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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

IN AN EPISODE of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, the protagonist's father, Abe Weissman, finds himself in possession of a consecrated host that he wants to dispose of. His son makes a suggestion, to which Abe replies, "You're going to flush the body of Christ down the toilet?!"¹ In medieval Europe, Christian authorities frequently accused Jews of committing even more insulting, antireligious acts, although they sometimes had difficulty writing about the horrifying details. In 1146, Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny (ca. 1092–1156), wrote to Louis VII, king of France (1137–80), to complain that it was pointless to go on a Crusade against the distant Muslims when the Jews, who were "not far away from us, but right in our midst, blaspheme, abuse, and trample on Christ and the Christian sacraments so freely and insolently and with impunity," and "use heavenly vessels for their evil uses to the disgrace of Christ and ourselves, things too horrifying to consider and detestable to mention."²

Less inhibited to offer examples of Jewish "latrine blasphemy" was the greatest of medieval popes, Innocent III (r. 1198–1216), who expressed his disgust that after Christian wet nurses employed by Jewish families took communion on Easter, "the Jews make these women pour their milk into the latrine for three days before they again give suck to the children."³

What are we to make of these and other accusations that Jews insulted Christianity by associating it with latrines? From contemporary Jewish discussions about such gestures that we will

consider in detail in chapter 5, we learn that some Jews were capable of doing exactly what infuriated Christian officials.

These accusations and stories about Jews insulting Christian symbols with latrine blasphemy are not isolated examples of how Jews viewed Christianity in medieval Europe but rather are a hint about how Jews could provocatively assert themselves in Christian Europe—a story that has not been told before.⁴ For medieval European history is sometimes written as though the Jews of Christian Europe were living on the moon instead of in the small towns of northern France, England, and Germany, in a region that Jews came to refer to as *Ashkenaz*, the geographic focus of this book.⁵ Medieval Jewish historians have recently revised earlier narratives that saw the Jews as the victims of the Christian majority's enmity and harmful policies.⁶ General historians of medieval Europe who do not work on Jewish history still tend to see the Jews as isolated in ghettos and passive victims of persecution, if they see them at all.⁷ Historians of the Christian majority sometimes forget that when they speak of "everyone," they mean Christians and usually ignore their Jewish neighbors.⁸ Medieval Christians could never forget their Jewish neighbors even when Jews no longer lived among them. The Jews remained a presence even in their absence.⁹

This book reexamines not only how the Christian majority understandably affected the Jewish minority but also surprisingly how the Jews—real and imagined—so challenged the Christian majority that it became a society that was religiously and culturally antisemitic in new ways between 800 and 1500. That new self-understanding remained part of European cultural identity down to the time of the Holocaust and beyond.¹⁰

The Jews as a Fourth Medieval Civilization

The European Middle Ages is the often-told story of the transformation of the western provinces of the Roman Empire into several new Christian political territories. A history of medieval Europe can also be related to two other contemporary medieval civilizations, Islam and Byzantium, each of which ruled over large territories including parts of what became Europe.¹¹ Byzantine emperors governed southern Italy and tried to recover other former Roman territories

in Europe in the sixth century. Umayyad and Berber Muslims ruled significant areas of medieval Iberia, and Ottoman Muslims governed important parts of early modern southeastern Europe.

Missing from this picture of the formation of Europe is the story of a group that became more prominent over the centuries and by its assertive presence within Europe stimulated and provoked the Christian majority into reimagining its own collective identity. These were not the Muslims far off in the East or nearby in Iberia but the Jews, who like pagans and heretics lived cheek by jowl among Christians throughout Europe. They were still the bearers of the ancient religious culture out of which Christianity first developed. Survivors of the pagan and Christian Roman Empire and the Muslim conquest in the eastern Mediterranean, Jews migrated into the emerging Christian West with a unique relationship to Christianity. Once settled there, Jews usually resisted complete social assimilation through conversion.¹² A distinctive minority organized in self-governing local communities, the Jews lived closely and sometimes intimately among their Christian neighbors for centuries. The Jews were a fourth medieval civilization embedded in three other civilizations: Islam, Byzantium, and Latin Christian Europe.¹³ This is the story of the Jews and the formation of Christian Europe, the West.¹⁴

