted the assaults on the Rhineland Jewries. It was also the citizenry of the towns themselves. Responsibility for the murderous assaults on Jews must be attributed to an unholy alliance of elements of the crusading leadership with townsmen (sometimes aided by the peasantry of neighbouring villages). Albert of Aachen, fullest of the Christian chroniclers of the pogroms, lays responsibility for originating the attacks on the citizens of Cologne. But it is the Hebrew chroniclers who are most insistent on the major role of the townspeople and of their collusion with the crusaders. 'Because of our sins', the Mainz Anonymous reported, 'whenever the crusaders arrived at a city, the local burghers would harass us, for they were at one with them' (Eidelberg 1977: 100). Though they were not slow to acknowledge individual exceptions to this collaboration, reporting how some Gentiles sought to provide protection, they go on to specify the cities where crusaders and citizens combined to attack Jews. And among those they named were the cities whose Jewries suffered most cruelly.

The Jews did not get much sympathy from the main crusade chroniclers. Albert of Aachen even suggested that their fate was 'a judgement of the Lord' before adding that it might have been 'some mental aberration' on the part of the crusaders. He

acknowledged that no one should be coerced into being a Christian. He was emphatic that those mainly responsible for the pogrom in Mainz were the Swabian Emich, count of Flonheim and the northern French lords in his company. Albert accused them of bearing off much wealth looted from the Jews (*Racueil* 1841–1906: 4.292). He passed over in silence the role of Godfrey of Bouillon who figures so prominently in the Hebrew accounts. The lords of Bouillon were Albert's local ruling family (Edgington 1997: 61). Ekkehard of Aura wrote of the crusaders' attacks on Jews as motivated by 'zeal for Christianity' without even a hint that such zeal was gravely immoral and seriously illegal. He wrote of Jews as 'the most impious ones' who were 'truly the internal enemies of the Church (Saracens being, the external ones), whose return to Judaism after coerced baptism was a return "to their vomit"' (*Racueil* 1841–1906: 5.15, 20; Prov. 26.11). Albert registered strong disapproval at the action of Jewish mothers in Mainz, who killed their children, he thought, to prevent their being killed by 'the uncircumcised' (more likely it was to prevent their being taken for baptism and Christian upbringing). Bernold of St Blasien, writing of Jews in Worms choosing suicide rather than having baptism forced upon them, attributed their action to 'the persuasion of the devil and their own hardness of heart' (Aronius 1902: 464).

It is the survival of the so-called Hebrew Chronicles which brings home the horrific realities of the violence. They are less histories than books of remembrance, martyrologies. Within a framework of narratives of merciless persecution, they commemorate the noble dead who died to keep God's name holy. The narratives recount, town by town, incident by incident, often in great detail, the sorry tale of crusader–citizenry assault: desecration of synagogues and sacred books, the double-dealing to get hold of Jewish wealth, the savage ultimatum of baptism or death, the pitiless slaughter of men, women and children, the mutilation of corpses . . .

'A NEW-STYLE MARTYRDOM'

. . . and in face of it all, fidelity to Judaism, heroism unto death, and that not only by particular individuals but by whole families and indeed by whole communities. This literature of memorialisation commended especially those who chose to die at the hands of each other rather than reject the charge God had laid on them:

Those who were slain sanctified the Name for all the world to see and exposed their throats for their heads to be severed for the glory of the Creator, also slaughtering one another – man, his friend, his kin, his wife, his children, even his sons-in-law and daughters-in-law; and compassionate women slaying their only children – all wholeheartedly accepting the judgement of Heaven upon themselves, and as they yielded up their souls to the Creator, they all cried out: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One'.

