5-28-1954

A Jewish Family of Thirteenth Century England

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This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Committee of the University of New Mexico in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

C. H. Castetter
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5/28/54
DATE

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A JEWISH FAMILY
OF
THIRTEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND

By

David A. Fisher

A Thesis
In partial fulfillment of the
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The University of New Mexico
1954

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There is a wealth of material on medieval Anglo-Jewry in the public records (rolls) of twelfth and thirteenth century England. These documents refer primarily to the financial transactions of the English Jews. Usury was forbidden to Christians by both the Church and the laws of the realm. The injunctions against usury, however, did not apply to the Jews.[1] The Jews of this period were considered to be the private property of the king and were forbidden from engaging in all economic pursuits with the exception of money-lending.[2] The crown benefited from this arrangement by applying heavy taxes upon the Jews.[3] Careful records were therefore kept of the business activities of the Jews of England for tax purposes.[4] A large amount of data regarding the Jews has in this manner been preserved. Although these references are primarily financial in nature they frequently reveal information on the social and religious

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1. Joseph Jacobs, editor, The Jews of Angevin England (New York, 1893), pp. x, xiii-xv.

2 Cecil Roth, A History of the Jews in England (Oxford University Press, 1942), pp. 96-102; Jacobs, p. xv.

3 Roth, pp. 97-99.

4 Jacobs, p. xviii.

life of the Jews of this period. A close examination of some of these documents has brought to light new material on the economic, intellectual, and religious life of thirteenth century English Jewry and will be presented in this study. This thesis does not endeavor to present a general history of Anglo-Jewry during the Middle Ages. Cecil Roth has written authoritatively on this subject.[5] Little research has been done on the lives of individual Jews of this period. This paper, therefore, limits itself to a comprehensive study of a particular Jewish family of thirteenth century England. The family of Master Moses has been chosen for the subject of this study. There is a wealth of information in the contemporary records (rolls) of England. A genealogical table traces this distinguished family through the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[6] This study portrays an exceptionally gifted family group whose members achieved fame in both finance and Hebrew scholarship. The history of this particular family mirrors the life of the Jews of thirteenth century England. The money-lending role of the Jew and his economic

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5 Roth, pp. 1-131.

6 David Kaufmann, "Three Centuries of the Genealogy of the Most Eminent Anglo-Jewish Family Before 1290," The Jewish Quarterly Review (1891), III, 561; Michael Adler, The Jews of Bristol in Pre-Expulsion Days," The Jewish Historical Society of England: Transactions (1928-31), XII, 130; Jacobs, pp. 253-4. The genealogical table for this family is found on page six of this study.

ties to the crown are described in detail. There is also ample evidence of considerable culture in both religious and secular fields, especially the great contributions made by English Jewry to Hebrew religious scholarship.

England was one of the last countries in western Europe to be settled by Jews during the Middle Ages. There is only scant and not too reliable information relating to Jews living in England before the twelfth century.[7] It has been definitely established that a small but prosperous Jewish community existed in London during the reign of Henry I (1100-35).[8] It is also known that he issued these Jews a charter granting them royal protection and certain privileges. The Jews were recognized as a separate and distinct community with a different status than the rest of the population. This charter made it clear that the Jews belonged to the king and were responsible to him alone.[9] The charter was re-confirmed by succeeding rulers and remained in effect until the expulsion.[10]

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7 Roth, pp. 1-7; Jacobs, pp. ix-xi, 1-12.

8 The Great Roll of the Pipe: The Pipe Roll of 31 Henry I, Michaelmas 1130 (London, 1929), pp. 53, 148-9; Roth, pp. 6-7.

9 Isidore Singer, editor, The Jewish Encyclopedia (New York, 1905), V, 161-2; Roth, pp. 6, 96-7.

10 Roth, p.6. The charter was evidently issued to Rubi Gotsce "Rabbi Joseph," financier and head of the Jewish community of London at that time. Ibid., p. 7. Rabbi Gotsce is first mentioned in public records in the year 1130. Pp.R. (1130), pp. 148-9.