Contrary to the widely accepted picture of Jewish history, medieval Jews were assertive agents. The Jews of the Middle Ages were convinced of their chosenness, and Christian rulers inadvertently reinforced Jewish solidarity by recognizing Jews as legal, self-governing communities, not just as individuals, if only to tax them better. The Jewish-Christian confrontation was grounded in a deep structural clash between two related religious cultures, each of which thought itself chosen and the other excluded from divine favor.¹⁵ Given the different power dynamics, this meant that force would be a Christian option, but the Jews had resources as well, even if limited and often ineffective. Jews were assertive, not passive, even without having the option of coercive force. Acts of Jewish assertiveness directed against Christianity, in turn, increased Christian authorities' anti-Jewish views and policies. Christians reasserted their claims to divine election and tried to subject the Jews to servitude unless they converted. One effect of this confrontation

between two chosen cultures was to make Christian Europe antisemitic in new ways.

In rethinking medieval Christian antisemitism, it becomes clear that the rivalry between Jews and Christians led each religious culture to create both symmetry and asymmetry in the way each created their imagined other.

The story was in part symmetrical in that each culture claimed to be the one God chose in its Bible. The Hebrew Bible and New Testament agree that it is the second or later party, not the first, that is God's chosen one, and Jews and Christians each claimed to be the second. In the Hebrew Bible, the Israelites displace the Canaanites, who are there first, and the younger sons, Isaac and Jacob, displace the elder sons, Ishmael and Esau. In the latter case, the Bible says that *the elder shall serve the younger* (Gen. 25:23). The Christian reading of those texts read the church as Isaac and Jacob, and the Jews as Ishmael and Esau, who were to serve the younger Jacob as the church.

Despite this symmetry about rival claims to being chosen, an important asymmetry developed in medieval Europe. Although most rabbinic leaders viewed their Christian neighbors as misguided and not as pagans, they still assumed that *Christianity* itself was a form of forbidden "foreign worship" (*avodah zarah*).¹⁶ The Christian majority, on the other hand, asserted its own spiritual election and treated *Jews* as rejected and despised pagans, and paid little attention to Judaism except as foretelling the truth of Christianity.¹⁷ So medieval Christian antisemitism was directed at medieval *Jews*. Jewish animosity was directed at *Christianity* and its sancta that Jews associated with biblical idolatry and filth.¹⁸

In asserting their Jewish religious and communal chosen identity in new ways at the same time that medieval Christians were reaffirming the exclusive truth claims of Christianity, Jews collided with Christians, and the confrontation resulted in new collective identities that were shaped in part by the impact of the other. The ways Jews and Christians became aware of each other as competing claimants to biblical, covenantal chosenness played a central role in shaping the West.

The focus of this book is on cultural history and the social settings in which Jews and Christians from all levels of society interacted. To get at the mentality of ordinary Jews and Christians, we

will consider carefully how they appear in written sources like saints' lives, exempla or moralistic stories, such as the hundreds found in *Sefer Hasidim* (before 1225), behavior portrayed in chronicles, and a variety of images.¹⁹ These sources are important because they make use of everyday settings of life in contemporary Ashkenaz.

But the ways Jews and Christians regarded and treated each other in medieval Europe reflect fundamental religious assumptions about chosenness laid out in the Jewish and Christian Bibles, two very different books. In working out their differences, Jews and Christians engaged in a rivalry over chosenness in society that we can explore by studying what Peter Gay referred to as "the social history of ideas."²⁰

Ancient Theological Assumptions about Chosenness

For the Jews' chosenness, the Book of Exodus foretells, *Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine* (Ex. 19:5). On this verse, the ancient rabbinic midrash on Exodus, *Mekhilta de Rabbi Yishmael* (third century CE Palestine), elaborates: (the phrase) *you shall be My* (means) "(if you) turn to Me and are occupied with Torah and not with other things," (then) *you shall be My treasured possession*. "Just as a man's treasured possession is precious to him, so, you will be precious to Me." The biblical passage continues: *but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation* (Ex. 19:6). On the phrase, *And you shall be unto Me*, the *Mekhilta* adds, "I shall not appoint nor delegate anyone else, so to speak, to rule over you, but I myself will rule over you."²¹

