STORIES OF BREAKING AND TAKING THE CROSS:  
A POSSIBLE CONTEXT FOR THE  
OXFORD INCIDENT OF 1268 (1)

There is a remarkable story relating how, on Ascension Thursday (17 May), 1268, certain Jews of Oxford snatched one portable cross, carried about in solemn procession on the said day, from the hands of its bearer, outrageously broke it and prostrated it on the ground in contempt. The story is told in the fourteenth-century Books of the Chancellor and Proctors of the University of Oxford (2). The striking thing about it is the suggestion that a medieval Jew would have been so daring as to attack a Christian symbol of faith when it was carried before what must have been dozens of eyewitnesses. The document speaks of all the parish priests of the city of

(1) The present essay originated as part of my postgraduate course in Medieval Studies at the Centre for Medieval Studies, The University of Leeds, during the academic year of 1993/94. I would like to thank the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for their generous funding of this stay, and my supervisors Dr. Simon Forde and Prof. Peter Meredith, with whom I have discussed drafts of the essay. Further thanks go to Prof. Alfred Haverkamp and Dr. Gerd Mengten at the project Zur Geschichte der Juden of the Sonderforschungsbereich 235 Zwischen Maas und Rhein at the Universität Trier, and to Willis Johnson, Berkeley, who has been a great help with matters related to Jewish tradition and Hebrew texts. The present essay derives more of its inspiration than is apparent in the footnotes, from the challenging work done in Jerusalem by Dr. Israel J. Yuval. Needless to say, I alone am responsible for the rather speculative nature of my argument, and for all the mistakes that remain in it.

Oxford as well as the town's populus making their way to the churchyard of St. Frideswide's priory, in order to hear a public sermon by the chancellor of the university, master Nicholas of Ewelme (3). The Ascension Day procession and subsequent sermon appear to have been a long-standing practice (ab antiquo ordinatum [...] et institutum ...) and are still in evidence in the later Middle Ages. Processions on Ascension Day were indeed nothing out of the ordinary. In Oxford the feast was the occasion for one of the annual university sermons, marked off in a special way by the presence of the townspeople, both lay and clerical, for which reason the preaching was done in the vernacular. In 1382, the Ascension Day sermon was characterized as the foremost sermon of the year in the English tongue (4). The venue was St. Frideswide's churchyard, and it is almost certain that the town-and-gown procession would have gone through Fish Street (St. Aldates), otherwise known as the Great Jewry, the street where most of Oxford's Jewish inhabitants had their houses. According to our source, the incident occurred just outside the churchyard (5).

The account in the Books of the Chancellor and Proctors goes on to inform us how, the matter having been duly established by the said chancellor and by the masters of the University through an inquest, the Jewish insult was reported to King Henry III, then abiding at Woodstock, and to his son Edward (the future Edward I), who had himself been present in Oxford at the time the offence was committed (6). The incident of 1268, or the story that tells it, is therefore situated in a complex field of reference, including relationships between clerics and laypeople, town and gown, as well as Jewish-

(3) TOVEY, Anglia Judaica [see n. 2], p. 168-169 says that the chancellor and masters were part of the procession, this is not clear from the document.


(5) Iuxta locum nunc dictum: ANSTEY (ed.), Munimenta Academica [see n. 2], t. 1, p. 36; for a description of the Jew's topography, see ROTH, Jews of Medieval Oxford [see n. 2], ch. 5, and the map facing p. 194.

(6) Quod cum memorato Cancellario et Magistris Universitatis antedictae per inquisitionem legitime constaret, ac Domino Regi Anglie apud Wodestoke illustrique viro Domino Edewardo ejus primogenito tempore sceleris patrati Oxonie existenti, per eodem fuerat nunciatum: ANSTEY (ed.), Munimenta Academica [see n. 2], t. 1, p. 37. TOVEY, Anglia Judaica [see n. 2], p. 169, erroneously concludes that Edward himself brought the news.
Christian relations, in particular those between the Jews and the University, and Jews and King. We hear nothing about a "popular" reaction, and certainly no outrage was committed against the Oxonian Jews at the time. Perhaps this is attributable to the presence of the King's son, or perhaps to the swift inauguration of some kind of judicial procedure by the University. It is also quite likely that the townspeople showed little interest in the prosecution of the "offence". This is indicated by the fact, mentioned in one of the writs to be cited below, that some of them later assisted their Jewish neighbours in concealing their chattels from grip of royal confiscation. At any rate, as far as past experience of the Oxford Jews went, they had more to fear from rioting scholars than from their lay neighbours. Indeed, one of the University's legal foundation stones, the privilege by which the Chancellor acquired jurisdiction over scholars in civil matters, had resulted from the wreck and pillage wrought in the Jewry by some students on 25 March 1244, when the sheriff and constable had to come to the rescue and arrest some of the rioters (7). A number of thirteenth-century churchmen educated at Oxford also took a strong anti-Jewish stance later on in their careers. Thus, Robert Grosseteste appears to have had a hand in the expulsion of the Jews from Leicester (8). The new orders of the friars in particular during the thirteenth century helped to shape a novel attitude of Christian society towards the Jews (9), and it was the friars who also quickly rose to a prominent place at Europe's centres of education. At Oxford, the Dominicans first briefly settled in the

(7) Roth, Jews of Medieval Oxford [see n. 2], p. 127-128. Cf. C.H. Lawrence, The University in State and Church, in J.I. Catto (ed.), The Early Oxford Schools (The History of the University of Oxford, 1), Oxford, 1984, p. 143: "The major problem the university faced was the recurrence of organized violence. The plea rolls of the thirteenth century suggest that Oxford was a dangerous city to venture out in after nightfall."


Jewry before they acquired their site in the parish of St. Ebbe, and
some historians have pointed out that this might have been with a
conversionist intent in mind (\textsuperscript{10}). The main conflict at Oxford, how-
ever, appears to have been in the field of money-lending, and in the
later thirteenth century, the University tried to establish an alterna-
tive to Jewish credit in the form of endowed loan-chests, the first
being Robert Grosseteste’s foundation of a chest at St. Frides-
wide’s (\textsuperscript{11}).

In view of the latent anti-Jewish sentiments of much of the aca-
demic community of the day, it is possible that, whatever happened
to that portable cross on the way to St. Frideswide’s on Ascension
Day, Nicholas of Ewelme would not have failed to elaborate on the
significance of the event in his sermon. His preaching after the inci-
dent could have had a certain influence on the information as it got
through to the King, and helped towards the shaping of the story in
its received form. Unfortunately, we know very little about master
Nicholas, and none of his sermons have so far come to light (\textsuperscript{12}).
Another such influence was probably exerted by the Lord Edward,
whose motives for giving credit to this anti-Jewish accusation will
have to be examined later.

King Henry, who was staying at nearby Woodstock, answered
the University’s complaint by imposing a heavy financial penalty on
the Jews: they were to pay for two new crosses, one of which was to
be a portable cross of gilded silver to replace the broken one and to
be carried about on the University’s processions, the other a fixed

(10) A.G. LITTLE, The House of Black Friars, in The Victoria History of the
County of Oxford (The Victoria County History of England : Oxfordshire), 12 vol.,
English Friars Preachers (Institutum Historicum FF. Praedicatorum: Dissertationes Historicae, 14), Roma, 1951, p. 11, n. 36, and ROTH, Jews of Medieval
Oxford [see n. 2], p. 19.

(11) ROTH, Jews of Medieval Oxford [see n. 2], p. 130-131 ; cf. T.H. ASTON and
Rosamond FAITH, The Endowments of the University and Colleges to circa 1348, in
CATTO (ed.), The Early Oxford Schools [see n. 7], p. 265-309, especially p. 275-276.

(12) A.B. EDMEN, A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D.
1500, 3 vol., Oxford, 1957-59, t. 1, p. 658. In search for any of his sermons, I have
looked through Johannes Baptist SCHNEYER, Repertorium der lateinischen Ser-
mones des Mittelalters für die Zeit von 1150-1350 (Beiträge zur Geschichte der
Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters, 43), 11 vol., Münster in Westf.,
1969-90, and checked the indices to Medievo Latino and the International Medie-
vale Bibliography.
marble structure (13). The King’s original mandate appears not to have survived, but according to Henry III’s other letters close and patent, his sojourn at Woodstock lasted from 19 June to 16 July (14). Thus, his reaction came at least one month after the incident had actually occurred. During the time of his stay at Woodstock, on 5 July to be more precise, he also issued a mandate to the justices in eyre, then touring Oxfordshire, to leave unmolested one Jew of Oxford, Jacob son of master Mossey,

because, as you know, our Jews of England must not plea nor answer anything touching our Jewry before any of our justices except before those of our justices who are assigned to the custody of the Jews (15).

No specific accusation against Jacob or any other Jew is as yet specified, but it is perhaps possible to relate the writ of 5 July to the Ascension Day incident. On 22 September, Henry repeated his protection for Jacob fitz Mossey, this time extending it to the Jew’s sons Mosseus and Benedict, in a writ to the constable of Oxford castle. The King exempted them from the penalty meanwhile imposed, on the grounds that the said Jews had been absent from Oxford at the time of the Ascension Day incident. The September letter is of great interest because it is in fact our earliest explicit reference to what had allegedly happened, and because its narratio reveals a hint of doubt, saying that

a certain small portable cross, which was carried along in a procession of Christians on the same day, was broken by the Jews of Oxford, it is said (\(\text{ut dictur} \)), in contempt for the Cross of Christ and for the whole of Christianity (\(\text{ut dictur} \)).

(13) * Rex, habito regni sui consilio, duas cruces, unam argenteam portatitem undique deauratam, aliarmque marmoream fixam et immobilem sumptibus Judæorum decrevit construendas, ac easdem in municipio suo Oxonie ad perpetuam rei memoriam reponendas, quarum argenteam Cancellario, Magistri, et Scholaribus dicte Universitatis in processionibus suis solemnibus ante se contulit deferendam *: Anstey (ed.), Munimenta Academica [see n. 2], t. 1, p. 37.


(15) * Cum, sicut nostis, Judei nostri Anglie coram aliquibus justiciariis nostris de aliquis Judaismum nostrum tangentibus non debeant placitare vel respondere nisi coram justiciariis nostris ad custodiam Judeorum assignatis *: Close Rolls Henry III, 1264-1268 [see n. 14], p. 470.

(16) * Quando quedam parva crux portatis, que in processione Christianorum eodem die deerefatur, per Judeos Oxonie confecta fuit, ut dictur, in despectum crucis Christi et totius Christianitatis *: Close Rolls Henry III, 1264-1268 [see n. 14], p. 553-554.
We have to pass over another three months until we are given details about the process. In a letter to the sheriff of Oxford dated 27 December, some of the past procedures have fortunately been summed up. It emerges that the Jewish community of Oxford had failed to reveal the name of the Jew — now in the singular — responsible for the attack on the cross. (The latter is now presented as an established fact). The sheriff had therefore been ordered to seize all the Jews and hold them in custody until they gave him sufficient security for the money needed to pay for the two new crosses. He was to raise the money as quickly as possible, so that the work could be finished by the feast-day of St. Edward next (5 January 1269). Yet some of the Jews had forestalled this by leaving their goods and chattels with certain Christian townspeople, so that the sheriff encountered difficulty in raising the sums required. The King therefore ordered him to avail himself of the mayor and some representatives of the Oxford Jewry (17), who in the presence of good and law-abiding men of the city were to establish where those goods and chattels had gone, which the sheriff was now also authorised to sell (18).

King Henry III’s mandate is much in line with his general policy of patronage towards the University (19), as is evident from his directive that its new processional cross should equal that of archbishops. At the same time, as Cecil Roth has noticed, «instead of merely being fined outrageously, the community was condemned to punishment in kind» (20). Henry underlined the religious significance of the Ascension Day incident, and the penalty he imposed was intended as a manifestation of the Church triumphant over its enemies. For the Jews on the other hand, it signified a deep religious humiliation to be forced to provide what to them were clearly objects of idolatry, against the express prohibition of their religious law.