The first records of Jewish money-lending activities appear during the reign of Henry I.[11] The English clergy bitterly resented this official sanction of usury. They could do nothing to oppose it because the Jews did not come under their religious jurisdiction. The crown actually encouraged the Jews to loan out money at a substantial interest by closing all professions except usury to them. The king derived much money from his chattels by this arrangement in the form of heavy taxes, fines, and gifts. The Exchequer of the Jews was established in the closing years of the twelfth century to provide a more effective means of taxation. This branch of the Great Exchequer recorded all Jewish financial transactions and kept the king informed exactly how much each Jew was worth. The king was actually the arch-usurer of the realm, for a large portion of his personal income was derived from the usurious activities of his Jewish subjects.[12]

The status of the English Jews did not change during the thirteenth century. They were regarded by all classes as aliens and were tolerated only because they were the king's personal chattels. The Jews had become successful in the field of finance but were taxed heavily and thus forced to contribute a large share of their earnings to the crown. During the latter half of the thirteenth century the money-lending role of the English Jews was gradually being taken

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11 Pp.R. (1130), pp. 53, 146-9.

12 Jacobs, pp. xiii-xxii; Roth, pp. 28-30.

over by Christians. English and Italian bankers, despite Church opposition, loaned out money at high interest rates.[13] The Italian money-lenders actually began to supplant the Jews as financial agents of the crown. The Jews could not raise the large sums of money needed by Edward I to carry on his numerous wars. The Italian bankers were able to finance all Edward's enterprises, from the Crusade of 1270 to his Welsh and Scottish campaigns.[14] The decline in the economic importance of the Jew may have prompted Edward I to issue the order for their expulsion in the year 1290.

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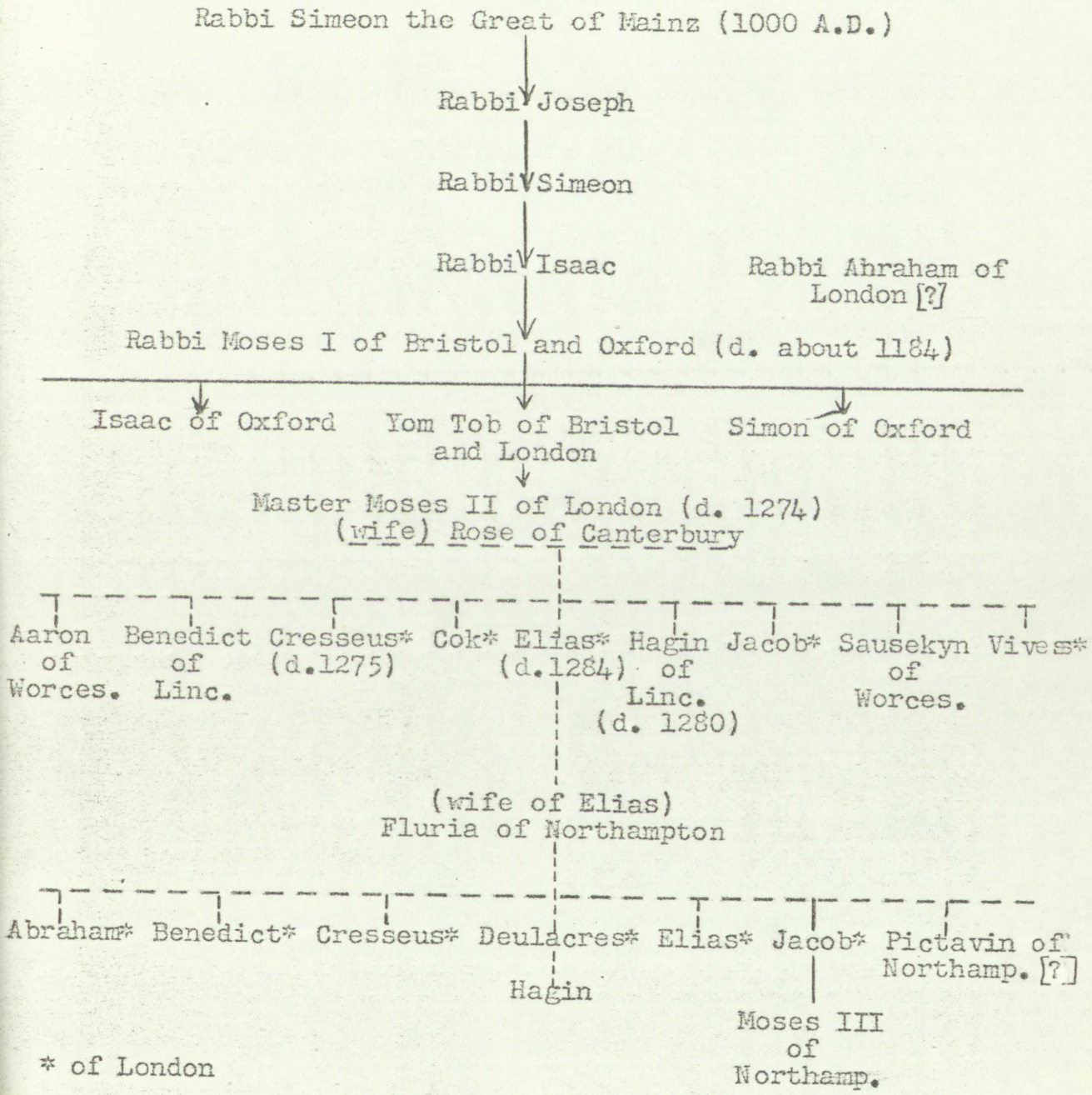
13 T.F. Tout, The History of England from the Accession of Henry III to the Death of Edward III (1216-1377) (London, 1930), p. 176; Roth, pp. 108-9.