The special relationship between Israel and God promised conditionally in the Book of Exodus is stated as a reality in the Book of Deuteronomy on which the early rabbis grounded their conviction of Jews as God's Chosen People for all time. The Book of Deuteronomy asserts that all of Israel is holy *now* and therefore is chosen to be God's special people: *For you are a people consecrated to the Lord your God: of all the peoples on earth the Lord your God chose you to be His treasured people* (Deut. 7:6).²²

This choice is not based on Israel's great numbers: *It is not because you are the most numerous of peoples that the Lord set His*

heart on you and chose you—indeed, you are the smallest of peoples (Deut. 7:7). Rather, it is because of Israel’s holiness or dedication to God: *For you are a people consecrated to the Lord your God: the Lord your God chose you from among all other peoples on earth to be His treasured people* (Deut. 14:2). And the rabbinic midrash on Deuteronomy, *Sifrei Devarim* (third century CE Palestine), explains that Israel’s holiness in the first part of the verse is the reason for its chosenness in the second part: “the holiness that is upon you has made you holy (that is, chosen).”²³ “Another interpretation of *the Lord your God chose you from among all other peoples on earth to be His treasured people* (Deut. 14:2) is, “Hence we learn that each individual (Jew) is more precious to the Holy One, blessed be He, than all the nations of the world.”²⁴

Medieval Jews who engaged with Christians in everyday encounters understood themselves, not Christians, as God’s “treasured people,” as referred to in Exodus and Deuteronomy, which they read annually in the synagogue, along with the commentary of Rashi of Troyes (d. 1105), who relied on the ancient midrash commentaries of *Mekhilta* and *Sifrei*.

Christians, for their part, also claimed to be the chosen Israel, as church father Justin Martyr (d. ca. 200) and others explained (see below), but they still developed a theological rationale for permitting Jews to live as Jews in a Christian society. Paul formulated this reason in his Letter to the Romans, and Augustine of Hippo (d. 430), the most influential of the Latin fathers, elaborated on it. It was supported by the Christian Roman legal traditions and adopted by the early popes as well. Unlike pagans, whom the church forced to convert, or heretics, who were to be exterminated, Jews who did not convert were theoretically allowed to live in a Christian society, though in a degraded or servile capacity, so that they could eventually play a divinely required role in salvation history.²⁵

Paul, Justin Martyr, and Augustine of Hippo

In his letters, the earliest part of the New Testament, the apostle Paul glosses key passages of the Hebrew Bible to make his case that gentiles as well as Jews can be part of a new covenant between God and “Israel.” In his Letter to the Galatians (4:21–31), he identifies the

Jews as Ishmael, the son of the “slave” Hagar, Abraham’s concubine, and Jewish and gentile believers in Christ as Isaac, the son of the “free woman” Sarah, Abraham’s wife (see Gen. 17 and especially Gen. 21). He further associates Hagar with Mt. Sinai, the law, and Jerusalem in this world, in contrast to the heavenly Jerusalem, the locus of Sarah’s son Isaac of the spirit, including gentiles as well as Jews who accept Christ. This interpretation is part of Paul’s insistence on Jewish servitude to those who accept Christ. Paul’s underlying idea, the first part of the three-part structure of the imagined Jew, is that Jews should be subordinate to Christians who received the divine promise—a view summarized as the *binary of inverted hierarchy*.

Paul reinforces the biblical warrant for Jewish servitude even more explicitly in a second biblical comparison. Following the narrative about pairs of siblings in the Book of Genesis, he then distinguishes between Isaac’s son Esau, the elder brother, and Jacob, also known as “Israel” (Gen. 32:29), the younger one: *though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call, she was told, “The elder will serve the younger”* (Rom. 9:11–12 RSV, quoting Gen. 25:23). Paul identifies the Jews as the elder son, Esau, and gentiles and Jews who believe in Jesus as Jacob, the younger, also known as “Israel,” the recipients of the covenant.²⁶ The rabbis identified the Jews as Jacob and Christians as Esau.²⁷

In these passages, then, Paul not only reinterprets the Book of Genesis to include gentiles and Jews who believe in Jesus as recipients of the divine covenant or promise made to Abraham (Gen. 15) but also insists that in each case the Jews are the elder sibling, the one who is to serve the younger whom God preferred and to whom he gave the covenant. Jewish servitude is expected and a condition for Jewish presence in a Christian society.