The sequel to the story is quickly told but not without interest in itself. On 11 February 1269 Henry had to give the sheriff new

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(17) The writ calls them cofrarii. This presumably meant the Jews who were responsible for the community's 'coffers', i.e., finances, and the assessment and allocation of the individual tax-burdens. For an example of independent Jewish assessments towards a national tallage, see Robert C. Stacey, Royal Taxation and the Social Structure of Medieval Anglo-Jewry: The Tallages of 1239-42, in Hebrew Union College Annual, 56 (1985), p. 175-249, esp. p. 191-195.


(19) Cf. Lawrence, The University in State and Church [see n. 7], especially p. 132-133.

(20) Roth, Jews of Medieval Oxford [see n. 2], p. 152.
instructions as to the site of the marble cross. Apparently, some of the townsmen found the site first intended highly inconvenient, and a place opposite the Jewish synagogue was suggested. The King and his council, however, considered this location quite improper ("indecens et inhonestum"), and now decided that it was to be erected in the placea of the scholars of Merton, near their church of St. John the Baptist (21). The silver cross was to be given to the same scholars. However, when the silverwork had finally been executed, Henry on 27 April ordered the sheriff to deliver it, not to Merton but to the University, and to place it under the custody of St. Frideswide and its treasury. No traces remain today of either cross (22).

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(21) Close Rolls Henry 111, 1268-1272 [see n. 18], p. 22-23. The inscription of the marble cross, however, still purported to mark the actual spot where the injury was first done. It ran:


Tovey, Anglia Judaica [see n. 2], p. 175 (Anstey [ed.], Munimenta Academica [see n. 2], t. 1, p. 37 has an inferior text, with "auctor" in line 1, "Magistri" in line 2 and a redundant question mark after "Domini" in line 4. See the textual note there and my following note).

(22) There is some confusion as to where the marble cross actually ended up. The Munimenta Academica appear to ascribe the inscription on the marble cross to the silver cross given to the university. This is probably why the text was first erased and then again written in by a seventeenth-century hand. The later scribe further complicated the matter by adding in a note that these were the "versus scripti in tabula aurea crucis S. Frideswyde" ([see n. 2], p. 37, note 8). Simon Forde concluded from this that the marble cross paid for by the Jews was later used as the preaching cross in St. Frideswide's churchyard (Nicholas Hereford's Ascension Day Sermon [see n. 4], p. 211, n. 20). This cannot be ruled out. Tovey, Anglia Judaica [see n. 2], p. 174, maintained that it was "plac'd, as I conceive, upon that Spot of Ground where now stands Merton College Brehouse"; and there remain'd till the Time of Henry the 6th: when John Ross the Antiquary, who study'd then at Oxford, says it fell to the Ground. However, Herbert Hurst, Oxford Topography: An Essay (Oxford Historical Society, o.s. 39), Oxford, 1899, p. 201, mentions the indictment in 1342 of one Adam Blanket for entering the churchyard of St. Frideswide's and carrying off an arm of the great ("capitalis") cross: "This seems to throw doubt on the choice either of a spot near Merton, or one near Mercury's pond, as the site of the noted Jews Cross, an undoubted part of whose base is still preserved." All that can be said with certainty is that there was a large cross, probably used for preaching, in St. Frideswide's churchyard.
For all the impact the Ascension Day incident of 1268 must have had locally, and for all its narrative potential — a Jew defying the Cross of Christ in a daring action, the fitting penalty imposed by the King as defender of the Church — it is surprising to find that the story was not taken up by medieval chroniclers. Apart from the University documentation and the writs issued by the royal chancery, no further direct sources have come to light. In modern times, the story was first discussed at length by the eighteenth-century historian of the English Jews, d’Blossiers Tovey. It is quite clear that Tovey derived the plot — the Ascension Day procession, the snatching, breaking and trampling of the cross, and the subsequent punishment by King Henry III — from the University's own account, supplemented by the royal writs, some of which he quotes in full. Tovey had no hesitation in believing the documents available to him and, as a representative of the Established Church and fellow of Merton College, Oxford, he spoke of an “impious Affront”, attributable to “the most consummate Impudence” of the Jew concerned (23).

A rather more sceptical (and certainly more appropriate) attitude was displayed by Cecil Roth, who in his monograph on The Jews of Medieval Oxford (1951) provided the fullest discussion to date of the Ascension Day incident. We should give full credit to this Jewish “Historian without Tears” (24) writing so soon after the Holocaust, that he did not reject the historicity of the anti-Jewish desecration story out of hand but clearly defined his doubts:

The truth of the matter is not easily to be discovered. The name and identity of the culprit were never suggested — itself a highly suspicious fact; and in general the Jews of the Middle Ages, if not tolerant, were at least circumspect. It may be that some Jew was pushed accidentally against the Cross or else dragged towards it by the mob, and made the bearer stumble, or possibly a demented iconoclast may have taken it into his head to make this foolish gesture; but in any case it is difficult to understand why he was not apprehended, or at least recognized (25).

In the absence of further direct evidence, we must continue to regard Roth’s attempt at an explanation as fully valid. The sagaciousness of his general point about medieval Jews is admirable. As far as the name of the culprit is concerned, however, I feel that it is also permissible to trust the medieval information which suggests

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(23) Tovey, Anglia Judaica [see n. 2], p. 168-169.
(25) Roth, Jews of Medieval Oxford [see n. 2], p. 152.
that the Jews had simply refused to disclose it. In that case, they would have sheltered the defendant in the full knowledge that they would suffer collectively, perhaps out of fear that worse might befall an individual.

The point where I would part company with Roth's interpretation is that it does not provide a context in which the story of the 'iconoclast' Jew would have gained significance. He placed the Ascension Day incident in the last chapter of his monograph, dealing with the final phase of the medieval Jewish community of Oxford and the expulsion of 1290. He thereby situated the accusation within 'a period of rapid decline' for English Jewry, beginning with the Civil War and marked by 'a succession of accusations of ritual outrage against Jews, which presaged the final tragedy' (26).

Roth's 'pre-Expulsion' context smacks of teleology, and while his argument would imply a statement about the Oxford incident narrative — namely, that it is merely one of a series of dubious accusations — it does not provide an explanation for its rise at a particular place and time, nor for its particular content, the breaking of a cross.

Since I cannot adduce further direct evidence about the incident myself, my interpretation will inevitably rest on a number of assumptions and hypotheses. While I shall certainly be considering the historicity of the cross desecration story, my main concern will be with its significance, both in the context of Jewish-Christian relations and of the Christian society which produced the narrative. I am working on the assumption that the context of a desecration narrative of this kind goes beyond mere anti-Judaism and that it reveals some of the religious, cultural, and social preoccupations of the contemporary Christian majority. My hypothesis is that the story of the Ascension Day incident emerged in an atmosphere dominated by the preaching of the crusade and Edward's preparations for taking the Cross on St. John's Day, 24 June 1268. These preoccupations may have had an influence upon the shaping of the anti-Jewish story through Edward's own perceptions or perhaps through the sermon delivered after the alleged incident. A crusading atmosphere, on the other hand, would not have failed to make an impact on the Jews. I shall argue that it was their sensibilities, perceptions and apprehensions as well as those of their Christian contemporaries, that gave occasion to the rise of the desecration narrative. This

(26) Roth, Jews of Medieval Oxford, [see n. 2], p. 151.
second argument is in fact something Robert Stacey has suggested in a recent article. Noting that in medieval England, «Jews and Christians lived cheek by jowl with each other», and that a procession might be seen as «an aggressive assertion of Christian dominance and Jewish subjection», he concludes that «the tensions which such interactions promoted erupted occasionally into violence» — as was the case in Oxford (27). I would go yet further than Stacey: There is some plausibility in suggesting that the desecration story emerged in a climate of religious tension in which even the «foolish gesture» of «a demented iconoclast» (Roth) would, for a moment perhaps, have made sense. Such sense as it made, to Jews and Christians alike, was rendered precisely by the idea of Crusading.

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One way to approach the Oxford incident is by comparing its narrative with other medieval stories of Jewish outrages against Christian symbols, such as icons of Christ or the Virgin, the Cross or crucifix, or the Eucharist. This approach is very similar to tracing a motif through literature, and it involves the comparison of incidents quite distinct from one another in place and time, with the aim of identifying common patterns of behaviour or narrative. Joseph Shatzmiller, in an article of 1980 in Hebrew, has collected a number of instances of the cross desecration libel. There are not many (28). This appears somewhat striking, considering the central position of the cross symbol in Christian thought and in view of the strong tradition in Judaism against any visual representation of the Godhead. A thirteenth-century Hebrew polemical treatise from northern France, the «Book of Joseph the Zealot» (Sepher Joseph ha-Meqane) records the following anecdote:

A monk once asked our uncle R. Joseph of Chartres: «Why did the H[oly One, blessed be He] reveal himself in a thorn bush, rather than in any other

type of tree? » He answered: » It's because it is impossible to use it for making an image [= a crucifix]. «

Throughout the medieval period, as Jacob Katz has observed, the (visible) symbols of Christianity « could be relied upon to repel every unconverted Jew » (30). After the rise of Christianity to a dominating and oppressive religion, the destruction of its « idols » and « houses of idolatry » became part of Jewish apocalyptic hopes that were sometimes expressed in their prayers — a fact which did not remain hidden from Christian contemporaries. The anti-Talmud campaigns of the thirteenth century, in particular, brought much new material to the attention of Christian churchmen, albeit usually in a grossly distorted form (31). Bernard Gui at the beginning of the fourteenth century translated extracts from Jewish prayer-books in his manual for inquisitors, with some degree of accuracy (32). The


(32) » Item, in quodam oratione sua alia ita dicunt: Super nos est adlavorandum Deum super omnia ad dandum magnitudinem creatoris principii qui non fecit nos sicut sunt gentes vel gentiles terrarum et non posuit nos partem nostram qui illi et sortem nostram cum omnibus congregationibus gentium qui illi inclinantes ad vanitates vanitatum et adorant ad Deum non valentem neque salvantem; super hoc speramus tibi, Deus, Dominus noster, ad vincendum cito seu velociter in pulcitudine virtutis tue at transeedum vel expellendum sculptilia, id est ymagines quas christianii de terra adorant ad honorem Christi, et ymagines destruantur et destruuntur erunt ad aptandum seculum in regnum Omnipotentis, et omnes filii carnis invocant in nomine tuo ad reverendum ad te, omnes perverse terre invocabant et cognoscent qui habitant in terra vel in seculum, quoniam tibi flecur tur omne genu et omnis lingua conjurabis coram te vel facie tua. « Bernardus Guidonis, Practica Inquisitionis Hereticis Pravitatis, ed. by C. Douais, Paris, 1886, p. 290-292; cf. Shatzmiller, Desecrating the Cross [see n. 28], p. 159. I am much indebted to Willis Johnson, Berkeley, for pointing out to me that
suspicions that Jews were blaspheming the Christian religion, in a strange language and in the seclusion of their synagogues, dated back well into patristic times (33). It was with such suspicions that Christian authorities or churchmen repeatedly condemned the Jewish custom of crucifying and burning an effigy of Haman on the feast of Purim, when the victory of Mordechai and Esther over that biblical arch-villain was celebrated in carnival-like revelry. In 408, emperor Honorius formally ordered his provincial governors to restrain the Jews from burning an effigy of Haman on a cross with the felonious intention of mocking the Christian faith (34). It was certainly easy to mistake the custom for an anti-Christian practice, and the reaction became particularly acrimonious when the feast of Purim fell into the time of Lent or, as happens in some years, even the week before Easter. Hence perhaps the more or less legendary tradition, recorded by some writers of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, that the Jews were annually mocking a crucifix, or sometimes a wax image of Jesus, in their synagogue on Good Friday. Ademar of Chabannes (d. 1034) tells the story of how the Jews of Rome by their insulting a crucifix provoked an earthquake on Good Friday, 1020, for which they were punished by death (35). Similarly, a widespread miracle of the Virgin has it that Mary appeared at a mass celebrated by the archbishop of Toledo, telling

the congregation that the Jews were tormenting a wax image of Christ in their synagogue — a massacre in the Jewry was the outcome (36). The idea that Jews were regularly and ritually insulting the crucifix in their synagogues was one of the traditions that led to the development, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, of the ritual murder accusation as well as the host desecration libel. The English examples of ritual murder accusations, in particular, regularly speak of the crucifixion of a boy in imitation of the Passion (37).