14 Tout, p. 176.

GENEALOGICAL TABLE FOR THE FAMILY OF MASTER MOSES[15]



15 The genealogy from Rabbi Simeon the Great of Mainz to Master Moses of London was composed by Moses III of Northampton, son of Rabbi Jacob. He was a grandson of Master Moses II, and traced his distinguished family through the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries. Kaufmann, p. 561; Jacobs, pp. 253-4; Adler, p. 130. Broken lines indicate portion of genealogical table derived from information in this study.

CHAPTER II

MASTER MOSES II AND HIS ANCESTORS

A. SIMEON THE GREAT OF MAINZ

The most illustrious ancestor of this distinguished Anglo-Jewish family was Simeon the Great of Mainz (Mayence). Rabbi Simeon was one of the most outstanding Talmudic authorities of western Europe during the early years of the eleventh century. He was also a versatile and prolific Hebrew poet and wrote a number of liturgical compositions which later were used in the synagogues of Germany, France, Italy and Poland. Simeon the Great was a man of great influence and wealth and used his power to save his co-religionists from persecutions. In the year 1012 the German emperor decreed that all Jews should be expelled from Mainz for their refusal to be baptized. Simeon successfully prevailed upon the authorities to have this order rescinded. The grateful Jewish community of Mainz took steps to perpetuate the memory of their benefactor. It was decreed that his name and noble deeds were to be mentioned in the synagogues on every Sabbath morning.[16]

Tradition relates that Rabbi Simeon[17] possessed great

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16 Heinrich Graetz, History of the Jews (Philadelphia, 1949), III, 245-7; J.E., XI, 350-51.