Moreover, Paul assigns a special role to subservient Jews in the economy of salvation history in the future. Complementing his view that Jews are to serve those who accept Jesus in the present is his hope that the Jews can eventually become part of the New Covenant in the future. In his Letter to the Romans, he says that God has not rejected the Jews for all time: *I ask then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of*

Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew (Rom. 11:1–2a RSV).

He then proceeds, in his parable of the wild olive tree, to present the relationship between Jews who do not accept Jesus and Jews and gentiles who do:

Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them . . . if the root is holy, so are the branches.

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. . . . And even the others, if they do not perish in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.

For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree.

Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery; brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved. . . . As regards the Gospel they are enemies of God, for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers (Rom. 11:13–28 RSV).

The Jews without faith in Jesus are the natural branches, but because of their unbelief, they have been temporarily lopped off and replaced by the engrafted gentiles, comparable now to Isaac and Jacob of the promise. He makes use of a logical argument to offer hope for Jews to be regrafted back in if they accept Jesus. If gentiles, who had nothing to do with the root and are a foreign body, can be grafted onto the root, the Jews who originally were descended from the root certainly could be regrafted back on.

The conclusion to Paul's parable, Romans 11:28, was to have profound and lasting mixed consequences for medieval Jewish-Christian relations. Paul refers to Jews as both theological enemies and beloved, but for different reasons. When Paul says "*as regards the Gospel they are enemies of God,*" it is because they continue to follow the Old Covenant of the "letter" and reject the New Covenant

of the “spirit” that includes gentiles and Jews with faith in Christ as chosen. In Paul’s binary vision of the world, the status of the literalist, Torah-law-following, fleshly, this-worldly Jew is in polar opposition to the new dispensation of the Gospels. But *they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers*. Jews are also beloved because of their earlier election or chosenness that made them special in the age of the biblical fathers. Jews thus exist in two planes in the present: they are formerly chosen, but now are still following the letter and not the spirit, and are in that sense “enemies” to the Gospel, its antithesis.²⁸

Paul’s theological trope of the Jews as “enemies of God” would be transformed at the time of the First Crusade into the active social and political category of “the enemy nearby,” a new stage in the Christian construction of the imagined Jew (chapter 3).

Although Paul maintains that God’s covenant with Israel now includes all who accept Christ, he does not say explicitly that the church has superseded the covenant with the Jews and that the Christian Church, not the Jews, is now Israel of the covenant, but he hints at it.²⁹ It becomes explicit in the second century, as in the writings of the church father Justin Martyr (ca. 100–160s) in his *Dialogue with the Jew Trypho* (ca. 160 CE). A gentile born in Samaria, Justin sought to defend Christianity by interpreting Scripture properly to a Jew, and he continued the New Testament tactic of using the Hebrew Bible as the platform from which to try to win over Jews to Christianity. To reassure Christians, he added that they, and not the Jews, are Israel, the heirs of the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob also called by that name: “We have been led to God through this crucified Christ, and we are the true spiritual Israel, and the descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac and Abraham, who, though uncircumcised, was approved and blessed by God because of his faith and was called the father of many nations.”³⁰

Medieval Jews were aware of the Christian claim, and it spurred them on to resist Christian triumphalism at times of crisis such as during the First Crusade. A Jewish chronicler in the early twelfth century has Crusaders taunting the Jews that they are no longer the Chosen People: “God has forgotten you and is no longer desirous of you since you are a stubborn nation. Instead, He has departed from you and has taken us for His portion, casting His radiance upon us.”³¹

Augustine of Hippo in North Africa (former Carthage) (348–430) was the most influential author of Christian doctrine in the West, and it is his image of the Jews as blind witnesses to the truth of Christianity that turned Paul’s contrast between free and slave in his Letter to the Galatians and the parable of the wild olive tree in the Letter to the Romans into theological policy.³²

