Moral Pandemic: Jocelin’s Narrative of Jewish-Christian Confederacy

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The geographic isolation of England from the European continent has been a crucial element in allowing all aspects of English life, in particular its spiritual and intellectual life, to afford some distance from the rest of the world. In medieval England, the Norman Conquest of 1066, the First Crusades of 1096, the Second Crusades of 1147, and the Third Crusades of 1189 were notable exceptions to the relative independence of the Kingdom of England from the affairs and preoccupations of the European continent. By offering Pope Alexander III the military assistance of England in the Crusades against the Islamic empires, the King of England Henry II atoned for the murder of Thomas Beckett in 1170 and secured England’s spiritual independence from the Catholic Church with the Compromise of Avranches.¹

The Jews and Jewish communities living in this context began to take on a foreign quality in the eyes of their Christian counterparts. Subject to different laws from the king and different religious values from their own spiritual authorities, medieval English Jews lived in a double-bind through their service to the king as the king’s treasurers. Their status as non-Christians allowed them to make a living on moneylending at interest to the medieval English Christians without any fear of the Catholic Church’s threat to excommunicate the practitioners of ‘usury’. But their status also attracted the attention of the King of England, who took nominal control of Jewish moneylending and called in debts to finance the expeditions of the Second and Third Crusades.² Once the collection of debts reduced the prominent Jewish moneylenders to poverty and raised the ire of ordinary Christians against their Jewish neighbors, the status of Jewish communities plummeted to a new low with the massacre of York of 1190 and the proliferation of anti-Semitic blood libels. Exactly 100 years later, Richard I would issue the Edict of Expulsion of 1290 and initiate the exodus of Ashkenazi Jews into the European continent and finally toward Eastern Europe.³

Jocelin de Brakelond considered the position of the Jews in his community and gave it a sinister interpretation in his work Chronicle of the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds. Given that the work recounts the succession of Abbot Samson to Abbot Hugo in 1182 and the ensuing governance of the Abbey under Abbot Samson for the next twenty years, a reasonable estimate

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for the provenance of this work dates to about 1202 in the County of Suffolk. At first glance, the primary focus of the *Chronicle* seems to be a gossip’s account of the petty intrigues and conflicts surrounding the governance of the Abbey: insubordination among the lower-ranking ecclesiastics concerning gluttony and petty thefts and prodigal hospitality, the election of a new abbot and his inconvenient plans for expensive building projects, an accidental fire that almost burns down one of the buildings, crafty negotiations with the local town, debtors, and the king’s representatives to gain the monetary advantage needed to balance the abbey’s exorbitant finances. But Jocelin, as narrator of this purportedly factual and transparent historiography, has chosen to structure his account as a story of how his abbey rose from the depths of conflict and disorder to a height of, if not perfect peace and harmony, at least some commitment to moral probity and financial solvency befitting an ecclesiastical institution.

Embedded in this portrayal of an abbey breaking free from corruption under the leadership of Abbot Samson is a deeply hostile and intolerant attitude toward the mere presence of Jews in a Christian community. First, it is worth noting that Jocelin was himself the author of an anti-Semitic blood libel about the murder of a boy named Robert by the local Jewish community in Suffolk. Second, within the pages of the *Chronicle*, Jocelin connects the relationship of Jewish moneylenders to royal authority, to insubordinates within the abbey, and to the Christian community at Suffolk, by suggesting that Jews and Jewish communities have an evil essence that allow them to infect, abuse, and tempt Christians away from the life of virtue and of the good to form Jewish-Christian confederacies of evil.

**Infection in the Abbot’s House**

The first axis of evil is the relationship between the insubordinates and the Jewish moneylenders. Jocelin attributes this relationship to the willingness of the local ecclesiastics under Abbot Hugh to manipulate the vulnerability of the abbot for their own benefit, in combination with the willingness of the Jewish moneylenders to collude with the insubordinate ecclesiastics by agreeing to secretly issue bonds. Emphasizing that “Abbot Hugh had grown old and was losing his sight”, Jocelin’s narration seeks to draw out the reader’s sympathy for Abbot Hugh and reduces the abbot’s responsibility for the corruption of the abbey. In particular, Jocelin’s readers would have recognized Abbot Hugh’s weak eyesight as a biblical allusion to

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Jesus’ compassion for the disabled in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. In the original Greek version of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus humanizes the blind individuals that come to him for healing by referring to them with words that connote social rank. The Gospel of Matthew similarly recounts stories where Jesus stopped on the road to Jericho to heal a group of blind men lying by the wayside, and where Jesus healed a blind man after proclaiming to onlookers that the man’s blindness did not diminish his worth as a faithful believer in God. Far from diminishing a Christian believer’s worth, some medieval interpretations of blindness explained it as a mark of God’s love. In England and France, New Testament references to blindness not only provided the basis for the creation of systems of charity that fed, clothed, and housed the blind, but also provided the French historiographer Gilles Li Muisis in the late 13th century with the justification for interpreting his own blindness as a blessing from God. For readers to blame Abbot Hugh for the corruption of the abbey would contradict Jesus’ compassion for blind men and run against the interpretation of blindness as a sign of God’s blessing.