In marked contrast to the more or less legendary accusations of secretly (and ritually) tormenting a crucifix, which were often followed by outrages against the Jews, Christian responses in better-documented, late-medieval cases usually consisted in the authorities imposing a heavy fine (38). Henry III’s reaction to the Oxford incident is a case in point, and there is a similar example from fifteenth-century Italy. One might add an earlier incident of the

(38) The cause célèbre of a ‘Jew’ stabbing an image of the Virgin at the Cistercian monastery of Cambron in Hainault in 1326, for which he was later hanged, is no valid exception, since he had been baptized before and was legally treated as a relapsus, for whom a heretic’s penalty applied, even if the later legendary tradition consistently treated him as Jewish: F. HACHEZ, La littérature du sacrilège de Cambron, in Annales du cercle archéologique de Mons, 27 (1897), p. 97-152; ERIC MYLES ZAFRAN, The Iconography of Antisemitism: A Study of the Representation of the Jews in the Visual Arts of Europe 1400-1600, 2 vol., Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 1973, t. 1, p. 208-214. Thanks to Willis Johnson, Berkeley, for guiding me to Zafran’s extremely valuable study.
type, reported in an early-eleventh century *responsum* of R. Jacob Tov-Elm (Bonfilis), who mentioned the great (financial) difficulties faced by the community of Sens because of the destruction of an abomination (*to'evah*) there (39). In his own analysis of the court proceedings against the Jew Simon David of Manosque, Shatzmiller has further demonstrated that a Christian court’s commitment to legal procedure could even lead to the acquittal of the defendant. In 1342, Simon David was accused of *purposely and deliberately* (*pensato et deliberato animo*) desecrating a wayside cross by spitting, stoning and breaking off its left arm, which he then threw to the ground, thereby committing a crime of lese majesté (*40*). Accused by Rostagnus Obereii (*as expected*), says Shatzmiller, a cleric, who had apparently first noticed that the cross had lost an arm, Simon David was later acquitted for lack of proof by the court of the Hospitallers of Manosque. Indeed, two of the (Christian) witnesses reported that after Obereii had accused the Jew in their presence, they went to the said cross to see for themselves. Taking a closer look at the severed arm, however, they concluded *that the fracture had not been made recently nor appeared fresh, but that this seemed to have happened long before* (*41*). Shatzmiller concludes that, in contrast to other accusations of the kind, such as the one raised in Oxford, *the court was committed to respect strict legal procedure


(40) *Spuit eandem et per spumam vituperavit. Et non contemptus de premissis, lapides accipiens quamplures proiiescit contra eam et percussit de ipsis adeo quod eam fregit et unum brachium eiusdem crucis videlicet sinistrum per eum sit [read sic] fractum in terram corruit et prostravit, incidens in legem Juliam magesstatis et legi Julie de vi publica et de sacrilegiis et penas earn*: SHATZMILLER, Desecrating the Cross [see n. 28], p. 168.

(41) *Et concorditer accesserunt tunc ad dictam crucem ad vidend(um) si sic esset. Et cum fuerunt ad dictam crucem invenerunt eam fractam uno brachio et perquisito eodem brachio ipsum invenerunt in quodam heremo satis prope crucem ipsum, et respicientes diligentem si eo tempore rupta fuerat cognoverunt, et ad inveniam locuti fuerunt, quod fractura non erat noviter facta nec apparabat nova, set videbatur quod diu antea hoc factum fuisse*: SHATZMILLER, Desecrating the Cross [see n. 28], p. 172.
and rules of evidence*, and thus restrained the dangerous anti-Jewish potential of the accusation (42).

No less striking examples of authorities' responses come from fifteenth-century Italy. In at least three cases — at Gubbio in 1471 at Pisa in 1491 and at Mantova in 1495 — Jews did in fact have Christian *sacred images* effaced from the walls of houses they were living in (43). What is more, they did so with authorisation. A commitment by the Jews to have a substitute painted in a more suitable place at their expense was apparently enough to secure such permission in Gubbio and Pisa. Michele Luzzati has demonstrated how, in the latter case, the episcopal authorities went to great lengths in assisting Isacco di Vitale of Pisa in his efforts, and in overcoming considerable obstacles. They even devised the striking justification that *non decet similes figuras et imagines stare, esse et permanere in domo hebreorum*, which, as Luzzati points out, amounted to nothing less than overthrowing the whole tradition of the Church's attitude towards the Jews (44). However, a more recent study also cites examples of inquisitorial punishment or popular outrage against Jews who had effaced *sacred* images: at Treviso in 1439/40, Lodi in 1456, and in 1470 at Vigevano in the duchy of Milan (45). At Mantova in 1495 the removal of an image with prior

(42) Shatzmiller, Desecrating the Cross [see n. 28], p. ix. One should also point out the lay witnesses' non-cooperation with Obreii, a behaviour so markedly different from the popular outrages committed during the pogroms following accusations of Host desecration in medieval Germany. There is perhaps a parallel in the behaviour of those Oxford townspeople who helped to conceal their Jewish neighbours' chattels after the accusation of 1268.


(44) Luzzati, Ebrei, chiesa locale [see n. 43], p. 850-851. The problem was that di Vitale had at first requested the removal of an image (of Saint Christopher) in a place described as vile and abject, in order to carry out repairs to his house. However, it turned out that there was a second picture (of the same saint), in the hall which was probably used as a synagogue. Probably, Isacco had calculated to take the proverbial *due piccioni con una fava*, i.e., to eliminate two Saint Christophers with a single authorization.

authorization went disastrously wrong. The Jewish banker, Daniele da Norsa, and the marquis who had given him the permission, Francesco Gonzago, faced violent popular opposition (duly channelled by the local mendicants and involving, incidentally, a rally on the eve of Ascension Day). Gonzago, who had just fought at Fornovo against Charles VIII as captain of the anti-French league, made an about-turn over his permission. Not only was da Norsa forced to have the image restored at his cost, but a church was to be built on the spot of his house, and to be dedicated to the Virgin, who had protected Gonzago and granted him what was by now considered a victory (64). The penalty is similar to that imposed on the Oxford Jews in that the replacement of the sacred image was outrageously out of proportion with the damage done in the first place. This can be substantiated by other cases of Jews being punished for alleged mockery of Christian symbols of faith. Thus, two Jews of Basle were fined, one in 1377 for making fun of the planctus Mariae, the other in 1396 for insulting St. Catherine; and three Jews from Ulm and Giengen in 1418 had to pay 110 fl. to the imperial chancery for mocking of the Pope (65).

In the later Middle Ages, Christian reaction to allegations of Jewish iconoclasm was, as far as we can tell from the limited evidence, rather ambivalent. On the whole, however, it was less spontaneous and violent than the response to other anti-Jewish accusations, most notably those fantastic stories of Jews stabbing or otherwise tormenting the Eucharist. The host desecration libel was one of the most volatile of anti-Jewish stories of the middle ages. Ignited in Paris in 1290, it spread like fire and especially in the German lands led to the destruction of a large number of entire

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(46) LUZZATI, Ebrei, chiesa locale [see n. 43], p. 848.
(47) Arye MAIMON, Mordechai BREUER and Yacov GUGGENHEIM (eds), Germania Judaica III: 1350-1519; Ibid., 2 vol., Tübingen, 1987-95, t. 1, p. 84 with n. 107, p. 89-90; t. 2, p. 1514, n. 165. A strangely parallel case [to that of Oxford] is still found commemorated today in the city of Prague. There on the Charles Bridge is a sculpted crucifix which, according to the inscription, was erected in 1696 with funds from the Jews to compensate for the mocking of a crucifix by one of their community. Their shame is emphasized by the carved (formerly gilt) Hebrew letters forming a halo around the crucified Christ with the words 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts' ZAFRAN, The Iconography of Antisemitism [see n. 38], t. 1, p. 197-198.
Jewish communities, usually on the mere evidence of rumour (48). It is clear that the popularity of the host desecration story as opposed to the accusation of Jewish iconoclasm reveals specific patterns of expectation on the part of the Christian majority and indeed a different function of raising the accusation in the first place. It also paralleled Christian doctrine, which never maintained that an image of the Cross or a representation of the Crucified was indeed God—quite the contrary. Orthodoxy always maintained that the veneration of sacred images did not imply their adoration. Not perhaps altogether incidentally, the point was repeatedly stressed in the adversus Judaeos literature (49). On the other hand, the basic tenet of Eucharistic theology, developing into full form during the twelfth and thirteenth century, was precisely the presence of Christ, flesh and blood, divine and human, in the consecrated wafer. This may have appeared even worse in Jewish eyes (50), however not mainly


(50) The prevailing note was disgust: \textit{As for the fact that they mock us and say that they do not make sacrifices and burnt offerings, as was formerly done in Israel, they do indeed make sacrifices and burnt offerings, for they offer up the flesh of the hanged [crucified] one and eat it}: Sepher Nizzahon Yashan (thirteenth-century Germany), quoted in Trautner-Kromann, Shield and Sword [see n. 29], p. 114. Alfonso da Spina, OFM (Spain, fifteenth century), asserts: \textit{Dicunt enim iudei quod christiani sunt pessimi idolatrae adorantes christum purum hominem tanquam deum et quod peius est hostiam de frumento ab eis...}
because they regarded it as idolatry: the host is not an image, and there is no specific prohibition against making absurd claims about pieces of bread (20). The problem with the Eucharist is that it was connected with a wine ritual which was prohibited by the injunctions against so-called libations (22). Another passage from the Book of Joseph the Zealot will help to illustrate the point:

The ploughers of sin say: Why don’t you believe in the sacrament? They also ask: Why will you not believe that the bread which we eat is the atonement for our souls? We answer them: When Hosea prophesied (9.4), They shall not pour libations of wine to God, and their sacrifices shall not be pleasing to Him, he referred to the sacrament which they make of wine. See what it says in the next sentence: It will be like mourners’ bread to them — all those who eat it will be defiled. And it will be like the disgusting bread (Malachi 1.7). And furthermore, when they say that the bread which they call pan comes to atone for their souls this is contradicted by the bread is for their hunger only — it will not come to the house of God (Hosea 9.4). All of this ritual is vanity (23).


(51) Willis Johnson, Berkeley, in a personal correspondence.


(53) Rosenthal (ed.), Sepher Joseph Hamekane [see n. 29], p. 85, n° 91a. I am indebted to Willis Johnson for the translation of this passage into English. Cf. also Kahn, Études sur le livre de Joseph le Zélateur [see n. 29], t. 1, p. 245; t. 3, p. 17.
For Christians at any rate, the *crime* of a Jew inflicting any kind of *torment* on the Eucharist constituted not a merely symbolical act but a *real* re-enactment of Christ's Passion, and many of the medieval accounts of alleged Jewish host desecration (which were also used as *exempla* for teaching the *reals praesentia* (54)) stressed precisely this point. This marks a clear-cut difference from the charge of *lèse majesté* (a concept taken from Roman civil law) raised in the Manosque proceedings of 1342, which characterized the symbolical significance of the material damage done to a wooden cross. In sum, the Christian reaction to the Oxford incident of 1268 — imposition of a financial penalty and absence of outright persecution — does not appear to have been out of the ordinary.