In his *Contra Faustum*, he defended the antiquity of the Old Testament with its prophecies of the truth of the New Testament from the attack of dualist Manichaeans, who denied its validity. The Jews themselves read in public the Old Testament that prophesies the coming of Jesus and the truth of Christianity even though they do not understand what they read. This proves to pagans and Christians alike that Christians have not invented the Hebrew traditions on which the church bases its claim to be the true Israel. Thus Jews unwittingly serve as “the desks (*scriniaria*) of the Christians, bearing the law and the prophets as testimony to the tenets of the church, so that we honor through the sacrament what it announces through the letter.”³³

In *The City of God*, written to defend Christianity against the taunts of pagan Romans who blamed Christian impiety for the sack of Rome in 410, Augustine interprets Psalms 59:12 [58:12] to add other reasons why Jews serve a positive role in Christian societies. *Slay them not lest they forget thy law. Scatter them in thy power and bring them down* (Ps. 59:12 [58:12]) means that it is forbidden to kill the Jews, but it is God’s will that they should be dispersed and degraded to serve as blind witnesses to the truth of Christianity for Christians and others everywhere. By being scattered and subordinated in Christian society, Jews prove that God has rejected them since they killed Christ and has exiled them from their land, and this benefits the church: “For, if the Jews had remained bottled up in their own land with the evidence of their Scriptures and if they were not to be found everywhere, as the Church is, the Church would not then have them as ubiquitous witnesses of the ancient prophecies concerning Christ.”³⁴

Four years after he wrote *The City of God*, Augustine wrote the tract “Against the Jews.” It begins with Paul’s parable of the olive tree in Romans 11, and after warning Gentile Christians not to boast, tries to convince Jews of the Christian meaning of their own Scriptures. The emphasis in Augustine on a positive role for Jews in a Christian society, despite their being Christ’s killers and

servants to Christians, reinforced Paul's position of hopefulness in Romans. The exegesis of Psalms 59:12 [58:12] that specifically forbade Christians to kill Jews, and instead emphasized scattering and subduing them, placed a powerful theological restraint on official Christian attitudes toward Jews.³⁵

Early Europe

Despite the future redemptive role early Christian theologians assigned to Jews living in a Christian society, the presence of Jews is not what usually comes to mind when we think about the making of early Christian Europe. Instead, we are supposed to think about the search for unity and law that looked back to Rome, as when Pope Leo III crowned a Germanic Frankish king, Charles the Great (Charlemagne, d. 814), "emperor of the Romans" on December 25, 800.³⁶ Newly formed kingdoms made up of partly Romanized and Christianized Germanic tribes took over several western Roman provinces. The Germanic kings were tied to their fighting men by bonds of loyalty according to ancient custom. Some German kings married into local Gallo-Roman, or Hispano-Roman, or Italo-Roman Christian noble families. Christianity gradually became the central religious identity, replacing pagan cults with the life of Christ and his representatives on earth as the bishops of Rome, the popes, and with attempts to approximate the Christian life in religious orders and reforms of lay behavior.

Rome, Germanic customs, and Christianity, then, combined over time to form early Europe—the West. And yet despite the fact that medieval Jews, unlike Byzantine Christian emperors or Muslim caliphs, did not exercise coercive power in any territory, the story of Europe is made more intelligible when one also looks closely at the Jews who formed a fourth medieval culture, the only religious minority that formed "infidel" communities that were permitted to live within Christian Europe itself.

Jewish and Christian Transformations

Two remarkable and lasting changes occurred during those centuries. Jews who migrated into Christian Europe from Byzantine Christian or Muslim Mediterranean lands became "Europeanized,"

and even Christianized, without actually becoming Christians. The Jews changed: they were not only an Eastern Roman- or Muslim-dominated culture but also an integral part of the emerging Latin Christian West. By a process of selective *inward acculturation*, they absorbed some elements of that Christian cultural environment while rejecting others.³⁷

Even though they looked down on Christians and continued to view Christianity as no different from ancient paganism, Jews had to take Christianity seriously in the Christian West. They didn't have to like it, but they had to deal with it. Out of a sense of cultural competition, Jews sometimes selectively internalized and Judaized Christian motifs or practices and incorporated them into their own Jewish cultural and religious practices.