(Deut. 6: 4)

These were the words of Rabbi Eliezer bar Nathan, liturgical poet and Talmudic scholar whose 'Chronicle' brings out most clearly the essentially religious nature of

this Hebrew literary genre: a narrative of pogroms certainly, but also a poetic commemorative lament for the martyrs of Speyer, Worms, Mainz and Cologne and more profoundly, a reading of God's unfolding purpose in permitting this suffering (Eidelberg 1997: 81). Eliezer recalled how when the Rhineland Jewries realised the extremity of the peril that threatened them as the crusade got under way, they had recourse to the appropriate penitential discipline of prayer, fasting and works of charity to avert God's wrath. But God hid himself, withholding his compassion, deaf to their appeal. For he had chosen this generation for a particular purpose of his own: in punishment for its sin, it should be put to the test, charged to demonstrate the strength of its faith and its fidelity to his word. The test passed, its exemplary conduct in face of a vicious foe dedicated to obliterating the name of Israel either by baptism or massacre would be meritorious for all future generations. Suffering then, but placed in the perspective of salvation history. In short, 'a new-style martyrdom' (Chazan 1987: 217–18).

This literature of panegyric was also one of polemic (Abulafia 1985). As the memorialising writers eulogised martyrdom to fortify the faith of their readers, so they sought to deter them from any possible seduction by Christianity. This they did in viruperative language, sometimes, for example, put in the mouths of Jews defying their oppressors with taunts against 'the name of the crucified, despicable and abominable son of harlotry'. Rabbi Eliezer wrote of how those who had been coerced into baptism returned to Judaism 'for in the end they regarded the object of the enemy's veneration as no more than slime and dung'. There was more of this contemptuous vilification of Jesus and his mother, in essence a denial of the central Christian doctrines of Incarnation and Resurrection, but phrased in language sharpened, it has been suggested, by drawing on the invective tradition of the centuries-old parody of the Gospels known as *Toledoth Yeshu*.

The appearance of this genre of literature – at once history of persecution, martyrology, theology of suffering and polemic – is in itself evidence of how the pogroms had changed the ethos of the European Jewish world and made of the First Crusade a watershed in Jewish history.

THE FAILURE OF PROTECTION

When all official theory, civil and ecclesiastical, condemned violence against Jews, why were they not better defended? One reason was the absence of their most powerful protectors: Henry IV was in Italy, the duke of Bohemia in Poland. This meant that the local rulers – bishops in the case of the cities which saw the most devastating attacks – were overwhelmed by the superior force of the crusaders and citizens combined. The Jews looked to the bishops for sanctuary, and were prepared to pay handsomely for it, but their attempts at protection, fairly fully chronicled by the Jewish writers, were largely failures: in Worms where the crusader-townsmen collusion was particularly close; in Mainz where the archbishop's men deserted him and he was threatened with death for standing up for the Jews; in Cologne where the bishop's attempt to save the Jews by dispersing them to strongpoints outside the city, also proved ultimately unsuccessful. These were attacks of sustained intensity

All sources, Christian and Jewish alike, agree that the return to Judaism was universal. It was permitted by Henry IV. No one mentioned any episcopal opposition and the argument from silence might suggest that bishops concurred. The papacy remained silent though the antipope Clement III ordered the bishop of Bamberg to make haste to prevent baptised Jews returning to Judaism for that. It can scarcely be canonical sanction and the example of the fathers' (Simonsen 1988: 42). If Clement

returned to Judaism, save one, about whose sincerity he had doubts (Peters 1848: 190-1). might escape the hands of those searching for them. But he went on to say that all Judaism and asked that their reception of baptism should be hastened so that they it that the Jews having listened to an exposition of the Catholic faith renounced peace and safety and then protect you from your enemies'. The biographer then has with a firm heart. Do this, he declared, and I will restore your possessions to you in themselves from death in body and soul by accepting baptism and the Catholic faith in guilt to their ancestors who had crucified the son of God. He urged them to save son of God and dishonouring his mother. He reminded them that they were bound told them that this crisis had befallen them because of their sins in blaspheming the But he, 'taking advantage of a favourable opportunity', sought to convert them. He rest, however, fled to the refuge of the bishop's palace, resolutely to conceal his help. Jewish women stuffed stones into their dresses and leapt into the river Moselle. The their children. He reported how as the victims of the derision of Christian madmen, some about it. He reported how as the crusaders approached the city, some Jews killed archbishop of Trier, was one such and he had a biographer to record how he went Some bishops urged Jews to save themselves by accepting baptism. Egilbert, guilty of attacking Jews by having their hands cut off.