* * *

The main difference between the cases of *iconoclasm* I have just discussed and allegations of ritual desecration is that the former were not quite as stereotyped as the latter. The favourite occasion for accusations of Jewish host desecration was the Easter season, particularly Good Friday, when the Passion was recalled in Christian liturgy and, in the imaginations of some, re-enacted by the Jews of their neighbourhood. It is a consequence of the purely fantastic nature of the host desecration libel that it needed a strong narrative structure for its wide dissemination, whereas accusations of iconoclasm would be made in a more opportunistic manner when an icon, cross or crucifix was found damaged, as was the case in Manosque. Confirmation for this point comes from the few instances of cross desecration which do appear stereotyped. They are a product of the Spanish inquisition against *conversos*, Jews forcibly converted to Christianity who often secretly kept some of their Jewish customs. A number of proceedings report that *conversos* were flogging a crucifix in their homes every Friday afternoon. The alleged secrecy of these acts as well as their symbolic timing reveal them as a product of clerical imagination rather than a real (and understandable) vindication for the suffering inflicted on Jews by Christianity (55).

(55) Haim Beinart (ed.), *Records of the Trials of the Spanish Inquisition in
At the same time, the accusations recorded by the Spanish Inquisition confirm that there did exist traditions about Jewish outrages against the Cross, which would have geared clerical expectations towards detecting Jewish image desecrations. In the following, I shall concentrate on one such tradition, the Historia ymaginis Berytensis, and try to establish what influence it might have had on the shaping of the Oxford incident narrative. The Historia ymaginis Berytensis originated, together with other similar stories, in early medieval Byzantium. It tells of a Christian who in the city of Beirut in Syria, who upon moving to another house had left an image of the Crucified in his former abode. A Jew then rented the house. He did not notice the image at first, but one of his co-religionists one day pointed out the fact to him over dinner. The Jew was embarrassed and apologized, but the other reported him to the head of the community. The Jews came together at the house and upon seeing the image beat up the owner and expelled him from the synagogue. They then seized upon the image, trampled it underfoot and repeated all the humiliations of the Passion on it. When they pierced it with a lance, suddenly blood and water issued. The astonished Jews collected the blood, took it to the synagogue and were able to cure all manner of illnesses. The Jews then approached the local bishop and were baptized.

The earliest extant version of this story is preserved in a Greek sermon erroneously ascribed to Athanasius, which was read to the Council of Nicaea in 787, but probably dates from the period of Emperor Constantine Copronymous (741-75), thus from a time of fierce iconoclast persecution. Iconodule fugitives from the East must have contributed to the spread of the narrative to the Latin


(56) This is in outline the version of the Legenda Aurea, which I have chosen because of its general availability in the Later Middle Ages: Th. Graesse (ed.), Jacobi a Voragine Legenda Aurea vulgo Historia Lombardica dicta, Dresden, Leipzig, 1846, chap. 137 « De exaltatione sancte crucis », n° 4, p. 608-609.

West, where a number of Greek manuscripts have survived (58). Further Latin accounts, however, do not appear until the twelfth century, when the legend was entered in the chronicle of Sigebert of Gembloux, under the year 765 (59). Although not in itself a miracle of the Virgin, it was also included in a number of collections of such miracles from twelfth-century France, as well as in the Englishman John of Garland’s thirteenth-century Stella Maris (60). The mass distribution of the story, however, was achieved by means of exempla collections, a new genre of the thirteenth century closely related to the rise of the mendicant orders of preachers and confessors. Almost all major exempla collections of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries featured a version of the Historia ymaginis—they include Vincent of Beauvais’s Speculum Historiale (arranged as a history book) (61), pseudo-Caesarius of Heisterbach’s Libri VII miraculorum (62), the French collection Ci nous dit (63), that medieval best-seller, Jacobus of Voragine’s Legenda aurea (64), Albert of Liège’s Alphabetum narrationum (65), and Jean Gobi’s Scala Coeli (66). Some of the collections made in late-thirteenth and early-


(59) MGH SS VI, p. 333; Migne, PL [see n. 35], t. 160, col. 145. The Annales Xantenses also mention it: MGH SS II, p. 222.

(60) Wilson (ed.), The Stella Maris of John of Garland [see n. 58], p. 113 n° 21, further references in the editor’s notes on p. 177-178. See also Adolfo Mussafia, Studien zu den mittelalterlichen Marialegenden (Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Classe, 113, 115, 119, 123, 139), Wien, 1887-98, t. 1, p. 11; t. 3, p. 25, n. 2.

(61) Book 23, chap. 160; cf. Mussafia, Studien [see n. 60], t. 2, p. 57.


(64) See above, n. 56.


(66) M.-A. Polo de Beaujou (éd.), La Scala Coeli de Jean Gobi (Sources d’histoire médiévale), Paris, 1991, no 378. See ibid., p. 668, and Frederic C. Tubach, Index Exemplorum: A Handbook of Medieval Religious Tales (FF Com-
fourteenth century England have it as well: the Anglo-Norman *Vies des anciens Pères* (67), and the anonymous collections in British Library Sloane 2478 and *Royal 12.E.i.* (68). In Middle English, it is represented in the *South English Legendary* (which depends on the *Legenda Aurea*) (69), the *Alphabet of Tales* (a translation of Albert of Liège) (70), and John Mirk’s *Festial* (71).

An indication of how far stories such as this were diffused into the culture of the Latin West is given by the fact that they were sometimes «updated». The miracle was presented as having occurred, not far away in the distant past, but in circumstances altogether more familiar. At some point in the later thirteenth century such an update was recorded by the chronicler Richer of Senones. The setting had now moved to Cologne, where a weaver rented a house in the Jewish quarter for a year, leaving an image of the Crucified when he moved out, and so on. The story must be considered a deliberate fraud, since it ends with the spoliation and forced conversion or killing of the city’s Jewish population, and of the erection of a church in honour of the Cross of Christ in place of the synagogue, none of which is confirmed by any other source. In fact, the story was the imposture of a vagrant who claimed to be a former Jew who had been present at the miracle and then converted to Christianity (72). A similar update was produced of another Byzantine


68) *Ward and Herbert, Catalogue of Romances* [see n. 56], t. 3, p. 517, n° 124 and p. 537, n° 1.


71) T. Erbe (ed.), *Mirk’s Festial: A Collection of Homilies by Johannes Mirkus (John Mirk)* (Early English Text Society, e.s. 96), London, 1905, p. 170-175, see also *Ward and Herbert, Catalogue of Romances* [see n. 57], t. 3, p. 707, n° 10. Most of the *exempla* listed above ultimately draw on the version of Sigebert of Gembloux.

legend of an ‘injured image’, the story according to which a Jew in Constantinople threw an image of the Virgin into his privy to defecate on it. First recorded in Adamnanus of Hy’s De locis sanctis (where it is presented as the tale of an Eastern visitor), this legend gained wide currency from the twelfth century in collections of Miracles of the Virgin (73). In the mid-thirteenth century, Matthew Paris picked up the theme and accused a contemporary Jew, Abraham of Berhamsted, of precisely the same insult. With unintentional irony, he called it an ‘unheard-of crime’ (74).

The Oxford story was certainly not merely a similar ‘update’ of a traditional legend. It was not alleged that it happened in Holy Week or even Lent, nor was it perceived of as a ritualized desecration. The account given by the extant material gives the impression of a sudden and unexpected act (75), and is altogether different from that of the Historia imaginis Berylensis, just as the type of documentation differs. But by the later thirteenth century, when Miracles of the Virgin and exempla collections were being widely disseminated among the clergy for purposes of preaching and devout reading, there was arguably a chance that the literary tradition could have contributed to the shaping of an image of the Jew-as-

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(74) H.R. Luard (ed.), Matthaei Parisiensis Monachi Sancti Albani Chronica Majora, 7 vol. (Rolls Series, 57), London, 1872-83, t. 5, p. 114-115 (‘insauditum nefas’, p. 115); Roth, Jews of Medieval Oxford [see n. 2], p. 32 has characterized Abraham as an ‘extremely objectionable protégé’ of Richard of Cornwall, and it is perhaps no coincidence that he was chosen for the legend update.

(75) ‘Et inopinatus’: Anstey (ed.), Munimenta Academica [see n. 2], p. 36.
iconoclast, which would in turn frame the way in which present-day Jewish behaviour was interpreted. It remains to be discussed, however, why and how this should have happened. We have to return to the particular circumstances of Oxford on Ascension Day, 17 May 1268.

* * *

As I have pointed out above, the two earliest possible "filters" to shape the narrative of the Ascension Day incident were the subsequent sermon by the chancellor and the Lord Edward's perceptions. To begin with the latter, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Edward's overriding concern during the early summer of 1268 was with his joining King Louis IX of France on a crusade to the Holy Land. Edward took the Cross together with his brother Edmund, Gilbert Earl of Gloucester, and many other nobles on 24 June at a council in Northampton (76). This was during the period when his father was staying at Woodstock near Oxford and from which we have the first reaction to the Ascension Day incident. What is more, it also followed a period of intensified preaching of the crusade.

The first crusade of Louis IX had ended in disaster and defeat, after the slaughter of an elite element in the crusader army at Mansurah c. February 1250 and the subsequent capture and ransom of Louis himself (77). After his return, the state of Outremer was further worsened by the Mongol incursions and the rise of Sultan Baybars, as well as by the eviction of Baldwin II of Constantinople by a new Greek emperor, Michael VIII Palaeologus, in 1261. Still in the same year, Pope Urban IV upon his accession resumed with new vigour


the preaching of a crusade to Outremer, but his plans had not advanced far when he died in 1264. His successor Clement IV took up the issue, while affairs in the East continued to get worse. Early in 1265 Haifa and Arsuf were lost (78), and by October 1266, Caesarea, Ashdod, and Safed had fallen too (79). Already in May 1266, Clement had made an urgent appeal to the French nobility to prepare for a new crusade to start in March 1267, but response was dilatory. However, on the feast of the Annunciation (25 March) 1267, King Louis IX of France, who had led the previous crusade, took the Cross again. Although he was severely criticised for this step, even by admirers such as Jean de Joinville, the «most Christian king» was probably able to pour some new inspiration into the campaign for a new passagium. The situation in Outremer meanwhile was further deteriorating. The principality of Antioch was under siege, and on 18 May 1268, the Friday after Ascension Day, its capital city fell. It is possible that the news reached France and England during the summer (80).

Meanwhile in England, the monarchy was slowly getting on top of the baronial opposition, especially after the victory over Simon de Montfort at Evesham in 1265, although the military pacification took much of the two subsequent years (81). In 1267, the last rebellions of the disinherited were suppressed: the Dictum of Kenilworth, the Lord Edward's capture of the isle of Ely, and the end to the occupation of London marked decisive steps in this process. Also in the same year, Llewelyn of Wales, confronted with this new assertiveness, agreed to settle with Edward. The Crown was aided in the process of internal settlement by Pope Clement IV, who sent his legate Ottobuono Fieschi, cardinal deacon of St. Adrian, and authorized him to preach, if need be, the crusade against the Montfortian

(78) Cole, Preaching of the Crusades [see n. 77], p. 190, with n. 51.
(80) Chronicon Thomae Wykes [see n. 76], p. 218 creates this impression.
party (82). At some point in 1266, Ottobuono emerged as Executor of
the Cross and, with the internal settlement progressing, resumed
preaching the crusade to the Holy Land. In October, he received
instructions for preaching on the recent losses in Outremer, and we
can see him preaching on various occasions during the following
year: at St. Paul's, London (in defiance of the city's occupation by
the rebels), and later at Lincoln and Barlings, Lincolnshire (83).
The financial implications of a new crusade were certainly discussed
at the church council of Bury St. Edmunds in February 1267, and
probably also at the legatine councils of London in June 1267 and
April 1268 (84). Ottobuono’s efforts were finally crowned with suc-
cess at the parliament of Northampton in June 1268, when he gave
the Cross to Edward, Edmund, and other nobles, and the legate left
England again on 20 July (85).