17 Simeon the Great is often referred to in Hebrew manuscripts as Simeon ben Isaac ben Abun. J.E., XI, 350; Adler, p. 128.

akill as a worker of miracles and that he was well acquainted with magic. It is said that he had three wonderful mirrors in which he could see the present, past, and future. Tradition also states that he had a son called Elhanan who was stolen as a child and brought up in a foster home as a Christian. This son is later supposed to have become pope under the name of Andreas.[18] Most of the liturgical poems of Simeon the Great have been preserved--consisting of festival compositions, penitential and Sabbath Day prayers. These religious poems were widely recited in the synagogues of Europe during the Middle Ages.[19]

B. RABBI MOSES I OF BRISTOL

The founder of this distinguished Anglo-Jewish family of scholars was Rabbi Moses (ben Isaac) of Bristol. He was a fourth generation descendant of Rabbi Simeon the Great of Mainz. Rabbi Moses left Germany before 1170 and came to England by way of Normandy. He was the first Jew of Bristol of whom we have authentic records.[20] Rabbi Moses later moved to Oxford where he owned land in the Jewry, and died about the year 1184. He was a wealthy man and was called "ha Nadib", or "Honorable," which indicated that he was a generous patron of learning.[21] His son, Rabbi Yom Tob (ben Moses) of Bristol

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18 J.E., XI, 351.

19 Loc. Cit.

20 Adler, pp. 128-31.

21 Loc. Cit.

and London, carried on the scholarly tradition of the family, and was the author of a religious work called the Sepher ha Tannaim.[22]

C. MASTER MOSES II OF LONDON

Master Moses, the son of Yom Tob, reached prominence not only in the field of religious scholarship, but in the secular world as well. He was a noted money-lender and there are records of his business transactions from 1244 until 1266.[23] He died in the year 1274.[24] Master Moses was held highly not only by co-religionists, but by the crown as well. In 1253 he is mentioned as one of the chirographers of the London branch of the Exchequer of the Jews.[25] Master Moses was

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22 A. Marmorstein, "New Material for the Literary History of the English Jews Before the Expulsion," The Jewish Historical Society of England: Transactions (1928-31), XII, 114-5; Kaufmann, p. 561; Roth, p. 127; Adler, pp. 129-30.

23 J.M. Rigg, editor, Calendar of the Plea Rolls of the Exchequer of the Jews (London, 1905), I, 106-7; Calendar of the Patent Rolls (1258-66) (London, 1893), pp. 510, 553.

24 C.E.J., II, 186.

25 Ibid., I, 128. The two other chirographers of the London Exchequer of the Jews were Christians--Roger Aliz and Arnulf Thedmar. Loc. Cit. A chirographer in the thirteenth century was a clerk who wrote chirographs, or documents written in triplicate, usually of debts owed to Jews. D. Du Cange, "Chartae in Modum Cyrographi Confectae," Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis, II, 309.

married to Rose of Canterbury.[26] They had nine sons: Aaron of Worcester, Benedict of Lincoln, Cresseus, Cok, Elias, Hagin, Jacob, Sausekyn of Worcester, and Vives.[27]

Master Moses was an outstanding Masorite and grammarian. He wrote Darke ha Nikkud weha Neginot, a grammatical work dealing with rules of punctuation and pronunciation. These rules were widely accepted by scholars during the Middle Ages.[28] Master Moses was recognized by the Jews of London as an outstanding authority on religious matters.[29] A number of his decisions have been preserved. Two short rabbinical decisions of Master Moses II, given by Dr. Marmorstein, read:

> A case of mourning occurred on Purim day. Scholars discussed whether the mourners have to mourn on this day or not. R. Moses decided in the affirmative . . . He decided in a case of divorce that a stranger may act as proxy on behalf of the woman.[30]

Two other decisions of Master Moses II as reported by Dr. Jacobs are:

> R. Moses of London decided that we certainly know it is a privilege for a woman under age that a man can

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26 C.E.J., II, 186.

27 Calendar of the Charter Rolls (1257-1300) (London, 1903), pp. 8, 126; C.P.R. (1266-73), p. 30; C.E.J., I, 135, 223, 243; C.E.J., II, 10, 117, 186; Marmorstein, pp. 112-3. Marmorstein knows of only three sons--Jacob, Benedict, and Elijahu Menachem [Elias].