large army, sufficient at any rate not only to save the Jewry but also to punish those effectives, but then only after some murders and suicides. He had at his disposal a good relations between its bishop and the Jewish community, was the bishop finally and persistence which overcame all opposition. Only in Speyer, with its history of

Figure 9.1 The Jews of Norwich unfavourably sketched on a village roll from the English exchequer, 1233. Isaac, the city's richest Jew, is represented with three heads, symbolising the worship of Atrichet, while the devil 'Cabbat' becares his agents, Mosse Mokke and 'Aveghay'. © London, Public Record Office.



had in mind those Jews who had conformed externally to the practice of Christianity, and there is mention of such in the Jewish sources, he may well have had in mind a canon of Toledo IV, included in Ivo's *Decretum*, which asserted that the relapsed of this sort 'should be forced to observe the faith into which they had been coerced by force and necessity, lest the name of the Lord should be blasphemed and the faith they had taken on be held as base and contemptible' (Linder 1997: 653–4). In Prague, it was alleged that it was through the clergy's negligence that Jews had forsaken Christianity after forced baptism, a charge taken sufficiently seriously by Hermann, bishop of Prague, on his death-bed in 1122 to accuse himself of negligence in allowing Jews to relapse.

There is no record of the Papacy responding in any way to the pogroms of 1096. In the pontificate of Calixtus II (1119–24), however, there was issued, in response to Jewish petitions, a letter of protection for Jews which has a good claim to be the most important single papal statement on this subject (Simonsohn 1988: 44, 51; Grayzel 1962). For it was to be frequently reissued by many popes, sometimes with updating, and it was to find a place in the official code of canon law. Calixtus was strongly committed to the crusade both in the Holy Land and in Spain. There is no evidence to link *Sicut iudeis* directly with crusade preaching. But it fits the context. It reiterates that Jews were not to be coerced into baptism, that their persons and their property should be protected from arbitrary violence and from punishment without due legal process. They were to be permitted to practise their religion, though forbidden to build new synagogues or to enlarge or make more ornate existing ones. These permissions were to apply only to those Jews who did not seek to subvert the Christian faith. That Jews were enemies awaiting their opportunity to strike against Christians was commonplace in Christian thought.

THE SECOND CRUSADE: RENEWED PERSECUTION IN 1145

The fall of Edessa in December 1144 sparked off a new burst of crusading zeal. It sparked off, too, a new burst of Jewish anxiety. Rabbi Ephraim of Bonn, a contemporary witness, gave voice to it:

We called out to the Lord, saying 'Behold, O Lord our God, not yet fifty years have passed since our blood was spilled for the unity of Your revered name, at the time of the great slaughter. Will you forsake us for ever, O Lord? Will your anger last throughout the generations? Such tribulation should not recur twice.

(Eidelberg 1977: 122)

But recur it did, *Sicut iudeis* notwithstanding. Persecution of Jews was preached to sympathetic ears especially by a maverick Cistercian, one Raoul. In many towns of France and Germany (including Mainz, Worms and Cologne, where the Jewries had earlier suffered so severely) he urged the death of Jews as enemies of the Christian religion. Peter the Venerable, Raoul's Cluniac contemporary, disclaimed any intention of 'sharpening Christian swords against this impious people'. But,

nevertheless, he made a strong case for doing so. 'What would be the profit', he demanded of the king of France, Louis VII, 'if the Saracens, the enemy in distant lands were conquered, while the Jewish blasphemers, far worse enemies of Christians than Saracens, were allowed in our very midst, with impunity to blaspheme, despise and disfigure Christ and all the Christian sacraments?' How can zeal for God consume his sons if the Jews, the foremost enemies of Christ and Christians, are allowed to escape totally unscathed? A Christian king should heed the words of a holy king of old: 'Have I not hated them, O Lord, that hated thee: and pined away because of my enemies? I have hated them with a perfect hatred' (Ps. 138: 21) (Constable 1967: 327–30; Friedman 1978; Torrell 1987: 339–42). It was sentiments such as these, along with greed for Jewish wealth, which led again to crusaders and townsmen combining to present Jews with the choice of baptism or death, with desecration of Torah scrolls, and looting of Jewish properties. All the atrocities of 1096 were repeated in 1146 and in much the same region.