Jocelin instead piles the blame on the insubordinates, issuing a blanket condemnation that “Every employee, seeing that the abbot was naive and elderly, ignored his duty and did as he pleased”. This passage not only attributes the corruption of the abbey to the insubordinates, but also frames the insubordinates’ actions as a moral vice replete with impiety and intemperance. Jocelin concludes his description of the rampant insubordination under Abbot Hugh with the observation that “This infection spread”. The opening passage of the *Chronicle* takes an uncompromising position; the insubordinates are rotten, both in their actions and, more importantly, in the very core of their moral character. The corruption has become a matter of extensive spiritual and bodily taint.

The Jewish moneylenders involve themselves with this corruption by lending the insubordinates money, and thereby giving them the means to express their moral vices. If we consider for a moment Jocelin’s historical context, we would see that Jewish moneylending no longer made the Jews evil—that is, until Jocelin and other writers like William of Norwich wrote stories about rich Jews luring children into their homes and murdering them. According to the conception of ethics advanced by the Christian theologian and philosopher Peter Abelard, the typical interpretation of the Jewish-Christian moneylending business would have held that the

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Jocelin’s Narrative of Jewish-Christian Confederacy

Clark Xu

Jewish moneylenders were morally neutral and that the real blame lay with the Christian insubordinates. Abelard’s work had an enormous influence in Christian theology when it was disputed by St. Bernard of Clairvaux in 1140, two generations before Jocelin’s time, and would have been familiar to a Latin, Christian writer like Jocelin. In the late 12th and early 13th century, the College of Cardinals would elect three of Abelard’s students to become the Pope, and many others would become European monarchs or courtesans. His major ethical works were Ethics; A Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew, and a Christian; and Commentary on St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans.

Abelard’s Dialogue modified the genre of Jewish-Christian disputation to become an analysis of Jewish rationality, rather than an attack on Jewish, racialized identity. Abelard discourages ad hominine attacks against the Jewish disputer by introducing a philosopher into the disputation. During the disputation, the philosopher argues separately with the Jew and the Christian; in fact, the Jewish and Christian disputants never directly address each other. In the disputes between the Jew and the philosopher, Abelard never gives in to the temptation of earlier writers of Jewish-Christian disputation to blindly assert Christian dogma. Instead, he employs the quaestio, a question and answer sequence consisting of logical objections and responses, that would become the hallmark of medieval scholasticism in Thomas Aquinas’ Summa Theologica. When Abelard fairly applies the quaestio to the philosopher’s disputes with the Jew and with the Christian, he suggests that Jews and Christians have a shared rationality that is more important than their dogmatic disagreements about articles of faith. By shifting the focus of moral judgments away from essentialist ethics, such as a Jewish or Christian ‘moral character’, Abelard’s ethical theory engages in the abstract with Jewish rationality, while allowing the Jews and Jewish communities of ‘real’ society to stay morally neutral.

In addition, Abelard’s focus on intentions rather than outcomes also allowed the Jews to occupy morally neutral ground. The historian of philosophy Peter King explains that Abelard’s ethical theory in the Ethics was intentionalist, which means that an individual’s actions are good if the individual’s intentions, or expected outcome, for those actions are good. His ethical theory represented a break from several other ethical theories, including the consequentialist

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8 Peter King, “Peter Abelard” (Stanford University, Summer 2015): 1.
9 Ibid, 2.
10 Peter Abelard, A Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew, and a Christian (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1979) 10.
11 Ibid 12.
12 Ibid 11.
view that an individual’s actions are good if the results, or actual outcome, are good. Abelard makes his argument by dividing an individual’s actions into four parts, which he calls desire, character, deed, and intention. After objecting to ethical theories based on desire and character, he argues against the consequentialist view by suggesting that it cannot condemn individuals who are planning to do an evil act until they have actually committed the act. Furthermore, the consequentialist view makes it impossible for individuals to plan their moral actions because they will not know whether an act is good or evil until its effects have played out. Instead, Abelard argues that his own ethical theory solves the objections to the consequentialist view and correctly categorizes the Christians’ love of God, which leads to good intentions, as moral behavior. Abelard’s ethical theory implies that the Jewish moneylenders were morally neutral because their intention was to provide financial services for Christians. In fact, his ethical theory implies that the actual source of evil is the Christian insubordinates, who chose to divert their loans from building churches, funding crusades, or helping the poor, to using the money to feed their own desire for pleasure.