28 J.E., IX, 94-5.

29 Marmorstein, p. 112.

30 Loc. Cit., translated from M.S. Montefiore, No. 269, 374.

receive her bill of divorce without her betrothed's knowledge. It happened thus with one who had two daughters [minors], and accepted an offer of marriage for one without her name being mentioned. And another Jew came and received the bills of divorce that were necessary without his knowledge. And so with the wife of a convert who refuses to give a bill of divorce to her and in the end agrees to do so. Such a case came before Rashi, and he decided that the divorce should be received without his knowledge.

And as for that confectionery which is called "turneres," which is made from fruits, if a Gentile has baked them, R.M. [Moses] of London wrote that this is not included among the things prohibited as being cooked by Gentiles. For the fruits can be eaten raw as they are. Even if these cakes were baked in the same oven with forbidden food, there is no prohibition since they are covered . . . Even if the dough is kneaded with eggs it is not prohibited on account of being cooked by a Gentile, since the dough is the chief ingredient. And a certain great one used to permit a Gentile to cook for a Jew in his house, but this leniency is not to be approved. For if a Jew has transgressed and cooked for his needs anything on a Sabbath he must not eat it even on a Sunday.[31]

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31 Jacobs, pp. 291-2, translated from M.S. lberstamm, No. 345, ff. 40a, 65a.

CHAPTER III

HAGIN, SON OF MASTER MOSES II

Hagin (Hayyim), the son of Master Moses II, was a celebrated Hebrew scholar of the city of Lincoln. He was also a man of great wealth and a prominent money-lender in that city.[32] Hagin was for a time high in the favor of Henry III and his brother Richard, Earl of Cornwall. In the year 1257, for services rendered to Richard, Hagin and his brother Cresse were exempted from all taxes for a period of five years.[33] The Jews of England had favored the candidature of Richard, brother of Henry III, to the throne of Germany.[34] Hagin and his brother had apparently given Richard a large sum of money to further his cause and were thus recompensed for their services. In the year 1258 Hagin was elected by his co-religionists to the exalted position of "Chief Rabbi of the Jews of England."[35] This position had become vacant with the conversion of Chief Rabbi Elias le Eveske. Previous to 1258 the Presbyter Judaeorum (chief rabbi) was appointed by the king. After

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32 Roth, p. 51; J.E. VI, 149. Hagin's brothers, Benedict and Elias were also noted Hebrew scholars. Marmorstein, pp. 103-4, 113-14.

33 C.P.R. (1247-58), pp. 555-56.

34 Roth, p. 48.

35 C.Ch.R. (1257-1300), p. 8

the deposition of Elias le Eveske, Henry III granted the "Community of the Jews" the power to elect their chief rabbi in the future. However, their choice had to be confirmed by the crown.[36] The Presbyter Judaeorum was not considered to be the true spiritual head of the English Jews or their spokesman before the king. He was actually a minor official of the crown whose duty it was to advise the king on Jewish taxation and affairs. The Presbyter Judaeorum also served as the king's technical adviser at sessions of the Exchequer of the Jews.[37] In 1260 Henry III again bestowed royal favor upon Hagin and his brother Cresse. He presented them with the lands of another Jew, Salamon le Eveske, whose property had reverted to the king.[38]

The Jews of England suffered severe persecutions during the civil war between Henry III and the barons. The barons were led by Simon de Montfort, the elder, a man known for his anti-Semitic bias.[39] In the year 1263 the London mob rose against the Jews to murder and pillage these hapless people. The mob was led by two prominent members of the baronial party--Stephen Buckrel, the marshal of

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36 C.Ch.R. (1257-1300), p. 8.

37 Roth, pp. 30-31, 112. The three "Dayanim" or judges of the Beth Din (rabbinical court) were considered to be the spiritual heads of a Jewish community. Jacobs, pp. 272-3.

38 C.Ch.R. (1257-1300), p. 28. Salamon le Eveske had been declared guilty of forgeries and other crimes and his possessions were therefore confiscated by the king. He escaped further punishment by promising to leave the realm. Loc. Cit.