As a result, Jews now studied the Bible and Talmud with a French interpreter, Rashi of Troyes (d. 1105), who used thousands of French words to clarify the Hebrew text.³⁸ Now they studied the Talmud with French scholastic commentators who resolved contradictions by making distinctions, as had Peter Abelard in his theological lectures at the University of Paris.³⁹ Now they remembered Jewish martyrs and deceased relatives by lighting candles annually on the anniversary of their deaths or in public liturgical memorials, as did Christian monks in their monasteries.⁴⁰

They built stone synagogues in the form of church chapter houses, and ritual baths designed by the same people who built the new local cathedrals and related buildings that they sometimes helped finance.⁴¹ They wrote Hebrew manuscripts with bold vertical letters like the Christian scribes' Gothic script in Latin that they did not read but saw in books that were pawned as collateral for loans to Christian owners.⁴² They spoke Yiddish or French based on the local tongues they learned over the centuries.⁴³ They wrote stories in Hebrew about romantic love as Christian writers did in Latin or French.⁴⁴ They atoned for their sins by confessing them to rabbis and asking them for penances, as did Christian sinners who confessed to their priests.⁴⁵ Jews took many of these Christianized practices with them into the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and continued to adapt selectively from their Christian environments later in early modern and even modern times. Judaism had become European and even Christianized while remaining defiantly Jewish.

But the everyday contact between Jews and Christians in medieval Europe transformed the Christianizing population there as well.⁴⁶ Christians had difficulty understanding why Jews did not convert and adopt what they considered the obvious good news (gospel) of their religion. What was wrong with the Jews? Why were they so resistant to accepting the truth? To make matters worse, although Jews lacked coercive political power over Christian rulers, they actually were *assertive* in their conversations with Christian neighbors and affirmed that they, and not Christians, were God's Chosen People. They hired Christian maids and wet nurses, like aristocratic Christian nobility. They prayed loudly in their synagogues, were in positions of influence when they were creditors, and abused Christian sacred objects. All of these Jewish actions rubbed Christian authorities the wrong way, making them more resentful and antisemitic.⁴⁷

Competing Claims of Chosenness

As the population grew in the towns of Christian Europe, Jews continued to migrate there to make a secure living in an expanding economy. Close contact with Christians was inevitable.⁴⁸ Isolation was not possible or desirable. Jews engaged in business with Christians first in trade and then also as borrowers or suppliers of credit. So much Jewish business depended on Christian clients that Jewish legal authorities permitted Jews to do business with Christians even though they considered Christianity to be a form of "foreign worship." Jews were simultaneously attracted to Christians and repelled by Christianity.

At first, Christian rulers inadvertently reinforced Jewish religious self-confidence. Since antiquity, Christian theologians had argued that there was a degraded place for Jews in a Christian society, but early medieval Christian kings treated Jews as assets for their developing economies, invited them into their realms, and issued them protective charters that exempted them from tolls and taxes. These supportive Christian policies, motivated by self-interest, and a strong Jewish sense of "chosenness" encouraged Jewish settlement in early European Christian societies.

Although Jewish migration was gradual and went on largely unrecorded, members of different Jewish regional elites later created

a “useful past” in the form of foundation legends. They remembered that a great king, Charlemagne himself, was a founder of the Jewish community of Narbonne in southern France and the Jewish community of Mainz in the German Empire, the heartland of what became Ashkenazic or northern European Jewish history. The elite claims expressed a sense of supremacy of one Jewish community in the West over another there, as well as a claim to being the heir to an earlier, esteemed Jewish center in the East. But intercommunal rivalries paled before the ongoing Jewish assertion that they, and not the Christian infidels, were God’s chosen (chapter 2).

Jewish assertiveness also clashed with the new Christian reform movements that emerged in the eleventh century and stimulated Jewish competition even further. Papal reformers launched a political and religious campaign to assert “right order.” One goal was to affirm ecclesiastical superiority over Christian kings by insisting that only the pope should be the “head” of the Christian social “body.” Right order also meant not allowing Jews to have power over Christians.

The concern for right order also dictated a new papal policy toward the recent Muslim occupation of holy sites in Jerusalem that resulted in what became the First Crusade. In 1095, reform pope Urban II called for an armed pilgrimage to the Holy Land to liberate the Church of the Holy Sepulcher from “pagan” pollution and reestablish right order there. The hysteria that the pope generated against non-Christian enemies abroad reinforced the Christian view that the Jews who lived among them now were the “enemy within.” To Paul’s imagined Jew as subservient to the church was added a second dimension: *the Jew as the internal enemy*.