But Jocelin goes out of his way to suggest another—unusual—interpretation of this relationship: The Christian insubordinates caught their moral infection from the rent-seeking Jewish moneylender. Of the one Christian and two Jewish moneylenders that Jocelin cites as holding the debts accrued under Abbot Hugo, Jocelin chooses to recall in detail the story of the abbey’s debt to a prominent Jewish moneylender, Benedict of Norwich. The story begins when William the sacrist “secretly borrowed 40 marks at interest from Benedict the Jew”. The secrecy of the exchange between William and Benedict, which hides the debt from the knowledge and permission of Abbot Hugh, associates the manipulative disloyalty of the insubordinates with the Jewish moneylender to form a Jewish-Christian confederacy of evil.

When Abbot Hugh eventually discovered the sacrist’s debt, “someone went to the abbot, and speaking on the sacrist’s behalf, so deceived him that he allowed another bond to be made out for Benedict the Jew, this time for £400”. The repetition of the epithet Benedict the Jew and the anonymity of the second insubordinate reiterate Jocelin’s belief in the close collaboration and wide net of the Jewish-Christian confederacy of evil. Jocelin concludes the story by juxtaposing

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14 Ibid 214.
15 Ibid 219.
16 Ibid 220.
17 Ibid 225.
18 Jocelin, 4.
19 Ibid.
the initial loan of 40 marks with the final sum of “£1200, excluding the compound interest”.
Anticipating the link between sinfulness and monetary value in the sale of indulgences that
would represent one of the central concerns of Canons 60 and 62 of the Fourth Lateran Council
in 1215, and later of Martin Luther’s 95 Theses in the Protestant Reformation, Jocelin
symbolizes the burgeoning corruption of the Jewish-Christian confederacy through the explosive
growth of the sacrist’s debt.20 In Jocelin’s narrative, the debt seems to be alive, the
uncontrollable, organic offspring of the unholy economic intercourse between Jew and Christian.
At another point in the Chronicle, Jocelin also recounts that “the cellarer, like the other officials,
borrowed money from Jurnet the Jew, without consulting the convent”.21 The position of the
Jewish moneylender in both cases is one with the dubious distinction of providing disobedient
subordinates with the means to ruin the fortunes of the abbey. Jocelin intricately intertwines
Jewish moneylending with rampant insubordination; he believes that the exorbitant usury of the
Jewish moneylender enables the abbot’s insubordinates to express their evil disobedience with
sinfulness and corruption. In his mind, this sinfulness and corruption have quasi-physical
properties, infection and growth, that share an evil essence with the physical presence of Jews
and Jewish communities.

By citing Jurnet the Jew as one of the two Jewish moneylenders in his Chronicle, Jocelin
turns Jurnet’s biographical background into an illustration of his imagined Jewish-Christian
confederacy. It turns out that Jurnet married a Christian woman and had children that were
considered Jewish by the local community. Following Jocelin’s framework of a Jew corrupting a
Christian through money exchange, one of Henry II’s pipe rolls records that “The Jews of
England owe 5525 marks and a half for the amerciament of Jurnet of Norwich”.22 The
amerciament refers to the court’s decision to impose a discretionary fine on Jurnet for marrying
the Christian woman Miryld of Humphrey de Havile. The pipe roll indicates, first of all, that
Jurnet was actually known as Jurnet of Norwich and that Jocelin’s Chronicle explicitly changed
the epithet to Jurnet the Jew in order to construct moneylending as a Jewish practice. Second, the
court’s discretionary power over the level of the fine and its final decision to essentially
confiscate all of Jurnet’s property for marrying Miryld attest to the ambivalence of the local
community towards Jewish-Christian sexual relations. Jocelin’s decision to explicitly name

21 Jocelin, 6.
Sons, 1893) 90.
Jocelin’s Narrative of Jewish-Christian Confederacy

Jocelin as a Jewish moneylender in his *Chronicle* turns this ambivalence against all Jews. When Jocelin represents Jurnet as the average Jew, he invites his readers to imagine Jews and Jewish communities as an evil clique that leverages their financial power for sexual favors from Christian women.