39 Roth, p. 61.

London, and John FitzJohn. About 400 Jews were killed during the rioting while many were forced to accept baptism.[40]

In 1264 many Jews of London were put to death on the order of Simon de Montfort, the elder. The Jews had been accused of planning a rebellion to overthrow his forces in the city of London. The Annals of Dunstable gives the following account of this affair:

> The earl Simon, who was in London, made himself and his men ready for Northampton. When he reached St. Albans, he was informed that the Jews of London had prepared a rebellion in the city, so he immediately returned and found that they had Greek fire in their possession with which they were going to fire the city on the Vigil [12 April] of Palm Sunday. They had made themselves false keys for every gate of the city, and it is said, they had underground passages to every gate. Because of this he had the Jews, from the least to the greatest, put to death, save certain elders of whom he wished to make further inquiries, and save those who were willing to receive baptism. Gilbert de Clare did the same to the Jews of Canterbury.[41]

About 1500 Jews died at the hands of de Montfort's men in London. The attacks upon the Jews were not limited to London alone. Anti-Semitic disorders occurred in cities all over England. The persecution of the Jews was partly motivated by economic factors. Many members of the baronial party were indebted to Jews. During anti-Jewish disorders the mob often destroyed the records of the local branches

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40 Roth, p. 61.

41 Margaret A. Hennings, England Under Henry III: Illustrated From Contemporary Sources (London, 1932), p. 115, translated from Annals of Dunstable, Annales Monastici, III, 230.

of the Exchequer of the Jews. This occurred in Worcester, Lincoln, and Nottingham. The forces of de Montfort were finally defeated in 1265.[42] Soon after these disorders Hagin lost favor with Henry III. It appears that Hagin as chief rabbi sought to protect the interests of his fellow Jews. He endeavored to help his co-religionists to escape some of the severe taxes imposed upon them by the crown. Hagin was apparently in charge of the vital statistics of the Jews of London, for not long after the disorders he was accused of having concealed the death of the infant child of Cok fil Aaron. Hagin by not reporting the death to the authorities attempted to save the boy's brothers the necessity of paying an inheritance tax for the second time within a few years.[43] A scandal arose once the tax evasion was discovered. Hagin fled to the Continent to avoid imprisonment and possible death at the hands of Henry III.[44] After being in exile for a short time Hagin returned and by 1266 we find him once again in the king's favor. In that year Hagin and his brother Elias were granted compensation for damages to their property arising from the anti-Jewish riots.[45]

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42 Roth, pp. 61-3.

43 Ibid., pp. 79-80. Cok fil Aaron was killed during the London anti-Jewish disorders of 1263 by John FitzJohn, one of the leaders of the baronial party. Roth, p. 61.

44 Roth, p. 80.

45 C.P.R. (1258-66), p. 574.

In 1266 we also find the resumption of Hagin's money-lending activities on a large scale. Contemporary records reveal that Hagin's transactions were not only local in charter. Documents disclose that Hagin's financial activities were carried on in a number of large cities--even as far distant as Nottingham.[46]

Ill-fortune continued to plague Hagin for the rest of his life. In 1274 Hagin incurred the displeasure of Edward I and had to hide to escape the possible consequences of his anger. His property was confiscated by the crown and the constable of the Tower of London was sent out to search for him. The constable reported that Hagin could not be found.[47] An entry for the same year indicated that Hagin had taken refuge on the Continent.[48] He returned to England in 1275[49] but in a short time a new accusation was leveled against him by the crown. In 1276 many Jews were behind in their tax payments. Edward I blamed Hagin, his chief rabbi, for the poor tax showing made by his fellow Jews. He ordered Hagin and other prominent Jews to be sent to prison until these taxes were paid.[50] Hagin was soon

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46 C.E.J., I, 135, 149, 196-7, 199, 207.