As a result, Crusader knights and mobs attacked Jewish communities mainly in the towns of the German Empire in spring and summer 1096. Jews reacted defiantly to Crusader mob attacks by fighting invaders, bribing authorities, and even provocatively pretending to convert, only to spit in the face of their attackers, kill and be killed in the streets, and to the horror of Christian chroniclers, be driven by the cruel Crusaders to ritually kill their own children and themselves to avoid being forced into the church (chapter 3).

After peace was restored, Jewish assertiveness assumed other forms as well.

The Jews created an *imagined Christianity* that they continued to view since ancient times as a form of paganism to be avoided and derided as much as possible. And so Jews went out of their way, when safe, to insult Christian sancta by making offensive wordplays and confronting Christians informally about their beliefs, provoking Christians to defend their faith. Jews also illustrated their Hebrew books with images of knights in combat and imagined themselves to be God's true knights as they engaged in everyday informal religious debates that irritated the church, which could not stop them. Christians saw this assertiveness and perceived Jews as Goliaths going out to battle them (chapter 4).

Moreover, Jews denigrated Christian sancta by engaging in private and public gestures of contempt, such as placing Christian images or statues in their latrines. Jews found the idea that God had been inside a woman preposterous and expressed their disgust about this idea in gestures that equated Christianity with bodily elimination, the opposite of the holy in both religious cultures. As Christian lay piety began to center on the Eucharist, a group of pietist Jews developed a ritual of childhood that challenged the efficacy of "eating God" by making young boys eat Torah verses written on cakes while seated on the lap of a rabbi in the pose of a Madonna and child. This nurturing ritual for young Jewish boys also served to discourage them from being lured away to a church increasingly eager to convert them (chapter 5).

There were limits, though, as to what real Jews actually did to show their contempt for Christianity. In the mid-twelfth century, as the eucharistic ritual reenactment of the Passion became more popular and enthusiasm for a Second Crusade gripped ecclesiastical circles, the *idée fixe* suddenly crystallized, first among English Benedictine monks, that Jewish infidels reenacted the Passion by ritually killing young Christian boys, whom monks now treated as local martyr saints. Local competition among Benedictines in England for making new Christian saints added a new dimension to the imagined Jew, augmented during the First Crusade frenzy as the nearby enemy of Christians. The imagined "enemy within" was now thought to harm "the body of Christ" in the present too, not just in the past, by ritually killing Christians (the ritual murder accusation), ingesting the victim's blood or heart (the blood libel),

stabbing the consecrated host that was understood as the real body of Christ (the host desecration accusation), and even trying to kill all Christians (the well-poisoning libel). Jews, in turn, were familiar with Christian saints and imagined that Jewish figures, like the martyr communities of 1096, were saintly Christ figures victimized by violent Christian Crusaders or other wicked people. Other Jewish holy men described how pious Jews living in a time of peace should keep away from Christians unless they were in a position of relative dominance or right order over them (chapter 6).

The idea of the body of Christ also led Jews and Christians to argue vigorously over Jewish and Christian bodies. Depending on the context, Christians considered Jews indistinguishable from Christians and therefore sexually threatening without external markers such as distinctive clothing, or in the framework of potential conversion, some Jewish physical features were thought to prevent especially an adult male Jew from becoming a sincere Christian despite baptism.

In their encounters over “cultural aesthetics,” Jews sometimes conceded to Christians that older Jewish (men) were dark and even “ugly” but insisted that they alone knew the inner truth about God and that such appearances were temporary. As the church tried to protect the faithful from heretics and assertive Jews in the thirteenth century, it took more defensive measures than before to convert Jews. An important question was, Could all Jews convert sincerely to Christianity and transform themselves completely, or were there physical traits that remained, especially among older Jewish male converts, in addition to circumcision? A gender and age analysis of Jews yields important nuances about the possibility of Jewish adult male conversion.

Thus to the imagined Jew as subordinate and then feared as the enemy within, a third characteristic was added: the belief that Jewish adult men could not change by conversion, and that *their Jewish condition was permanent*. At the same time, some room was left for the possibility that Jewish boys and “the beautiful Jewish woman,” a potential or actual Christian sexual partner, could convert sincerely (chapter 7).