Jurnet’s biographical background also provides Jocelin with the material to show that the infection of the weak, Miryld, leads to the infection of the strong. The *Abbreviatio Placitorium* of October 1194 notes “Humphrey had pledged the whole land of Herlam to Jurnet [and Miryld] his wife, and Isaac his son, for five shillings principal and one penny every week for interest”. When the document concludes by reporting that “Afterwards Humphrey came and put himself at the King’s mercy”, we see that Humphrey was a prominent subject of the king, with means to travel and present himself at the king’s court. Even without Jocelin’s historiography, Humphrey’s decision to transfer his entire estate to his son-in-law Jurnet for a token sum was a scandalous affair. Jocelin’s decision to evoke this incident by mentioning Jurnet in the *Chronicle* turns scandal into the suspicion of a Jewish-Christian confederacy. In this confederacy, once dependable Christians like Humphrey become infected by weaker Christians like Miryld who have already succumbed to Jewish influence. The infection is complete, with Humphrey accepting interest like a Jewish moneylender and passing on his estate to a line of inheritance that includes a grandson named Isaac.

In addition to Isaac from the *Abbreviatio Placitorium*, Jurnet and Miryld had a daughter named Margaret who, despite the matrilinearity of Ashkenazi Jews, was considered to be a Jewish moneylender by the townspeople of Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk. A legal fragment preserved at the British Museum and dated to 1201 documents that “Peter of Eclesfield, [owes] Margaret daughter of Jurnet, five marks of silver at the nativity of St. John the Baptist following the demise of Gerard, prior of Norwich”. Margaret’s status as a Jewish moneylender in Norfolk, only several years before Jocelin completed his *Chronicle*, provides Jocelin with several neat stories of Jewish infection. First, after Jurnet went out of business lending to insubordinates in St. Edmund’s abbey, his daughter Margaret simply relocated to Suffolk’s northern neighbor and continued to practice moneylending. Margaret, moreover, clearly inherited the religion, race, and economic occupation of her Jewish father, not her Christian mother, allowing Jocelin to pose Jews and Jewish communities as an existential threat to Christian culture and Christian bodies.

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Margaret’s story suggests to Jocelin that the Jewish infection has the capacity both to reproduce itself and to spread to other areas of England.

Thus, Jurnet’s life is perfect material for Jocelin to appropriate in his narrative of the spread of Jewish-Christian confederacy by infection. The historical documents suggest that the appearance of Jurnet in Jocelin’s *Chronicle* would have conjured up the following image: Jurnet, an unknown foreigner from abroad, settles in East Anglia and makes a parasitical living by lending money to countless unsuspecting Christians. As he gains wealth and power, he lures Miryld into marriage and uses his marriage to bring down his father-in-law, Humphrey de Havile, a respected townsman. His marriage also leads to Jewish children, further expanding the Jewish-Christian confederacy. Finally, he appears in Jocelin’s *Chronicle* as one of the two Jewish moneylenders who are funneling money to the insubordinates in the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds and preparing to bring the Abbey to financial ruin.

Just as the construction of Jurnet in Jocelin’s historiography transforms the *fait divers* of Jurnet’s life into a representation of the ways in which Jews allegedly infect and corrupt Christians, Jocelin will recall the royal patronage of Benedict the Jew to insinuate that Jews have the sinister power to consummate the financial ruin of the abbey by corrupting and abusing royal and local authority.

### Corruption of Sheriffs and Royal Letters

The second axis of evil is the relationship between royal authority and the Jewish moneylenders. Jocelin attributes the king’s royal intervention in William the sacrist’s debts to the unwelcome meddling of the Jewish moneylender Benedict, recounting that the “Jew arrived with a letter from the king concerning the sacrist’s debt”\(^\text{25}\). His syntactic construction places the Jew as the grammatical subject and thereby shifts the responsibility for calling in the debt from the king to the Jewish moneylender. Furthermore, Jocelin’s verb choice *arrived* suggests that the Jewish moneylender carried out the king’s instructions with an unusual amount of haste and eagerness, raising doubts about the Jewish moneylender’s personal motives in his manner of executing the letter of the law. In Jocelin’s narrative, the Jewish moneylender is more than a representative of the king; Benedict the Jew seems to abuse the king’s power and authority in order to benefit from his secret Jewish-Christian confederacy with the abbot’s insubordinates. Thus, Benedict the Jew presumably applies pressure on the abbey to repay its debts by making

\(^{25}\) Jocelin, 4.
sure that “the king has received an unfavourable report about [the abbey], to the effect that the affairs of the church are being mismanaged both inside the convent and outside”. Jocelin’s version of events suggests that Benedict the Jew reported to King Henry II that Abbot Hugh was responsible for the enormous debts of the Abbey, and actively encouraged the king to send the royal almoner to chastise Abbot Hugh and to collect the debt of £1200.