Ephraim of Bonn's *Book of Remembrance* suggests that despite the brutalities which attended the Second Crusade, the Jews were somewhat better protected. Otto of Freising credited Conrad III with protecting many Jews as also the citizens of some towns (unspecified) (Waitz 1912: 372). Ephraim of Bonn credited the archbishop of Cologne with considerable success in protecting Jews. He noted too that there were Gentiles who safeguarded their Jewish acquaintances. Judicious use of Jewish money is also a theme of Ephraim's account, buying protection, obtaining deterrent punishment of murderers.

Both Otto of Freising and Ephraim of Bonn, our main sources of information for the pogroms of 1146, gave prominence to the role of Bernard of Clairvaux in combating attacks on Jews. Both accounts make it twofold. He was able to silence the inflammatory preaching of Raoul. He constructed a theological defence of Jews which he propagated widely. That God himself had forbidden Jews to be killed as enemies of the Christian religion became an integral part of crusade preaching.

Both writers recorded that Bernard's argument was presented as an exegesis of Ps. 58: 12: 'God shall let me see over my enemies: slay them not, lest at any time my people forget. Scatter them by thy power: and bring them down, O Lord my protector.' The classic interpretation of this text, applied to the Jews, had been supplied by Augustine: it was God's will that Judaism should survive and that its survival and dispersal throughout the nations should serve to support the truth of Christianity. Bernard put his personal stamp on this reading. He commended the zeal for God of those who took up arms against the Saracen but instructed them to do so according to knowledge (cf. Rm. 12: 2). And the knowledge they were to have is that 'Jews should not be persecuted nor killed nor even expelled'. For Christ speaking through his Church in the psalm has stated, 'God has made it known to me not to kill these my enemies'. And discerning God's purpose in his decree, he argued that their dispersal among Christians was a reminder of Christ's redeeming suffering because it was at their hands that he had met his death. Dispersal as punishment for this very great crime had brought Jews to harsh captivity under Christian princes. There was a further reason for believing God wanted Jews to survive. Alexander II had used the same argument. God had promised that their conversion to Christ would eventually occur: 'If the Jews are totally destroyed, how

can we hope for the salvation which has been promised for them at the end, their final conversion?' (Leciercq and Rochais 1977: 316; Dahan 1987: 59–64).

Peter the Venerable used the same psalm text to argue for Jewish survival. But he was arguing a particular course of action: 'Let their lives be preserved but let their money be taken from them so that the insolence of the infidel Saracens be subdued by the right arms of Christians, strengthened by the wealth of the blaspheming Jews.' He argued for the appropriateness of relieving Jews of wealth, illicitly acquired, to serve the great cause.

It was to Louis VII that he proposed his plan. Ephraim of Bonn noted that French Jews did lose much of their wealth through the action of the king. It would seem, however, that in this context of financial exploitation of Jews in support of the crusade, it was Pope Eugenius III who had more direct influence on Louis VII than Peter the Venerable. For the pope was offering privileges to crusaders, one of which was exemption from paying interest on past loans, with absolution from any oath binding them to a loan contract (*Quantum praedecessores*, 1146). Bernard supported this inducement in his crusade preaching. It is unclear how it was implemented but that it led to Jewish financial loss is not difficult to believe.

Another action of Louis VII may well have given greater cause for concern. He issued a decree against Jews who returned to Judaism after baptism (Luchaire 1885: 143). They were to be banished from the kingdom under sanction of death or mutilation. Coerced baptism was not specifically mentioned, but the implementation of this decree in the crusading context where forced baptism was a regular feature was a potentially very serious threat.