It is quite certain that the Lord Edward did not take the Cross
spontaneously at Northampton. Going out on crusade required care-
ful planning, notably with regard to finances, and the vows of high
dignitaries were often carefully staged, so as to induce as many fol-
lowers as possible to follow suit (86). This is not to deny Edward’s
genuine devotion to the cause. Already during 1267, he must have
been in contact with King Louis of France concerning the new cru-
sade. A later poem in praise of Edward claims that he took the Cross
out of gratitude for the end of the Barons’ Wars (86). It is at any rate
certain that the internal settlement of the realm had progressed far
enough to allow for a new venture. Yet Edward was pursuing his

(82) Jourdain (éd.), Registres de Clément IV [see n. 79], n° 56, cf. Lloyd,
English Society and the Crusade [see n. 79], p. 12. For Ottobuono’s legatine
mission to England, cf. Natalie Schöpp, Papst Hadrian V. (Kardinal Ottobuono Fieschi)
(Heidelberger Abhandlungen zur mittleren und neueren Geschichte, 49),
(83) Lloyd, English Society and the Crusade [see n. 79], p. 63, 52 n. 32; cf.
Schöpp, Papst Hadrian V. [see n. 82], p. 166-167.
(84) Lloyd, English Society and the Crusade [see n. 79], p. 69; Schöpp, Papst
Hadrian V. [see n. 82], p. 173-174, 176.
(85) Chronicon Thomae Wykes [see n. 76], p. 219.
(86) Christopher Tyerman, England and the Crusades 1095-1588, Chicago,
London, 1988, p. 155-158. Wykes reports that up to 120 knights took the Cross
following Edward’s example: Chronicon Thomae Wykes [see n. 76], p. 218.
(87) * Cupiens exsolvevere dignum / Obsequium Christo, qui se liberavit ab isto /
Turbine bellorum *: Thomas Wright (ed.), The Political Songs of England: From
the Reign of John to that of Edward II (Camden Society, 6), London, 1839, p.
130-131.
crusading plans in the face of opposition, both from his father the
King and from the Pope, who both thought it unwise for the heir to
the throne to leave the country, considering the King’s age and the
recent turmoil. Clement IV in January 1268 quite clearly expressed
his wish that not Edward but his younger brother Edmund should
go to Outremer, in fulfilment of their father’s own long-standing
vow (which he was clearly no longer expected to fulfil in person) (88).
Without backing from the Pope, a major source of financial aid was
cut off from Edward, *and it is likely that no final agreement had
been reached when the pope died [29 November 1268], notwithstanding
Ottobuono’s lobbying on Edward’s behalf* (89). It is not
difficult to imagine Edward’s feelings in the early summer of 1268.
As Simon Lloyd has put it:

Restless, chafing under restraints, the heir to the throne probably regarded
the prospect of the crusade with relish. Louis IX also encouraged him. He
had urged Henry III to fulfil his own outstanding vow of 1250 on a number
of occasions in the 1260s, and he probably promoted the cause ever more
ardently among his Plantagenet kin after taking the Cross himself in March
1267. It is apparent from Clement IV’s letter to Louis in January 1268 that
Edward and Louis had already been in contact over the matter by late 1267.
Louis, perhaps, had been making overtures to Edward as early as this, a
surmise strengthened by Henry III’s observation in June 1272 that Edward
had set out for the Holy Land at Louis’s behest (90).

The influence of the French crusader king is difficult to overesti-
mate. Towards the end of his life, Louis truly assumed the reputa-
tion, among much of the aristocracy of Western Europe, of a most
Christian king (91). Also, to judge from Edward’s later efforts as a
king to organize a new crusade (he took the cross again in 1287),
crusading was a genuine expression of the English prince’s personal
piety (92). It is important to stress the religious aspect of Edward’s
crusading vow, as opposed to the political (and perhaps, the chival-
ric and adventurous), since both his father and Pope Clement IV
appear to have considered it inexpedient at the time. Edward’s

(88) Jourdain (éd.), Registres de Clément IV [see n. 79], n° 1288.
(89) Lloyd, English Society and the Crusade [see n. 79], p. 147.
(90) Lloyd, English Society and the Crusade [see n. 79], p. 115.
(91) Jean Richard, Saint Louis: Crusader King of France, ed. and abr. by
(92) Michael Prestwich, The Piety of Edward I, in W.M.Ormrod (éd.),
England in the Thirteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1984 Harlaxton Symposium,
Grantham, Lcs., 1985, p. 120-128 (p. 128).
determination to follow Louis is evidenced by the fact that in August 1269, he in effect pawned Gascony to the French crown, in return for a huge loan from the French king (93). I would suggest that in this situation the allegation of an attack on the Cross would have been of prime significance for Edward, and that he would not have failed to exploit it in order to further his own cause for defending the Cross.

* * *

If the Lord Edward in May 1268 associated the Oxford incident on Ascension Day, whatever that may have been, with his plans to take the Cross, the link was certainly reinforced by the paramount importance the symbol of the Cross was given in preaching, and particularly in preaching the crusade. With particular reference to a number of sermons by Richard Fishacre O.P. (fl. at Oxford in the mid-thirteenth century), Jennifer Sweet has pointed out:

No subject for the medieval preacher was more fruitful in imagery than the cross and passion. The cross is the standard of Christ going out to battle. Its four corners signify strength, boldness, faithfulness and love, and it is held on high for all to see [...] As the crucifix is put in a place of honour in the church, [...] so should the Crucified be always present in the human soul (94).

Sweet's point holds true a fortiori for the preaching of the crusade. At the time of the Fifth Crusade, the sermons ad crucisignatos of Jacques de Vitry, whose sermones vulgares were to become immensely popular as model sermon collections, relate all kinds of biblical mentions of signa, notably in the prophecies of the Old Testament, to the sign of the Cross. It is the sign of Zion (Jer. 4.6), the standard raised in the land (Jer. 51.27) or in the mountains (Is. 18.3), it is the sign God will exalt to the peoples (Is. 11.12, 29.22, 66.18-19). Symbolically, it is also the Staff of Jacob, Noah's Ark, Jacob's ladder, and the shepherd's rod (of Lev. 27.32). More importantly, it is the sign of the living God of the Apocalypse (Apoc. 7.2), and Jacques de Vitry places special emphasis on the apocalyptic nature of the crusade. He ties a close bond between the Cross and the Crucifixion, i.e., the willing self-sacrifice of Christ to

(93) Lloyd, English Society and the Crusade [see n. 78], p. 147.
be emulated by the crusaders. The Cross, « Christ’s blood-stained standard », has the power to arouse people to avenge the injury done to the holy places (\textsuperscript{95}). Or, in the words of the roughly contemporary \textit{Ordinacio de Predicatione Sanctae Crucis in Anglia}:

The Lord on the Cross defines all our life to us, so that we may imitate him, since each of Christ’s actions to us is an instruction (\textsuperscript{96}).

In the course of the thirteenth century, the preaching of the crusade was largely taken over by the new mendicant orders. They were employed systematically as local preachers from the 1230s, and the move paralleled a new policy which allowed more people to take the cross than actually intended to set out, « the majority of whom were urged to redeem their vows whilst retaining the indulgence tied thereto » (\textsuperscript{97}). The friars’ role in preaching the crusade was gaining particular importance during the 1260s. Thus, Cardinal Ottobuono employed them during his preaching campaign in England in 1267. The chronicler Thomas Wykes asserts that, apart from the many nobles who took the Cross at Northampton in June 1268,

Driven by a similar impulse of devotion, with the Friars Preachers and Minors having spread the word of the Cross of Christ throughout the realm in cities, towns and vills, a countless multitude of common folk adorned their shoulders with the same sign of the Cross (\textsuperscript{98}).

It was during these years that both the Franciscan Guibert of Tournai (d. c. 1284) and the Dominican Humbert of Romans (d. 1277) composed appropriate aids for the task. Guibert’s three model sermons on Apoc. 7.2, « Then I saw another angel rising from the east, carrying the sign of the living God », follow Jacques de Vitry in developing this theme through linking it to the sign of the Cross. According to one of Guibert’s \textit{distinctiones}, the cross is directive,

(95) COLE, \textit{Preaching of the Crusades} [see n. 77], p. 133, 134-37.
(97) LLOYD, \textit{English Society and the Crusade} [see n. 79], p. 19.
(98) « Consimili quoque devotionis instinctu, facta per totum regnum in civitatibus burgis et villis per frates Praedicatores et Minores disseminatione verbis crucis Christi, plebeia multitudo, quam dinumerare nemo poterat, eodem crucis charactere suos humeros adornabant »: \textit{Chronicon Thomae Wykes} [see n. 76], p. 218; cf. LLOYD, \textit{English Society and the Crusade} [see n. 79], p. 54, n. 50, and TYERMAN, \textit{England and the Crusades} [see n. 86], p. 160.
distinctive, restorative, recollective, and remunerative; according to another, it is signum clementie, signum victorie, signum iusticie, and signum glorie. At about the same time when Guibert composed his model sermons, Humbert of Romans wrote a much more comprehensive manual, De predicacione crucis, laying out a systematic approach towards the preaching of the crusade. According to Humbert,

The cross which [a crusader] takes signifies his dedication and proclaims that its wearer, out of love for God, has determined to avenge Christ’s injuries [...] The soldier who wears the cross should be able to say to God, *Because of you I have honored and glorified your blessed cross to the best of my ability in wearing it on my shoulders before the Jews, before the Saracens, and before the nations of the world* *(*)*.

*Exempla* were an integral part in preaching the crusade. Preachers of the thirteenth century began to make use of the material that was now made available to them in model sermons, *distinctiones*, and *exempla* collections. In order to inspire contrition and encourage the rejection of earthly vanities, they related before their listeners the wondrous signs of martyrdom in the form of crosses on the bodies of those fallen in the East (*99*), the examples of piety and heroism in battle, and the punishments of those who refused to take

(99) COLE, *Preaching of the Crusades* [see n. 77], p. 205, 206; Humbert wrote his treatise c. 1265-66 (p. 202); according to E.T. BRETT, *Humbert of Romans: His Life and Views of Thirteenth-Century Christian Society* [Studies and Texts, 67], Toronto, 1984, p. 168, it was between 1266 and 1268). He also wrote model sermons *ad crucisignatos* which are inserted in his treatise *De eruditione praedicatorum*.

(100) There is an instructive — and critical — account of the abuse made by some preachers of such *exempla*, dating from the time of the crusade of 1309, written by an anonymous monastic chronicler in Upper Austria. He accused a number of *clerici questuarii* of preaching a general crusade without authorization, and of inciting the masses by mendacious tales of crosses appearing on the bodies of fallen crusaders. He quotes one preacher he had heard himself as saying, *Videte, carissimi, quomodo negocium nostrum nutu divino dirigitur. Recipientibus nos rerum ubertas, solatium sanitatis a Deo tribuitur. Domus non recipientium igne misso celitus concremantur. Multi nostrum iam venerunt ad Terram sanctam, qui dindicantes cum Saracenis uno bello campestri vitam glorioso martyrio finiverunt. Et inter multa milia occisorum de nostris non erat unum corpus quod non nigro cendato aurea cruce intexta desuper de celo misso miraculose esset vestitum*: *Continuatio Florianensis*, in MGH SS IX, p. 753.
the vow or who even dissuaded others from taking it (101). *Exempla* were also justified, as in the English *Ordinacio*, on the grounds that they attracted the listeners’ attention and prevented boredom (102). Edward of England himself later became the hero of an *exemplum*. Jean Gobi’s *Scala Coeli* relates how he was protected in the midst of battle by the sign of the Cross. The collector was simply applying a story told by Bede of King Oswald to the new English king (103). The *exemplum* was grouped under “crux”, but *exempla* on *cruce signatis* follow on the next page, quite a common phenomenon in the collections. In the *Scala Coeli*, the story of the Jews and the Crucifix in Beirut immediately precedes the one about Edward. It was perhaps sometimes used in a crusading context, although direct evidence is lacking. However, it is worth pointing out that in some influential collections, like the *Legenda Aurea*, it was entered, together with other anti-Jewish tales, under the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (14 September). William Tyerman observed that:

This became a sort of crusaders’ festival day, exploited by preachers from the Third Crusade or earlier. In 1291 the friars and other clerics appointed to preach the cross in the see of York were all instructed to deliver their sermons on 14 September, testimony to the importance of the symbolism and cult of the cross within the sermons themselves and within the surrounding network of devotional habits upon which the institution of the crusade depended (104).