But records show that the majority of debts that Jewish moneylenders decided to call in early were actually so mandated by the king to raise immediate funds for the royal warmongering expeditions across Europe and the Middle East. Upon his succession to the throne in 1190, King Richard I issued a royal charter that confirmed the monarch’s patronage of Jewish moneylending. Far from Jocelin’s insinuation that the Jewish moneylenders twisted and corrupted royal authority in order to collect their debts from Christians, the text of Richard I’s charter clearly supports Jewish moneylending when it proclaims, “The aforesaid Jews may sell their pledges Without trouble [...] We command and order you to ward and defend and protect them”. In light of the charter’s unambiguous endorsement of Jewish bonds and its injunction that the king’s subjects guarantee the safety of the Jews, Jocelin’s portrayal of Benedict the Jew as a corrupter of royal authority dissolves. If anything, it is the king that forces Jews into moneylending practices. When the charter notes that “Let them go whithersoever they will with all their chattels just like our own goods [...] just like our own chattels”, the king’s legal justification for exempting Jews from local tariffs is that the Jews are royal property.

Closer to the year in which Jocelin completed his Chronicle, King John’s royal charter of 1201 reiterated many of the protections granted to the Jews by Richard I. It exactly repeats Richard’s endorsement of Jewish bonds and his guarantee of the safety of the Jews. Furthermore, John justifies the exemptions granted to the Jews by treating the Jews as royal property and asking his subjects to respect his decision. Declaring at the outset that “we have granted to all the Jews of England and Normandy [...] their liberties and customs just as they had them in the time of the aforesaid King Henry”, John’s charter not only fulfills its promises to allow Jewish moneylenders to operate with the same rights and privileges as they had under the reign of Richard I, but also phrases royal patronage of Jewish moneylending as a traditional policy that is

26 Ibid, 5.
29 Ibid.
Thus, the first article of John’s charter suggests that John’s decision to reaffirm Jewish rights and privileges is one way in which he will rule the kingdom “better and more quietly and more honourably”. Jocelin’s narrative contradicts the historical records of Richard I and John to create the illusion that Jewish moneylenders had full agency and discretion over the management of their loans to Christians. Continuing his story of a Jewish-Christian confederacy, this illusion allows Jocelin to interpret Benedict the Jew’s attempts at collecting the debt as both a morally reprehensible usurpation and misuse of royal authority, and an ill-intentioned act aimed at the abbey and ecclesiastical authority.

Jocelin reintroduces William the sacrist in his narrative as “the father and patron of the Jews, for they enjoyed his protection”. With this detail, the Chronicle establishes two major characteristics of the Jewish-Christian confederacy between the Jewish moneylender and the abbot’s insubordinates. As already discussed, the Jewish moneylenders provided the Christian insubordinates with the means to express their moral vices. Now a second axis of evil appears in Jocelin’s narrative: the corruption of power. For Jocelin, the physical presence of Jews and Jewish communities bears the responsibility for transforming William the sacrist from a virtuous ecclesiastical authority to a corrupt official. Jocelin illustrates this principle by giving voice to several complaints about the misconduct arising from William the sacrist’s close relationship with the Jewish moneylenders. He claims that the Jews “had free entrance and exit, and went everywhere throughout the monastery, wandering by the altars and by the shrine while Mass was being celebrated”. Rather than portraying the presence of Jews in the abbey as a peaceful moment of intermingling between Jews and Christians, Jocelin contrasts the casual lassitude of the Jews with the strict religious observances of the Christians to portray the Jews as utterly disrespectful and undisciplined. He also observes that “Even more incongruous, during the troubles [of 1173-4], their wives and children were sheltered in our pittancery”; the pittancery of this excerpt and the free entrance and exit of the previous excerpt refer to the economic activities of circulation and exchange, further reinforcing Jocelin’s association of Jews and Jewish communities with the dubious practice of ‘usury’.

William the Sacrist, as an official corrupted by his role as the protector of the Jews of Bury St. Edmunds, probably had a complicated relationship with the Christian community. Although little is known about William the Sacrist besides Jocelin’s historiography, he played a

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31 Jocelin, 10.
similar role in the Troubles of 1174 to that of Ranulf de Glanville in the massacre of York in 1190. As protector of the York Jewry and a representative of Henry II, Ranulf held a considerable amount of social influence in York. His residence was one of the neighboring buildings to York Minster, the largest cathedral in England, and was in the local vicinity of York’s synagogue. With Ranulf in town, the Christian community at York respected his presence by tolerating the Jewish community. But Ranulf bequeathed his residence to St. Leonard hospital and went on crusade in 1189 with the blessing of Henry II. By the next year, Ranulf’s absence had weakened the king’s protection of the York Jewry. When the Christian mob actually did rise up against the Jewish community, the Jews fled to the Tower of York and were left to fend for themselves. In this context, Jocelin’s claim that Jewish presence corrupted local authority had a plausible basis in relationships between Jews and local authorities: When Ranulf distanced himself from the York Jewry by going on crusade, the Christians of York were no longer pinned down by Ranulf’s ‘corrupt’ authority and had the opportunity to free themselves from the Jewish influence. Jocelin also would have had a plausible complaint about the financial dealings between the Jewish moneylenders and their clients. Since clients were usually monastic houses or the local nobles, Jewish moneylenders had business contacts with the powerful elements of the town that would have been inaccessible to the average Christian. From this perspective, Jocelin’s rhetoric about the unhealthy, corrupting influence that Jewish moneylenders had on local authorities would have been highly persuasive to the Christian layperson.