THE THIRD CRUSADE: ENGLAND AND GERMANY

At the foot of the mound which is crowned by Clifford's Tower in the city of York there stands a commemorative plaque. It reads:

On the night of Friday 16 March 1190 some 150 Jews and Jewesses of York having sought protection in the royal castle on this site from a mob incited by Richard Malebisse and others chose to die at each other's hands rather than renounce their faith.

Let them give glory to the Lord and let the people of the islands voice his praise [this in Hebrew].

(Isaiah XLII 12)

The biblical text is doubly apt – both for what it states and for its echoes of the medieval Jewish poet Rabbi Menachem ben Joseph in his elegy on Jewish martyrs, including those of York, concluding as it did: 'They spurned the vanity of life . . . thus they gave glory to the Lord and declared his praise in the island.' That the plaque, erected as a gesture of reconciliation, is sited where it is, is also apt for it marks the scene of England's worst pogrom (Howlett 1884–9: i. 293–9, 308–24; Dobson 1974). But what happened in York was not just of local and national

significance. It was another example of that European phenomenon, pogroms at the time of crusades.

The York atrocity of March 1190 was actually far worse than the plaque indicates. The memorial commemorates martyrs, those within the castle who accepted death, whether self-inflicted or at the hands of loved ones, rather than submit to baptism by force, the Jews who accepted the advice of the much-respected elder, Yomtov of Joigny who happened then to be visiting this furthest outpost of European Jewry. The rabbi in William of Newburgh's account presented the starkness of the threefold choice: between acceptance of baptism, which was to choose the disgrace of apostasy, refusal of baptism, which would mean death in mockery at the hands of impious enemies or, on the other hand, in the praiseworthy manner and in the tradition of their ancestors, a willing and devout surrender of life to the one who asked us to die for his law at our own hand. It was those who accepted this martyrdom that Jewish tradition has especially memorialised. There were, however, two other incidents of massacre to raise the death-toll substantially, significantly to increase the guilt of those responsible, and to exacerbate the horror of the whole event.

Some Jews, unable to reach the protection of the royal castle, were slaughtered in the streets when they refused to accept baptism. Others, inside the castle, were not persuaded to accept the suicide pact. Newburgh has them crying down to their besiegers that they were 'prepared to accept your accustomed demand of us that we be washed clean in holy baptism and our former rites abandoned, to be united to Christ's Church'. Their submission in the form of asking for acceptance as brothers in the peace of Christ was to be shamefully betrayed. Lured from the castle by promises of safety they were mercilessly butchered by Malebisse and his followers even before they could be baptised. In effect the York Jewish community, men, women and children, their properties and possessions and their business records, had been obliterated.

This York pogrom was no isolated incident. It was rather the culmination of a series of attacks on Jews through the length of eastern England over the previous six months. The first riot occurred on the day of Richard I's coronation at Westminster, 3 September 1189. The leaders of the English Jewish community had come to London at this time to seek renewal of the privileges conceded to them by the late king, Henry II. This would be standard procedure, not merely for Jews but for many different sorts of petitioners who felt they needed formal reassurance of their legal position at the beginning of a new reign. The Jews had some difficulty in gaining access to Richard and as they waited, they were first jostled and then severely attacked by a mob. As the convenient rumour spread through London that the king planned the expulsion of the Jews, the initial attacks escalated into a wholesale assault on the persons and properties of the London Jewish community, England's largest, by an out-of-control mob, 'foaming at the mouth for plunder and for the slaughter of a people by God's judgment hateful to all', in Newburgh's explanation of the ferocity of the onslaught. Many Jews were killed, as also some Christians, in squabbles over the booty from Jewish houses which had been thoroughly pillaged and set on fire. There were forced baptisms.

There followed in February and March 1190 attacks on the Jewish communities in Norwich, King's Lynn, Stamford, Lincoln, York and Bury St Edmunds. Greed,

envy, bloodlust were at work in all these towns. In most of them some Jews were killed, others forcibly baptised, their properties looted. In some, notably Lincoln, if they moved quickly, Jews were able to secure protection in the royal castles near to which they habitually lived, against the days of just such emergencies. But in most, casualties were high in proportion to the relative smallness of these provincial communities, and the damage to their properties severe; royal protection proved in the event to be of uncertain and variable quality. It was the conspicuous failure of royal officials to deliver that security to Jews which it was their duty to provide, which made the London and York attacks particularly vicious.