However, it has to be admitted that there is no information whatsoever on the topic of the Ascension Day sermon delivered by master Nicholas of Ewelme in Oxford in 1268. We know very little about master Nicholas himself, and not a single one of his sermons has been identified. However, if we consider that the sermon was regularly delivered in English and that there is later evidence to suggest that it was an occasion for addressing subjects of current interest (105), and if we further accept the information that the Lord


(102) *Exempla aliqua quoque interseranttur, tum ut magis reddant auditores attentos tum propter remociemem tedij, tum ut per exempla aliorum magis moveantur ad contricionem, tum ut magis fallacem mundi vanitatem contemptant, ut aliquod huiusmodi verbi gracia *: *Ordinacio* [see n. 96], p. 24.

(103) Polo de Beaulieu (éd.), *La Scala Coeli de Jean Gobi* [see n. 66], no 379.

(104) Tyerman, *England and the Crusades* [see n. 86], p. 159.

(105) In 1382, for a Wycliffite sermon: Forde, *Nicholas Hereford’s Ascension Day Sermon* [see n. 4], passim.
Edward was at Oxford on Ascension Day, 1268, there is at least a probability that the sermon master Nicholas preached that day was concerned with matters of the Cross. The readings of the day — Acts 1.1-11, Mark 16.14-20 — would at least not exclude the possibility for relating them to the Crusade (106). It is not beyond the realms of fantasy to surmise that his sermon might even have contained an exemplum dealing with the desecration of the symbol. At any rate, the designation of the Jews as inimici crucis Christi (107), and their association with the other enemies of the Cross in Outremer was longstanding. Already at the beginning of the eleventh century, Raoul Glauber had reported that the Jews were made responsible for the loss of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, a charge which resulted in various measures of persecution against Ashkenazic Jews (108).

The considerations presented so far suggest that the accusation raised at Oxford was perhaps shaped by an atmosphere in which the crusade — the « matter of the Cross » — was of considerable importance. It was probably influenced by the perceptions of the Lord

(106) For example, « praecepit eis ab Hierosolymis ne discederent » ; « et eritis mihi testes in Hierusalem et in omni Iudaea et Samaria et usque ad ultimum terrae » (Acts 1.4, 8) ; « Euntes in mundum universum praedicate evangelium omni creaturae » (Mark 16.15). Thanks to Simon Forde for pointing this out to me.

(107) See, for example, Dungal the Recluse, Responsa contra Claudium, in Migne, PL [see n. 35], t. 105, col. 528 ; Jonas Aurelianus, De cultu imaginum, in Migne, PL, t. 106, cols. 332, 350 ; Raban Maur, Expositiones in Leuiticum, in Migne, PL, t. 108, col. 564 ; Amulo of Lyons, Liber contra Judaeos, in Migne, PL, t. 116, col. 144, 170 ; Haymo of Halberstadt, In Epistolam Pauli ad Philippenses, in Migne, PL, t. 117, col. 748 ; Idem, Homiliae, in Migne, PL, t. 117, col. 85-86 ; Stephen of Blois, Contra perfidiem Judaeorum, in Migne, PL, t. 207, col. 827.

(108) Robert Chazan, 1007-1012: Initial Crisis for Northern European Jewry, in Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research, 38-39 (1970-71), p. 101-118. A similar charge was made by the continuator of the chronicle of Florence of Worcester, with reference to the fall of Antioch which, as we have seen, coincided so closely with the events thousands of miles away in Oxford : « Civitas Antiochiae capta est a soldano Babylonie, Judaeis qui ibidem morabantur, hoc procurantibus, die Ascensionis Domini, qui fuit xvi. kal. Junii » ([see n. 76], t. 2, p. 201). It is interesting to note that this accusation against the Jews appears in a passage on Ottobuono’s preaching mission, the legatine council of London and Edward’s taking the Cross. See also below, n. 125, and more generally, Allan Harris Cutler and Helen Elminquist Cutler, The Jew as Ally of the Muslim: Medieval Roots of Anti-Semitism, Notre-Dame, Ind., 1986.
Edward, who was himself an ardent supporter of the crusading cause at the time and who would have tried to exploit the accusation, fictional or real, to further that cause. There is also a possibility of the rise of the desecration narrative being linked to a sermon on the crusade or even a particular *exemplum* employed in it, but this theory, it must be said, rests on a compound of hypotheses. Nor does it explain why the legendary accusation should have been turned against the local, contemporary Jews. Perhaps it was a way of inciting more people to take vows, *in view of the insult and injury being done at this moment to the Cross of Christ*, as Gerald of Wales had described his own motivation almost a century earlier (*109*), but there is no knowing. Before any further conclusions can be reached, I would therefore suggest trying to explore the sensibilities, perceptions and apprehensions of the Jews who were in Oxford on Ascension Day, 1268. If we but take as established that preparations for the new crusade were under way, and that this was being felt at Oxford, there is also a simpler, although even more daring hypothesis to explain the emergence of the desecration story: that there was indeed an incident of the kind it describes.

* * *

The Oxford incident cannot be understood, not even as a mere story, when it is separated from the whole context of Jewish-Christian relations of the period. While it undoubtedly gained significance because it struck a chord with contemporary Christian preoccupations, its emergence in the first place needs to be placed more firmly into the history of community relations. It has already been pointed out that the penalty imposed on the Jewish community of Oxford in 1268 must have had more than merely a grave financial impact on them. Jews were by their religious law forbidden to have any part in idolatrous practices or to give any assistance thereto. According to the talmudic tradition, a Jew was not to have dealings with gentiles *while they are taking part in, or preparing themselves for, any form of idol worship*, and *transactions at any time in utensils and materials which were likely to be used in the performance of idol worship were forbidden*. In his important and influ-

(109) Quoted by TVERMAN, *England and the Crusades* [see n. 86] p. 157 (Gerald was of course not referring to Jews or to local affairs).
ential study on *Exclusiveness and Tolerance*, Jacob Katz has demonstrated how the necessity of economic intercourse with gentiles led to some sophisticated rethinking, mainly by the Tosafists of the High Middle Ages, of the prohibitions in special cases. However, «the images of Christian worship themselves were never exempted from the prohibition». To illustrate the point, Katz quotes the late-twelfth century «Book of the Pious (or Pietists)» (*Sefer Hasidim*) relating the story of a Jew:

> who used to supply the clergy with jewellery for the churches; when he died it happened to be the day of a procession, and the Gentiles encountered his funeral with their images. «So people said it was a just and fitting retribution» (*110*).

To force the Jews of Oxford to provide for two splendid crosses therefore amounted to inflicting a grave religious humiliation, surely regarded by the King as a fitting punishment for a religious provocation. Yet if we further explore the atmosphere of religious confrontation the Oxford incident story calls up, we can also assume that the procession — if, as is very likely, it passed through the Great Jewry — formed part of the picture. As mentioned in passing with regard to the case of «iconoclasm» in Mantova, 1495, a Christian procession could easily assume the character of an anti-Jewish rally (*111*). The many late-medieval Jewry-laws forbidding Jews to go outside not only on Good Friday but also on some days of processions give evidence to the inherent threat such events could develop for the religious minority, as do the attempts by secular authorities to ensure their protection during these days (*112*). On the other hand, Jewish religious authorities sometimes also had to admonish community members to stay away from processions, as they must be


(111) The forced mass conversion of the Jews of Clermont in 586 likewise happened after the Christian population had attacked the Jewish quarter on Ascension Day: Aronius, *Regesten* [see n. 72], p. 14, nº 38.

(112) Maimon, Breuer and Guggenheim (eds), *Germania Judaica III* [see n. 47], t. 1, p. 216 (the so-called «Cralisheimer Judenordnung», probably merely a draft by a local priest), p. 238 (Donauwörth, as part of wider restrictions on the freedom of movement), p. 635 (Cologne). Cf. Stacey, *Conversion* [see n. 27], p. 265.
regarded as an accepted way of Christian worship (113). Often, as in Oxford, the visible symbols of Christianity were carried around on the occasion, symbols which, as again Jacob Katz asserts, *could be relied upon to repel every unconverted Jew*, particularly in the case of the crucifix. And as Robert Stacey observes, Jews were not only *necessarily witnesses to such manifestations of Christian militancy; frequently they were its deliberate target* (114).

*Revulsion becomes especially acute*, Katz further observes, *when the symbols of the two religions are liable to trespass upon each other* (115). So does confrontation. For example, the riot in the Jewry in 1244 not only occurred, as Roth pointed out, on a major feast-day of the Virgin Mary, a figure of acrimonious Jewish-Christian debate and a sentimental rallying-point for medieval (and modern!) anti-Judaism, but also, and more importantly, on the first night of Jewish Passover — a fact which appears never to have been noticed. The riot thus bears some affinity to the custom of the *Easter tidie stoning of the Jews*, to which Roth himself has first drawn our attention (116). Likewise, the situation in 1268 was probably not exactly helped by the fact that Ascension Day with its procession through the Jewry coincided with a Jewish date of significance, the 3rd of Sivan. It was the first of the so-called Three Limitation Days (sheloshet yemé hagbalah) before the feast of Shevuot (Pentecost). Shevuot itself during the Middle Ages was celebrated as the day the Torah was given to Moses at Mount Sinai, i.e., the institution of the basic inheritance of Judaism. It was customary in medieval Jewries of Northern France and Germany to initiate one’s children to the study of the Torah on this day (117). The Three

(113) Eliezer of Metz, Sefer Yere'im, p. 128a-b, quoted by Katz, Exclusiveness and Tolerance [see n. 30], p. 45. In the fifteenth century, R. Seligman Bing reproached a Jew who out of curiosity had followed a procession on the day when a priest was ordained: MAIMON, BREUER and GUGGENHEIM (eds.), Germania Judaica III [see n. 47], t. 1, p.119.

(114) Katz, Exclusiveness and Tolerance [see n. 30], p. 23; Stacey, Conversion [see n. 27], p. 264.

(115) Katz, Exclusiveness and Tolerance [see n. 30], p. 96.


Limitation Days recall the three days the people of Israel waited in the desert while Moses ascended to receive the Law (cf. Exod. 19.10-15), and they are marked off as days of preparation for this event (118). It is possible to surmise that, just as late-medieval Christians objected to the public appearance of Jews during the week before Easter, the Oxford Jews would have felt offended by the Ascension Day procession with its provocative display of an «abomination», the crucifix. However, I would argue that this was not enough to provoke an act of Jewish defiance. It was the crusading context which made the situation really explosive.