The corruption of William the sacrist also reiterates the close relationship between the Jewish moneylender’s physical presence and the usurpation of royal authority. As an extension of royal power, the king often delegated responsibility to local authorities, such as sheriffs and castellans, for the protection of Jews and their ‘usury’ trade. For example, another article of Richard I’s Royal Charter of 1190 announces that Jews may plead “before those who guard our castles in whose bailiwicks they themselves remain wherever they may be.” This clause represents the apotheosis of what Jocelin would have considered as the corruption of royal authority, allowing Jews and Jewish to exist in every garrisoned town with the blessing of the king and outside the grasp of the local Christians. To a monastic like Jocelin, the suggestion that

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34 Rymer, n.p.
the Jews appropriated castles as a safe haven from the local Christians would have been particularly irksome—up until 1200, Cistercian orders used defensive architecture as a mnemonic for daily spiritual devotionals.\textsuperscript{35} Deriving from Cicero’s \textit{Rhetorica ad Herennium}, the Cistercian orders believed that the space a person inhabits should serve as a constant reminder to be virtuous. This idea developed throughout the Early Medieval period, and we find Abbot Aelred of Rievaulx writing in his \textit{Sermo XVII} of 1163, “Brothers, let us make ready a certain castle spiritually, so that our Lord might come to us [...] The tower guards everything, because it is taller than everything else”.\textsuperscript{36} Thus, Jocelin and his contemporaries would have interpreted the refuge of Jews in sacred places, whether the local castle or even the pittancery of the Abbey, as both an insult to the local Christian community and a perversion of hallowed space. In Jocelin’s world, the corruption of both royal and local power springs from the evil, infectious material essence that Jocelin attributes to Jews and Jewish communities.

The Christian, the Jew, and the Ugly

The great danger of Jocelin’s hostile historiography is that the identification of Jewish presence with corruption implies the converse identification of Jewish absence with moral probity. Jocelin uses the appointment of Abbot Samson in the aftermath of the death of Abbot Hugo to represent the turning point between corruption and redemption. He asserts that “the expulsion of the Jews from St. Edmund’s town, and the foundation of the new hospital at Babwell are all signs of his great goodness”.\textsuperscript{37} For Jocelin, the elimination of Jewish presence from Suffolk is an unambiguous social good. The syntactic proximity of the elimination of Jewish presence and the foundation of a new building in Jocelin’s narrative suggests that Jocelin expects the Jewish expulsion to be a constructive and stable policy. In an analogical sense, Abbot Samson’s decision to build a space for medical patients is akin to his decision to rid Suffolk of the risk of infection from Jewish presence.

Framing Jewish absence as a reversal of the corruption caused by Jewish presence, Jocelin’s description of the expulsion of the Jews from Suffolk echoes several details from the first and second axes of evil. For example, when Jocelin records that “The abbot asked the king for written permission to expel the Jews from St Edmund’s town”, the narrative alludes to

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid} 78.
\textsuperscript{37} Jocelin, 41.
Benedict the Jew’s letter from the king. While the Jewish moneylender in Jocelin’s narrative formerly abused the king’s writing by leveraging its power to collect the abbey’s debts, Jocelin now believes that the Abbot Samson restores the king’s righteousness by using his writing to save Suffolk from the Jews. Similarly, “The abbot’s repurchase of the manor of Mildenhall for as little as 1,100 marks of silver” resonates with the abbey’s debt of 1,200 marks to Benedict the Jew earlier in the narrative; a sum of money that symbolized corruption now acts as a symbol of redemption.

Finally, Jocelin recounts that “the abbot directed that in future all those who received back Jews or gave them lodging in St Edmund’s town, were to be excommunicated in every church and at every altar”. Abbot Samson’s threat of excommunication for any townsperson of Suffolk who continued to associate with Jews echoes Pope Alexander III’s instructions in a letter to two archbishops with dioceses in England. After the assassination of Thomas Beckett in 1170, Alexander III wrote, “The king of the English should be subjected to excommunication, and his kingdom to interdict, unless peace were restored to the church of Canterbury”. For the sake of England’s religious purity, Alexander III gave the Bishop of Sens the authority to excommunicate Henry II if he refused to atone for the death of Thomas Beckett. By authorizing excommunication for any Suffolk townsperson who ignored the order to keep away from Jews, Abbot Samson looks back to Alexander III’s decision to use excommunication as a way to force secular politics to change its course.