The chroniclers, who bring us as near to contemporary informed opinion as we can get, represent these attacks as unprecedented in England. Up to this time the *pax Judeorum* had held good; London had witnessed no previous outrage, we are told. What had gone wrong? The novelty challenged the chroniclers to explanation. Sometimes they could pinpoint an immediate cause, discerning in a particular happening the spark of the explosion: the minor scuffle at the palace of Westminster which precipitated the London pogrom; an alleged attempt by the Jews in Stamford to seize by force a Jew who had become a Christian and who had taken refuge in a church. Without hesitation Newburgh attributes the York massacre to an organized plot devised by Malebisse and his associates all heavily in debt to the Jews to whom their lands were pledged. They were under pressure to repay their loans, as the Jews in their turn were pressurised by the king's demands on them. Significantly, Newburgh's account of the York massacre ends with the destruction in York Minster of all records of debts to the Jews which had been kept there.

More general explanations of the attacks were offered. The dean of St Paul's, London, Ralph of Diss was emphatic that the responsibility for the attacks on Jews throughout England lay on those who had vowed to go with Richard on crusade. And he condemned them succinctly, with the Bernardine defence of Jewish survival:

Many men preparing to march on Jerusalem decided to rise against the Jews before they attacked the Saracens. Therefore on 6 February [1190] they killed as many Jews in Norwich as could be found in their homes; some Jews found refuge in the castle. On 7 March in Stamford on market day many Jews were killed. On 16 March almost five hundred died in York, it is said, of wounds inflicted on each other. For they preferred to have their blood let by their own people rather than perish at the hands of the uncircumcised. On 18 March, Palm Sunday, fifty-seven Jews are said to have been murdered at Bury St Edmunds. Wherever they could be found Jews perished at the hands of the crusaders (*peregrinantes*) unless they were rescued with the help of those living in the town. It must not be believed that this slaughter of Jews, so disgraceful, so wicked, was acceptable to thinking men; the words of David come frequently to our ears: 'Slay them not'.

(Stubbs 1876: ii. 75–6)

Newburgh also recognised crusader involvement in the mounting of these attacks, though he viewed it rather differently and assigned to it only a secondary role. To his mind, the crusaders despoiled Jews in order to finance their crusading pilgrimage.

He related how crusaders at Stamford and York and probably at King's Lynn rationalised their robbery from Jews as a service to Christ, since they were using the proceeds to pay their crusading expenses. However, Newburgh did not consider the outbreaks of violence as essentially crusader-created. In his analysis, it was on Henry II that there lay primary responsibility for the violence. Three times in his *History of English Affairs* did he express his condemnation of that king. In his own financial interest, Henry had over-encouraged and over-protected these enemies of Christ and their usurious practices; as a result, they had become arrogant, extortionate, oppressive of Christians. Hence such a backlog of resentment had been built up that eventual disaster to the Jews inevitably followed. And so it was 'by the just judgement of Christ' that retribution followed, even if it were implemented by wrong-doers.

All the attacks on Jews in 1190 took place after King Richard had left the country on crusade. It may be that had he been in England more drastic intervention on behalf of his interests might have prevented the worst of the atrocities. However, it is relevant to note, at the time of his coronation in September 1189, he had been powerless to stop the London riot and totally ineffectual in punishing the criminals, despite his reported anger at the grave injury done to the royal authority. That injury was compounded when, immediately following the London incident, after he had affirmed his peace and protection for Jews, it was ignored in so many provincial towns.