The reform of Christian society took a new turn as town walls expanded to accommodate growing populations, and money and

credit became more visible in everyday life. A Christian-renewed emphasis on apostolic poverty meant that wealth, and especially the uses to which money was put involving interest or “usury,” penalized foreign Christian bankers and local Jewish merchants and suppliers of credit but undermined vulnerable Jews more. Some pious kings supported these ecclesiastical reform efforts and thought that their realms needed to be purged of the polluting sin of usury, especially before they went on a Crusade.

Since even after conversion, some Jews persisted in their Jewish practices or were thought to retain hated Jewish characteristics, kings made bargains with political rivals by forcing Jews to emigrate, despite the ancient theological rationale to retain them. The danger that authorities said the Jews posed to Christian society now outweighed the Pauline and Augustinian need to keep them inside Christendom.

But even after their expulsion, the imagined Jew remained and expanded, along with converted Jews, as a persisting feature of antisemitic European Christian culture and society. Because Paul and Augustine taught that Jews, unlike heretics, were supposed to be part of Christian society, their physical exclusion created an even greater reason than before to emphasize the presence of the imagined Jew as an inner enemy within Christian social space. In literary works in England, we see the imagined presence of the unchangeable enemy Jewish male adult featured in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Prioress’s Tale*, Christopher Marlowe’s *Jew of Malta*, and William Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* (chapter 8).

The imagined Jew, however defined, could not be expelled from Europe, because it existed in the minds of Christian Europeans and persisted for centuries there and wherever Europe spread its influence. It enabled medieval and early modern images of European antisemitism to linger and develop through the centuries until they were selectively redeployed to support new, antimodern, and pseudoscientific racial forms of Jew hatred in the late nineteenth century, becoming lethal in the twentieth. The Jews were first understood to be the enemy of the church and the body of Christ, and then became, in redefined racial categories, the enemy of the *Volk*.

Medieval antisemitism is related to its modern form. But instead of following those scholars who point to one or more stereotypes

that seem to continue into modern times, this book suggests a different approach. Because medieval Christian antisemitism was built on structural assumptions about Jews and Christians in society, it contained the possibility of being translated into modern categories.

Christians had created an imagined Jew in three stages. First, Jews and Christians agreed that they lived in a binary of inverted hierarchy. Each thought that it should be above and control the other. Neither wanted to be subordinated to the other. This was an extension of the chosenness claims of both, and it meant that *power* was an important theme of difference from the Middle Ages on. Domination and resistance were the result when power was one-sided in favor of the Christian culture. But Jews were also assertive, and Christians sometimes were defensive.

Secondly, after the First Crusade and prior to each subsequent one, the structure of hierarchical power and chosenness was sharpened as Jews came to be seen as the dangerous enemy within. The many different stereotypes of the “Jew” were actually expressions of this second structural feature of the Jew as an inner enemy. The idea emerged in bursts of religious zeal created by the first Crusades, but it persisted long afterward, as did the binary of inverted hierarchy.

Third, Jewish identity, especially that of adult Jewish men, was seen as an unchangeable or permanent condition, regardless of conversion. Late medieval efforts to convert Jews in northern Europe, not just in Iberia, raised issues of “racial” permanence despite efforts to convert Jews, especially adult males.

The three factors of inverted hierarchical power, internal enemy, and permanence shaped the Christian-imagined Jew, and these Christian antisemitic assumptions could be transformed into modern antisemitism by replacing medieval attributes with modern ones that fit the three structural categories. This new interpretation builds on the insight of Robert Stacey that “we need, in short, to put the history of antisemitism squarely at the center of the history of medieval Europe if we are properly to understand either one” (chapter 9).⁴⁹

The story begins with the realization that Europe includes the role of the Jews as a challenging cultural presence before, during, and after they actually lived there. The real and imagined

movements of Jewish populations into the early medieval West coincides with the birth of Europe. Jews were present at the creation and played an active part in shaping the new Christian culture that developed there.⁵⁰ Before we consider how Christian religious reforms helped reinforce Jewish assertions of chosenness that, in turn, stimulated Christian competitive claims of its superiority, we need to see the early Jewish-Christian symbiosis that was based more on common business interests than on hierarchical claims of superiority. It serves as an instructive foil for what was to follow.

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