The order of excommunication by Abbot Samson also anticipates the order of quarantine first used in the 1330s by medical authorities responding to the spread of Black Plague from trading vessels. In this later context, the idea of Jewish infection took a literal turn as Christian mobs across France, Spain, Italy, the Low Countries, and the German Principalities, rounded up Ashkenazi Jews and burned them at the stake for allegedly poisoning the food and water supply with bubonic plague out of spite for the Christians. When confronted with Jewish lepers, evidence against the accusation that Jews were maliciously spreading the bubonic plague to kill Christians, the Christian mobs explained them away as an example of God’s decision to punish

38 Ibid.
39 Jocelin, 42.
the heresy of Jews and treated them as a minority within a minority.42 Furthermore, historians of this period seem to have reached the consensus that riots which sought to eliminate Jews were partly driven by the economic motive to wipe out debts held by Jewish moneylenders.43 The harshness of Abbot Samson’s directive, on par with the excommunication of Henry II as well as the quarantines and riots of the Black Plague, suggests from Jocelin’s point of view that the Christians of Suffolk may have been too amicable with Jews for their own good and unnecessarily exposed themselves to the risk of spiritual infection from Jews and Jewish communities. Writing in a time before Canon 68 of the Fourth Lateran Council ordained the strict separation of Christians and non-Christians, Jocelin helped to develop and popularize the idea that the Catholic Church could and should use its ecclesiastical authority as a political tool to limit the influence of Jews and Jewish communities in the secular realm.

As a consequence, the third axis of evil in Jocelin’s imagination clearly would have been the relationship between the townspeople of Suffolk and the Jewish moneylenders. But the fortuitous intervention of Abbot Samson saved Suffolk from the ruinous influence of the evil essence emanating from the physical presence of Jews and Jewish communities. Jocelin’s account of Abbot Samson’s first few acts in office ties all of Jocelin’s subsequent praise for the abbot’s moral probity with his hostility to the physical presence of Jews. At the end of the narrative, Jocelin provides the oblique compliment that “no one ‘is entirely perfect’—and neither was Abbot Samson”.44 He goes on to recall Abbot Samson’s misappropriation of 10 marks, and his decision to flood a neighbor’s farm for the sake of preserving a fish-pond, as the two major mistakes of Samson’s abbacy. Jocelin’s silence about Abbot Samson’s expulsion of the Jews from Suffolk encourages his readers to consider this particular act as part of the imposing edifice of Abbot Samson’s moral probity.

Best of all, Jocelin’s claim that Abbot Samson saved the Abbey and Suffolk, by deciding to expel the Jews from Suffolk in 1190 and by taking measures to quarantine the town from future Jewish infections, is clearly an ideological construction on his part because—quite simply—it is false. Recalling Margaret’s loan of five shillings to the prior of Norwich in 1201, we know that clergy in a neighboring county were still taking out loans from Jewish moneylenders more than a decade after Abbot Samson supposedly set an example to all

43 Cohn, 25.
44 Jocelin, 115.
Christians by expelling the Jews from the town. Jocelin also fails to mention the economic benefits that accrued to Abbot Samson from the expulsion of the Jews. In particular, the seigniorial privileges of the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds would have been disputed by representatives of the king who wanted to share the benefits. These representatives often used the protection of Jewish communities, the ‘king’s property’, as an excuse to extend their jurisdiction in a town and access Abbot Samson’s orchard, fishpond, and the like. At Bungay, Thetford, Castle Rising, as well as Bury St. Edmunds, the local authorities tried to stymie the power of the representatives of the king by reducing the number of Jews in their communities. Jocelin’s decision to ignore the economic component of Samson’s decision by representing it as purely motivated by the greatness of his soul suggests that he is bending his historiography to fulfill an agenda. Furthermore, the massacre of fifty-seven Jews at the Bury of St. Edmunds in 1190 and the rapid growth of the cult of St. Robert from Jocelin’s own anti-Semitic blood libel suggest that Abbot Samson’s decision to expel the Jews did not run against the grain of popular sentiment in the town, but instead attracted the support of a large majority of the town. Jocelin’s decision to portray a popular measure like Samson’s expulsions of the Jews as something that could only succeed with Samson’s great moral character and strict threat of excommunication contradicts the record of the town’s anti-Semitic behavior in response to past crises with the Jewish community. Something besides accurate historiography is at work in Jocelin’s exaggerated praise of Samson’s heroism—it is precisely Jocelin’s fear of moral infection from the Jewish-Christian confederacy that inspires him to cast Abbot Samson as a great savior of the town.