The weakness of the English government in this crisis contrasted markedly with the success of the German monarchy in protecting its Jews in the context of crusader threats to their lives. The Emperor Frederick I who took the Cross in Mainz in March 1188 was already a veteran crusader having served under his uncle Conrad II on the Second Crusade. The Jews of Mainz, as of other Rhineland towns, were in their very different way also veterans of crusading, their community having suffered virtual obliteration at the time of the First Crusade and having been terrorised at the time of the Second by the inflammatorily hostile preaching of the Cistercian Raoul. In 1188–90 the experience of ruler and ruled combined to frustrate the savagery of some crusaders who, like some of their predecessors, thought that Jews were indistinguishable from Saracens as common enemies of Christ and ought either to be baptised or to be killed. The Jews were quick to take refuge in castles that proved safe. They organised for themselves a negotiating team to keep their plight in the forefront of the concerns of the civil authorities and to have it adequately provided with the cash necessary to ensure protection that was effectively activated. They were successful in securing the cooperation of the emperor. He forbade attacks on Jews under threat of condign punishments. According to a Jewish source, a letter of Rabbi Moses ben Eleazar, anyone who wounded a Jew was to have his hand cut off; anyone who killed a Jew would himself be killed (Chazan 1970: 84–93). And the emperor made sure that his officials understood he was in deadly earnest about ensuring the safety of his Jews. Furthermore he induced the German bishops to back up his measures. To quote Eleazar again, 'the bishops condemned anyone raising his hand against the Jews in order to harm them', their privileged crusader status notwithstanding. These early, coordinated and appropriately firm measures taken by the Jews themselves and the Christian authorities acting responsibly, alerted by

memories of the unhappy experiences of earlier crusade ventures, contrast sharply with the ineffectuality of English officialdom with its complacent assumption that the hitherto unbreached *pax Judaeorum* would continue to hold even in the circumstances of the crusade fever now affecting England for the first time.

The English government reacted strongly to the damage done to the royal authority and treasury by the violence of 1190. There was first an attempt at punitive action. At the beginning of May 1190, the chancellor William of Longchamp, bishop of Ely, arrived in York to seek out and punish those who had violated the king's peace given to Jews and to seek recompense for the damage caused to the royal treasury by destruction of their property and loss of their money. By this time the ringleaders of the conspiracy had fled either to Scotland or on crusade. The city authorities claimed that they had neither participated in the massacre nor had they been strong enough to prevent it. Hostages from the citizenry were taken and held until the richest citizens on behalf of the city as a whole paid fines. But the mass of the rioters, many of them from the surrounding countryside, could not be identified. Longchamp sacked the royal officials, that sheriff and constable of the castle whose inadequacies had allowed the initial attack to get out of hand and bring about the deaths of so many Jews whose safety in the castle should have been guaranteed. Malebisse himself forfeited his estates, which presumably was why in 1191 he joined John in rebellion against the king. When John became king in 1199 Malebisse made fine for all past offences, including his part in the York massacre, and his lands were restored to him. Careful attempts to identify the numerous other Yorkshire gentry who were Malebisse's associates have not been very successful; evidence, it would seem, though negative, that their punishments, if any, were of no great severity. Attempts to recoup in the king's interest what had been lost in the destruction of Jews' property were pursued for some years, as the instructions given to the itinerant justices in 1194 show. But their degree of success is difficult to establish. All in all, Newburgh was right if he meant no one paid with his own life for killing Jews when he wrote between two and four years later: 'Up to the present time, no one has been condemned for that massacre of Jews'.

There were, however, developments in the aftermath of the massacres of Jews of greater long-term significance than punitive measures and the securing of compensation for loss of Jewish resources. Richard made clear that Henry II's policy of privileging Jews would continue by renewing the charter by which the special position of Jews in England and Normandy would be guaranteed. It was a charter which also underlined the royal monopoly of control of the Jews. But he also went further than had Henry II in tightening the link between Crown and Jews.