The Jews of Oxford would not have remained untouched by preparations for a crusade. If the crusade was «in the air», then they had reasons to be apprehensive. It was in such periods of heightened Christian zeal that European Jewry had suffered its heaviest losses. In 1096 a number of Rhenish and northern French communities were attacked, and some of them almost completely wiped out, by fringe groups of the army setting out for the First Crusade. According to Gavin Langmuir and Robert Chazan, the religious factor, expressed in the policy of «death or baptism», was the principal motivation for the slaughters (119). It rested on the association of the European Jews with the enemies of Christendom in the Holy Land, recorded by all the major chroniclers, Latin and Hebrew: why go to distant places if Christ’s enemies were here at hand? In the words of one Hebrew chronicler:

> It came to pass that, when they traversed towns where there were Jews, they said to one another: «Behold we journey a long way to seek the idolatrous shrine and to take vengeance upon the Muslims. But here are the Jews dwelling among us, whose ancestors killed him and crucified him groundlessly. Let us take vengeance first upon them. Let us wipe them out

(118) The halakhic rules appear somewhat ambiguous: Exod. 19.12 forbade touching Mount Sinai, Exod. 19.15 having sexual intercourse (cf. ibid., 19.10 and 14). On the other hand, there were exceptions from the general note of self-restraint. Thus, marriage celebration and haircuts, otherwise prohibited during most of the period of Passover and Shevuot, were permitted during these three days: Encyclopaedia Judaica, 16 vol., Jerusalem, New York, 1971-72, t. 14, col. 1357.

as a nation; Israel's name will be mentioned no more. Or else let them be like us and acknowledge the son born of menstruation. (20)

At the time of the Second Crusade, outrages were again committed against the Jews in the Rhineland, but a major catastrophe was averted by the preaching of Bernard of Clairvaux (121). In England, King Stephen was able to protect the Jews, according to one of the Hebrew chronicles (122). When the emperor Frederick I took the cross on Laelare Jerusalem 1188 (Sunday, 27 March), the Jews of Mainz were again in danger of their lives, and Frederick had to expressly forbid anti-Jewish preaching (123). The time of the Third crusade also saw the first wave of anti-Jewish riots in England, starting in London on the day of Richard I's coronation (3 September 1189) and reaching its horrific climax in the York massacre on Shabbat ha-Gadol (17 March) 1190. These slaughters certainly owed much to the political uncertainties after Henry II's death, as well as

(120) Chazan, European Jewry [see n. 119], p. 243-244 (the lengthy Hebrew chronicle of the First Crusade, usually attributed to Solomon bar Simson). The Hebrew text and a German translation will be found in A. Neubauer and M. Stern (eds), S. Baer (trans.), Hebräische Berichte über die Judenverfolgungen während der Kreuzzüge (Quellen zur Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland, 2), Berlin, 1892, p. 1, 82. For analogous statements, see p. 36-37/154 (Eliezer bar Nathan), p. 47/169 (a short anonymous account, trans. Chazan [see n. 119], p. 225), and p. 58/188 (Ephraim bar Jacob). The Christian chroniclers of the Crusade confirm the Hebrew tradition. See, for example, Guibert of Nogent, De vita sua, in Migne, PL [see n. 35], t. 166, col. 903; Richard of Cluny (Poitiens), Chronicon, in Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France, t. 12, p. 411; Gesta Treverorum, in MGH SS VIII, p. 190.


(122) Neubauer and Stern (eds), Hebräische Berichte [see n. 120], p. 64/196 (Ephraim bar Jacob), trans. Eidelberg, The Jews and the Crusaders [see n. 121], p. 131.

(123) Neubauer and Stern (eds), Hebräische Berichte [see n. 120], p. 72-73/209. The epistle read on Laelare Jerusalem, Gal. 4:22-31, and its traditional anti-Jewish exegesis (for example, in Augustine's City of God, 15.2) perhaps provided a starting-point for anti-Jewish sermons preached on the occasion (I am grateful to my teacher, Prof. Alfred Haverkamp, Trier, for drawing my attention to this fact). Elazar bar Judah also mentions an accusation of ritual murder connected with the Mainz unrests: Neubauer and Stern (eds), Hebräische Berichte [see n. 120], p. 76/214.
to shifts in local power relations. As Barrie Dobson has demonstrated, a small group of indebted and ruthless landlords were largely responsible for the murders in York (124). But some English chroniclers again claimed that the crusaders had «decreed» first to rise up against the Jews, before fighting the Saracens. According to William of Newburgh, the Stamford riots in 1190 were perpetrated by young crusaders who grudged the «enemies of the cross of Christ» their riches. Also, some of the York «conjurati» are known to have joined the Third Crusade, perhaps not only to evade prosecution (125). In 1236, thousands of Jews in Western France and Brittany were murdered by crusaders (126). And during the «popular» crusades of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries — the Pastoureaux of 1251 and 1320, the abortive crusade of 1309 — Jews were again a target for harassment and slaughter (127). Even at the time of


the Hussite Crusade one century later (1421), the Jews of the Rhine-
land had reason to recall the memories of the Jews-haters of old
who spoke to one another: 'Here we are going abroad, to take
revenge on the enemies of Christ, and the Jews, who have killed him,
we should pass by? Why should we leave them in peace?' (128).
Even as late as this, crusaders were still intimidating the Jews not
only by physical violence but also by forcing them to accept baptism,
in acts of religious violence as one might term them (129).
Apart from the threat of outright persecution and forced baptism,
there was also another way in which a crusade was liable to
affect the Jewish community. This was the fact, that from
the point of view of the crusade, Jews and Jewish money-lending were
regarded as a sort of standing injury to the realm (130). According
to canon law, crusaders could claim a respite from the payment of
interest on their debts to Jewish or Christian moneylenders. Christian
monarchs were expected to enforce this privilege. While Henry
III was reluctant to grant such remissions, he sometimes had done
so prior to 1268, and there may have been a general expectation to
this effect (131). There was also the possibility that the matter of

of these events in my doctoral dissertation on the Jews in the Medieval Low
Countries.

(128) Israel Jacob Yuval, Juden, Hussiten und Deutsche: Nach einer hebräi-
schen Chronik. Mit Anhang: Gilgal bne Chuschim (Geschichte der Hussiten), in
Alfred Haverkamp and Franz-Josef Ziyes (eds), Juden in der christlichen
Um welt während des späten Mittelalters (Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung,
Beihfelt, 13), Berlin, 1992, p. 59-102 (p. 97).

(129) Yuval, Juden, Hussiten und Deutsche [see n. 128], p. 79 on the Hussite
Crusade; on forced conversions in 1309, see Martini Continuatio Brabantina, in
MGH SS XXV, p. 262, and H. VANDER LINDEN, P. DE KEYSER and A. VAN LOEY
(eds), Lodewijk van Velthem's voortzetting van den Spiegel Historiael (1248-1316)

(130) Robert C. Stacey, Crusades, Crusaders, and the Baronial Gravamina of
1263-1264, in P.R. Coss and S.D. Lloyd (eds), Thirteenth Century England III:
Proceedings of the Newcastle upon Tyne Conference 1989, Woodbridge, Suffolk,

(131) Stacey argues that Henry's measures to this effect — a general crusader
exemption for five years in 1250 and the Statute of Jewry of 1253 — were
considered inadequate by the baronage: ibid. See also the letter requesting protection
against the Jews for Robert de Lucre, addressed to the chancellor William of Kilkenny in 1253: Walter Waddington Shirley (ed.), Royal and Other
Historical Letters Illustrative of the Reign of Henry III, 2 vol. (Rolls Series, 27),
Jewish usury was addressed in a more general way, by restricting it or forbidding it altogether. Louis IX of France had done it in 1253 while on crusade and as part of his general endeavour to amend the injuries done to his realm (132). And it is demonstrable that, here again, his action served as a model for other European princes (133). Simon Lloyd has suggested that in England, Henry's statutes concerning the Jews, also promulgated in 1253, stood in connection with his recent crusading vow, and that it was perhaps no coincidence either that Edward's crusade of 1270 was preceded by the statute of 1269 restricting Jewish money-lending (134). With regard to the latter, there is a significant connection to Oxford: the man who had drafted the provisions of 1269 and presented them to the Exchequer was Walter de Merton, founder of what was to become Merton College (135). It was his nascent institution to which Henry III in 1269 ultimately granted the gift of the fixed marble cross, after other suggested sites had been dropped.

*Saint* Louis had also led the way with regard to yet another moral question raised during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, that of the justification of taxes from the Jews. The problem was that these were ultimately derived from usurious practices. The policy which Louis and Pope Gregory IX devised in 1237 was that in theory, these incomes of the Crown had to be restituted to the Jews' *victims*; when it was impossible to identify these former debtors, however, the money should be put to a pious use. Louis in this case

(132) Robert Chazan, *Medieval Jewry in Northern France: A Political and Social History* (The John Hopkins University studies in historical and political science, ser. 91, 2), Baltimore, London, 1973, p. 121; cf. William Chester Jordan, *Louis IX and the Challenge of the Crusade*, Princeton, 1979, p. 84-86, 154-55. One English chronicler alleged that the Saracens had suggested to Louis that it was inconsistent to fight them when he was tolerating the Jews in his own country at the same time: Henry Richard Luard (ed.), *Flores Historiarum* (Rolls Series, 95), London, 1890, t. 2, p. 381.

(133) For example, Henry III Duke of Brabant in his testament ordered the expulsion of Jewish and Lombard money-lenders from his dominions unless they gave up usury: G. Boland, *Le testament d'Henri III duc de Brabant* (26 février 1261), in *Revue d'Histoire Ecclesiastique*, 38 (1942), p. 59-96 (p. 94). The French connection of this decree was probably established through Henry's mendicant confessors, who also acted as executors to his will.

(134) Lloyd, *English Society and the Crusade* [see n. 79], p. 213 and n. 70, where Lloyd also picks up Powicke's point that Henry's attitude towards the Jews might more generally have been influenced by Louis of France.

(135) Tovey, *Anglia Judaica* [see n. 2], p. 175-177.
spent it on supporting the Latin kingdom of Constantinople (136). In the course of the later thirteenth century, it became a common way of justifying extortions from the Jews by diverting some of the money towards the crusade (137). Finally, there was the threat of outright spoliation by the Crown, either through heavy taxation (such as the Jews were made to grant toward Richard of Cornwall's crusade in 1237) (138) or confiscation (as happened in France on 15 September 1268, certainly in view of the impending crusade) (139).

In conclusion, it can be stated that if the situation at Oxford on Ascension Day 1268 was indeed influenced by the preparations for a crusade, the Jews had ample reasons for fear and apprehension: a crusade could bring considerable financial losses and it posed a serious threat of violence and religious humiliation. It is not altogether unthinkable that in such a situation a Jew might have overreacted and made an attack on that symbol which, for him, was the perfect embodiment of these threats. Seen from a Jewish point of view, it could have been considered an act of pious heroism, and it would not have been without precedent. The Hebrew chronicles of the persecutions at the time of the First and Second Crusades record many cases of Jews showing their utter contempt for their persecutors' religion, in the full knowledge that this would immediately cost them their lives. The opening lines of these accounts provided the overture for the deeds of religious defiance they were about to recount:

[They] took counsel and set plans to ascend and to rise up like eagles and to do battle and to clear a way for journeying to Jerusalem, the Holy City, and for reaching the sepulchre of the Crucified, a trampled corpse who cannot profit and cannot save for he is worthless.


(138) Lloyd, English Society and the Crusade [see n. 79], p. 178.

(139) Chazan, Medieval Jewry [see n. 132], p. 148.
[...] They — both princes and common folk — placed an evil sign upon their garments, a cross, and helmets upon their heads (**).

The most notable feature of the Hebrew chronicles is certainly their praise for the practice of mass suicide and killing of one's own children in *sanctification of the Divine Name* (qiddūsh ha-Shem) in order to evade baptism, commonly equated with pollution:

The young women and the brides and the bridegrooms gazed through the windows and cried out loudly: *Behold and see, our God, what we do for the sanctification of your holy Name, rather than deny you for a crucified one, a trampled and wretched and abominable offshoot, a bastard and a child of menstruation and lust*. [They then killed themselves].

The saintly women [...] cursed and blasphemed the crusaders in the name of the Crucified, the impure and foul, the son of lust: *Upon whom do you trust? Upon a rotting corpse!* The crusaders advanced to break down the door...(**).