800 Years of Solitude

By associating Jewish presence with the expression of moral vice among the abbot’s insubordinates, with the corruption of royal and local authority, and with the potential for deterioration in the moral character of society through epidemic infection, Jocelin constructs Jews and Jewish communities as a source of evil that must be removed from the community for the benefit of Christians and Christian virtue. His perspective on Jews and Jewish communities offers a mutually exclusive choice between the formation of Jewish-Christian confederacies of

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evil and the expulsion of Jews with the physical absence of Jews as a guarantee for the preservation of civic health.

Jocelin’s preoccupation with the spiritual purity of the Christians at Bury St. Edmunds foreshadowed wider shifts in England and the continent from limited tolerance for Jews and Jewish communities to demands for segregation and finally outright expulsion. As noted earlier, the Fourth Lateran Council issued a list of decrees in 1215, including Canon 68, which required Jews and Muslims to wear a distinguishing badge that marked them out as non-Christians. In 1218, the Archbishop of Canterbury Stephen Langton instituted Canon 68 in England by requiring all Jews to wear a white patch on their chests.\textsuperscript{47} The situation quickly became dire. King Henry III ordered port authorities along the English Channel to prohibit Jews from boarding ships and, in a dramatic change of policy from the 12\textsuperscript{th} century, a deacon who converted to Judaism was burned at the stake in 1222 for his betrayal of the Christian faith.

The Jewish moneylending business also began to lose importance in the eyes of the English monarchy of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century. While the king’s tax income doubled between 1133 and 1239, Jewish contributions to royal finances dropped by a third and came into competition with Italian moneylenders who were legitimated by the Catholic Church. Part of the reason for this decline in the productivity of Jewish moneylending was the cumbersome system of protections that developed for Jews in the wake of the massacre and the destruction of debt documents at the Tower of York in 1190. While the Italian moneylenders benefited from the patronage and proximity of the Pope, the Lord Chancellor Hubert Walter invented the archa system for safeguarding Jewish bonds. The archa system essentially doubled the bureaucracy behind Jewish moneylending, requiring each step of the transaction to have a Jewish and a Christian counterpart: the transaction now required two Jewish and two Christian witnesses, a Jewish and a Christian keyholder to the archa where the debt obligations were stored, and two chirographers elected by a jury of six Jews and six Christians to oversee the process.\textsuperscript{48} As a further protection, all Jewish moneylending, which now had to pass through this formal process, could only take place at seven official centers in all of England.\textsuperscript{49} A vicious cycle began to develop, where anti-Semitism directly hindered the productivity of Jewish moneylenders, and the decline in productivity reduced the monarch’s commitment to giving the Jews royal protection against anti-Semitism.

\textsuperscript{47} Joseph Jacobs, “England” (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1903) 164.
\textsuperscript{49} Mundill, 148.
It is worth remembering that Jocelin’s vision of a happy, strong Christian community is inextricably, and sometimes inexplicably, bound up with a desire for the elimination of Jews and Jewish communities. In an eerie moment where life mimicked fable, local authorities rounded up the Lincoln Jews in 1255 for allegedly martyring the boy Hugh, leading to the execution of the 18 Jews who asserted their innocence as an example to all the others. Jocelin’s blood libel genre was no longer a fancy trick to establish a lucrative and popular cult to the boy martyr Robert at the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds, but was now the legal basis for spilling blood. Finally, King Edward I’s Statute of the Jewry prohibited Jewish moneylending in 1275 and the official order of expulsion came in 1290, exactly 100 years after Abbot Samson’s ‘benevolent’ decision to expel the Jews from Suffolk.\(^{50}\)

While Jocelin’s anti-Semitic blood libel about the death of Robert at the hands of Suffolk Jews may no longer be extant, his Chronicle remains just as sinister for its deep-seated hostility against all Jews. Despite the intervention of 800 years and a translation from Latin to English, Jocelin’s anti-Semitism still speaks with the cold clarity of sly accusations and meaningful omissions. This aspect of the Chronicle is uncomfortably similar to other works in the notorious literary, philosophical, and political tradition that expressed intolerance for the physical presence of Jews, that followed Ashkenazi Jews from the expulsions of Western Europe down to Eastern Europe in the mid-20\(^{th}\) century.

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\(^{50}\) Jacobs, 166.
Jocelin’s Narrative of Jewish-Christian Confederacy

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