This he did by establishing a permanent exchequer of the Jews, a sub-department of the Great Exchequer, the hub of royal government. There had already been, in the late 1180s, some movement towards setting up a distinct government department to deal with Jewish affairs. It had been found administratively convenient in 1186 to handle the collection of the tallage on Jews separately from the rest of the revenue-raising. Likewise, after the death of Aaron of Lincoln it had been found easier to reckon the amounts of the king's take-off from outstanding debts by setting up an 'exchequer of Aaron'. But in 1194 when Richard returned to England and ordered a general survey of his assets and a certain reorganisation of their management, earlier

ad hoc arrangements of Jewish financial matters were put on a more permanent basis. It was then that the exchequer of the Jews began to take shape. The justices in the eyre of 1194 were instructed to register all Jewish properties of whatever sort, to nominate six or seven towns where all loan contracts were to be registered by officials appointed to oversee the appropriate procedures: 'from this time', the instruction ran, 'no contract is to be made with nor payment made to Jews nor any alteration in the bonds except before these officials or a majority of them'. Here is the birth of the exchequer of the Jews, with its 'keepers', its standard form of contract (the chirograph), its chests (*arcas*, which became the generic term for the repositories of loan records); a government department which had competence over Jewish affairs, both as a financial agency and a law court. We hear no more of such arrangements as had made York Minster a place of deposit for records of debts, readily open to the likes of Richard Malebisse and his fellow-criminals. Jews were now formally administered directly by the Crown and, while still having recourse to the ordinary royal courts, had now a court specialising in matters Jewish, especially those concerning loans. The development probably enhanced their security and the efficiency of their business dealings because they were the more clearly underwritten by the Crown and its law. But it also enhanced their vulnerability for they were now to be even more readily at the mercy of the ruthless vagaries of inherently unstable royal fiscal policies. And they shared too the unpopularity of those policies in the country at large (Stubbs 1868–71: iii, 262–7; Scott 1948–50: 446–55; Richardson 1960: 116–20).

The period of ruinously merciless taxation of Jews by the kings of England was as yet some way off (Stacey 1988: 135–50). Richard I, like his father before him, was reasonably moderate in his demands on his Jews. One sign that the Jews had weathered the storms of 1189–90 came in 1194 when the king taxed all the Jewish communities in the so-called 'Northampton *donum*' (Abrahams 1925: lix–lxxiv). Figures for the receipts of this levy are extant. They show that despite the attacks of a few years earlier healthy sums could still be raised without gross damage to Jewish businesses. In all, twenty Jewries contributed. York, King's Lynn and Stamford did not figure in this record. But London, Lincoln and Norwich did.

An even surer sign of Jewish recovery came in the reconstitution of the York community. The Pipe Rolls for 1195 show Jewish lenders active in Yorkshire. By the turn of the century, York was one of twenty-seven towns where *arcas* were established (Richardson 1960: 14; Dobson 1974: 41–2). By the end of the second decade of the new century, royal taxation records strongly suggest that York had become second only to London as the wealthiest Jewish community in the country. Such was the courage and resilience of the Jews, such was the continuing high demand for their credit services, such was (the exceptional circumstances of 1189–90 apart) the power of royal protection. We witness in England a recovery similar to that achieved by the continental Jewries after the massacres and lootings of the First Crusade.

This is not to say that the recovery of the northern European Jewries was the result of cessation of persecution. Far from it. Such persecution, in the thirteenth century and beyond, could and did take many forms: most notably, in the baseless accusations of ritual murder, blood libel and host desecration and in wholesale

expulsions (Rubin 1999). Nor is it to say that persecution in the crusade context ceased totally. The Shepherds' Crusades of 1251 (Jordan 1979: 113–16) and 1320 (Barber 1981; Nirenberg 1996: 43–92) showed that at least for the peasants who made up the *pastoureaux*, the cause of the Holy Land demanded the killing of Jews as a preliminary. But in effect the chapter in the history of persecution of Jews which attended mainstream crusading closed in 1190² – and did so presumably because the ruling classes had at last come fully to appreciate that slaughtering Jews was inimical not only to their religion but also to their economic interests.

NOTES

- 1 Ivo of Chartres included them in his *Decretum* (Linder 1997: 671–2). The letter to all the Spanish bishops became particularly influential since the substance of it entered Gratian's *Decretum*, C. 23 q. 8 c. 11 (*Dispar*) and thus became an ordinary part of a canonistic education.
- 2 Although it has been suggested that crusade involvement stimulated some rulers to further tighten restrictions on Jews: Jordan 1979: 154; Stacey 1988: 146.

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