The Christian persecutors' policy of *death or baptism* was countered by brave Jewish men and women with a demonstration of defiance. In Trier, Asher ben R. Joseph and Meir ben R. Samuel were led out of the bishop's palace where the Jewish community had fled, *to be killed, in order to spread fear and anxiety among the rest, so that they might acknowledge their pseudo-faith*:

When they left the gateway of the palace, the crusaders brought before them [an image] so that they might bow down before it. They mocked [the image]. Then they killed these two pious ones for the sanctification of the [Divine] Name (**).

Other Jews pretended to accept baptism, only to use the chance of publicly defying Christianity. David ben R. Nathaniel and his

(140) CHAZAN, European Jewry [see n. 119], p. 225 (the short anonymous chronicle); for the Hebrew text, see NEUBAUER and STERN (eds), Hebräische Berichte [see n. 120], p. 47. The German translation (p. 169) has suppressed the strong invectives against Christianity. For a discussion of the editors' reasons, and of the function these invectives have in the crusade chronicles, see Anna Sapir ABULafia, Invectives against Christianity in the Hebrew Chronicles of the First Crusade, in Peter W. EDBURY (ed.), Crusade and Settlement: Papers read at the First Conference of the Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East and presented to R. C. Smail, Cardiff, 1985, p. 66-72.

(141) CHAZAN, European Jewry [see n. 119], p. 255, 258 (the long chronicle, ascribed to SOLOMON BAR SIMON); cf. NEUBAUER and STERN (eds), Hebräische Berichte [see n. 120], p. 7/97, 9/101.

(142) CHAZAN, European Jewry [see n. 119], p. 291; NEUBAUER and STERN (eds), Hebräische Berichte [see n. 120], p. 27/135. EIDELBERG (ed.), The Jews and the Crusaders [see n. 121], p. 65, translates: *They cast a branch at the abomination* (cf. Ezek. 8.17).
family had survived the first onslaught in Mainz, hidden in the courtyard of a cleric. When the crusaders approached, David seemingly gave in to the cleric’s entreaties to accept baptism and asked him to call together the crusaders and burghers. When they came, David instead delivered a challenge:

He trusted in the God of his ancestors and called out to them and said:

«You are the children of lust. You believe in a deity who was a bastard and was crucified. But I believe in the God who lives forever, who resides in the highest heavens. In him I have trusted to this very day and thus shall continue to do unto death. I know the truth. If you kill me, my soul will reside in paradise, in the light of life. But ‘you will descend to the nethermost pit’, to ‘everlasting abhorrence’. In hell you shall be judged along with your deity and in boiling excrement, for he is the son of a harlot ». When they heard the words of the pious one, they were enraged that he had blasphemed and had revealed to them their shame.

The crusaders then besieged and stormed the house and killed David and all his family (143). In Cologne on the day of Shevuot, they found a pious man, named Isaac ben R. Eliakim, who left his house. The enemy seized him and brought him to the church. He spat before them and before their shrine and cursed and reviled them. They killed him for the sanctification of the [Divine] Name, since he did not wish to flee out of respect for the holiday and because he was happy to accept the judgment of heaven (144).

Two striking examples for defying the crucifix come from the Hebrew account of the Second Crusade, Ephraim bar Jacob of Bonn’s « Book of Remembrance » (Sepher Zekhirah). One happened when three Jews of Bacharach left their refuge on Stahleck castle on the eve of Shevuot in order to settle business matters:

The errant ones rose up against them and pursued them, demanding that they defile themselves. They refused, for they deeply loved the Creator even unto death. Kalonymos openly spat on the image of the crucified one, and they slew him on the spot. The others took refuge under beds, but were slashed and pierced by the swords of the enemy (145).

The other incident related by Ephraim concerns the sister of Simeon bar Isaac of Würzburg:

(143) Chazan, European Jewry [see n. 119], p. 261-262; Neubauer and Stern (eds), Hebräische Berichte [see n. 120], p. 11/104. The insults made against Jesus and Christianity are based on the Töledōt Jeshu tradition (an anti-Christian version of the life of Jesus): Abulafia, Invectives [see n. 140], passim.

(144) Chazan, European Jewry [see n. 119], p. 274; Neubauer and Stern (eds), Hebräische Berichte [see n. 120], p. 41/160; cf. p. 18/117.

(145) Eidelberg (ed.), The Jews and the Crusaders [see n. 121], p. 125; Neubauer and Stern (eds), Hebräische Berichte [see n. 120], p. 61/191-192.
They took [her] to their place of idolatry so as to profane her, but she sanctified the Name and spat upon the abomination. Then they struck her with stone and fist, for they do not bring swords into the disgusting house (146).

The influence these traditions may have had upon the Jews of thirteenth-century England is difficult to assess. But there is a final twist to the present argument which would suggest that there might have been such an influence at work on Ascension Day, 1268. The day when it happened — the 3rd of the month of Sivan — was the day on which, generations earlier, the Jewish community of Mainz had been wiped out. The chronicles did not fail to point out the significance of this date:

It came to pass on the third day of Sivan, which had been a day of sanctity and setting apart for Israel at the time of the giving of the Torah — on that day when Moses our teacher, may his memory be blessed, said: « Be ready unto the third day » — on that day the [Jewish] community of Mainz, the pious of the Almighty, were set apart in holiness and purity and were sanctified to ascend to god all together. « Cherished in life, in death they were not parted ». [...] The enemy entered the courtyard on the third of Sivan, on the third day of the week, « a day of darkness and gloom, a day of densest clouds ». « May darkness and day gloom reclaim it »; may God above have no concern for it; may light never shine upon it (147).

When the chronicler continued to relate the events of the following days, the stark contrast between the giving of the Torah to Moses and its trampling underfoot by the crusaders is duly underlined in the report of the events on Shevuot. In Cologne,

They destroyed the synagogue and took out the Torah scrolls and desecrated them. They gave them over to « trampling in the streets ». On the very day when it was given, when the earth had been shaken and « its pillars trembled », it was torn and burned and the evil and wicked trampled it and « ruffians invaded it and defiled it » (148).

Remembrance of the Rhineland Jews’ heroic deeds was not primarily secured by chronicles such as these. A much more important

(146) EIDELBERG (ed.), The Jews and the Crusaders [see n. 121], p. 127; NEUBAUER and STERN (eds), Hebräische Berichte [see n. 120], p. 62/193. Be the sequel also told, to the memory of an honest simple woman: « Finally a Gentile laundress came and bore her to her home, where she concealed her and saved her life ».

(147) CHAZAN, European Jewry [see n. 119], p. 251-252, 253; NEUBAUER and STERN (eds), Hebräische Berichte [see n. 120], p. 6/93, 6/95.

(148) CHAZAN, European Jewry [see n. 119], p. 274; NEUBAUER and STERN (eds), Hebräische Berichte [see n. 120], p. 40-41/160.
role was played by the yearly liturgical occasions when prayers were said for the martyrs (149). There is some evidence to suggest that the custom might have been common in England, too. Thus, the Hebrew crusade chronicles and the memorbooks of medieval German Jewry did not only memorize the local martyrs, but, as in the case of R. Yom Tov of Joigny who died «in sanctification of the Divine Name» in York, 1190, also the martyrs of medieval England, with whose communities there must have been some cultural links (150). Similarly, the day of the persecution at Blois in 1171 was kept «by all the Jewish communities of France and of the Isles and of the Rhineland as a day of mourning and of fasting», according as R. Jacob ben Meir (Rabbenu Tam) had decreed (151). At Mainz and Worms, where the events of 1096 had centered on the week leading up to Shevuot, the occasion for recounting the names of the fallen in the synagogue was the preceding Sabbath (152). It is certainly very speculative to think that the Oxford Jew who broke a processional cross on Ascension Day 1268 was influenced by the memory of those who had «sanctified the Divine Name» in this way — but it would have given his action a clear reference. If so, this deed would not have been altogether spontaneous, and certainly not just a «foolish gesture» of iconoclasm.

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At the end of this exploration into what I would term a possible context for the Ascension Day incident in Oxford, 1268, it is proba-

(149) Chazan, European Jewry [see n. 119], p. 148-155; Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory (The Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectures in Jewish Studies), Seattle, London, 1982, p. 45: «The single most important religious and literary response to historical catastrophe in the Middle Ages was not a chronicle of the event but the composition of selihot, penitential prayers, and their insertion in the liturgy of the synagogues».

(150) Neubauer and Stern (eds), Hebräische Berichte [see n. 120], p. 71/205, cf. p. 69-70/204 on the coronation riots in London, 1189.

(151) It was the 20th of Sivan: Neubauer and Stern (eds), Hebräische Berichte [see n. 120], p. 68/202.

(152) S. Salffeld (ed., trans.), Das Martyrologium des Nürnberger Memorbusches (Quellen zur Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland, 3), Berlin, 1898, p. xii, n. 1, and p. 3/98 (Mainz), 5/102, 8/107 (both Worms), 10/113 (Mainz); in the later middle ages, the communities held fast days on 3 (Mainz) and 1 Sivan (Worms): Maimon, Breuer and Guggenheim (eds), Germania Judaica 111, t. 2 [see n. 47], Art. ‘Mainz’, § 7 and n. 183; Art. ‘Worms’, § 7 and n. 105.
bly advisable to stress once again by how few «hard facts» the journey has been guided. I would, however, think that we are on fairly safe ground in relating the cross desecration story which emerged on Ascension Day and became established during the summer of 1268, to the preaching of the crusade and Edward’s taking the cross in the same period. All that follows rests on the crucial assumption that medieval narrative traditions were able to exert influence over people and shape their behaviour in so far as they made their actions meaningful. This theme has been explored in a twofold way: by following the Christian traditions of crosses defiled and defended, and with regard to the Jewish theme of the «sanctification of the Divine Name» (qiddush ha-Shem). Both relate to the experience of the crusades, and they may both have been able to shape human behaviour — fears and expectations, words and deeds — when the circumstances were similar. This is not altogether surprising, since telling stories is in itself a type of human behaviour ensuring continuity in social groups. Either tradition, or both, may have contributed to the emergence of a new narrative of cross desecration in the crusading climate of Ascension Day, 1268. Above all, I have tried to set this narrative in a field of reference not only dominated by the preoccupations of the Christian majority, but influenced by the complex interrelationships of Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages, about which we still know so little.

A final question has to be resolved. Why was the money the Oxford Jews had to pay as a penalty not diverted to the crusade, if that was the overriding concern? I do not have an answer to this, but I suggest that it might lie in the conflict between Henry III and his son Edward concerning the latter’s crusading ambitions. As I have mentioned, the King was not at all in favour of his firstborn son leaving the country. My hypothetical scenario would be that, whereas the Lord Edward was eager to exploit the desecration story to further his crusading cause, his father refused to follow and made a decision which kept the proceeds from the Jewish penalties at Oxford, where the University profited from it. Only after the vows had been taken would there have been a change in the King’s policy and some funds provided for his two sons’ venture.

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Summary. — On Ascension Day, a Jew was accused of attacking a cross which was carried about in procession through the Jewish quarter of Oxford. Using the symbol of the Cross as a central metaphor, the article explores the possible context for the accusation: in the sermons and exempla literature, in the political situation of the day (Ottobuono’s legatine mission, the preaching and the Lord Edward’s taking the Cross), but also in the likely attitudes among the Jews. The author suggests to view the incident as a symbolic act which gained its significance from the Jewish memory of the persecutions at the time of the first crusades.

Résumé. — En 1268, le jour de l’Ascension, un juif est accusé d’avoir attaqué un crucifix porté lors d’une procession à travers la rue des juifs d’Oxford. Partant du symbole central de la croix, l’article fait un sondage sur le contexte hypothétique de l’accusation. Il prend en considération les rapports dans la littérature de la prédication et des exempla, la situation politique du temps (la lélagation du cardinal Ottobuono, la prédication de la croisade, le prince Edouard prenant la croix) aussi bien que les attitudes présumées parmi les juifs. L’auteur propose de voir dans l’attaque contre le crucifix un acte symbolique qui tire sa signification de la mémoire juive des persécutions au temps des premières croisades.