47 Ibid., II, 121.

48 Ibid., II, 141-2.

49 Ibid., III, 34, 81.

50 Ibid., III, 103.

released from prison and permitted to resume his money-lending activities.[51] Hagin never did relinquish the office of chief rabbi to which he was elected for life. The crown continued to ignore him since his fall from royal favor. The king now turned to his brother Elias for counsel on Jewish affairs.[52] Hagin died early in the year 1280.[53] His nephew, Hagin, son of Deulacres, succeeded him as chief rabbi of England.[54] The last entry relating to Hagin is dated 1296. Some houses in London that once belonged to Hagin had come into the hands of the king as the result of the expulsion of the Jews from England. Edward I had given these fine properties as a token of royal generosity to Otho de Grandissono, a close friend of the king.[55]

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51 C.E.J., III, 177, 262, 274, 304.

52 C.Ch.R. (1257-1300), p. 8. C.Cl.R. (1272-9), p. 570.

53 Calendar of the Inquisitions Miscellaneous (London, 1916), I, 353-4.

54 C.P.R. (1272-81), p. 433. Also referred to as Cok Hagin fil' Deulecresse of London. Roth, p. 80. He was the last chief rabbi of medieval England and obtained this position through the influence of the queen [Eleanor of Castile]. C.P.R. (1272-81), p. 433. According to Jacobs in J.E., VI, 149, and Roth, p. 80, it was the queen mother [Eleanor of Provence] who intervened in his behalf.

55 C.Ch.R. (1257-1300), p. 465; Maurice Powicke, The Thirteenth Century (Oxford, 1953), p. 514. Also called Otto of Granson. He was one of the advisers of Edward I. Powicke, p. 514.

CHAPTER IV

BENEDICT OF LINCOLN

Benedict of Lincoln was one of the outstanding Anglo-Hebrew scholars of his time. His commentaries on the Talmud were widely discussed in the rabbinical academies of France and Germany during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[56] He is also referred to in contemporary manuscripts as Berechiah of Nicole (Lincoln), Benedict fil Mosse de Londres (London),[57] and Berechiah ben Moses de Nicole.[58] His theological opinions are mentioned in the Tosaphoth (critical and explanatory comments on the Talmud).[59] There are a number of his decisions in the religious literature of the time which show that he was considered an outstanding authority on ritual matters. The following two rabbinical decisions of Benedict of Lincoln are mentioned in the Jewish Encyclopedia: "Thus . . . he decided that the evening prayer might be said an hour and a quarter before the legal time of night. On another occasion he declared that nuts prepared by Gentiles might not be eaten by Jews . . ."[60]

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56 Marmorstein, pp. 103-4.

57 J.E., III, 55.

58 Roth, p. 56.

59 Ibid., p. 128.

60 J.E., III, 55, translated from Mordecai Ber. IV, 90; "Shilte ha Gibborim" on Mordecai, 'Ab Zarah,' II, 831.

Benedict of Lincoln was the chief rabbi of the city of Lincoln.[61] When he assumed this position is not known. A number of synagogues existed in Lincoln as early as the year 1244.[62] The synagogue of Peytevin the Great is mentioned in 1256.[63] However, no document has been found relating to Benedict's synagogue or term of rabbinate. Records do reveal that Benedict was a prominent money-lender in his native city. Documents first mention his transactions in the year 1250.[64] A money-lender by the name of Benedict of Lincoln is mentioned in 1220. This man was a contemporary of Benedict's father and grandfather. It is quite unlikely that this man could be Benedict the scholar whose career we can trace to the year 1277.[65]

Since Benedict was one of the great Jewish scholars of thirteenth century England,[66] why is he not referred to in English official documents as "Master"--a title used in the Christian world to denote a learned man? Benedict's father, Moses ben Yom Tob, and his brother, Elias, were usually called "Master" in government records. Moses ben

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61 J.E., III, 55.

62 C.E.J., I, 89.

63 J.W.F. Hill, Medieval Lincoln (Cambridge University Press, 1948), p. 227.

64 C.P.R., (1247-58), p. 63.

65 C.E.J., I, 38; Ibid., III, 261.

66 Marmorstein, pp. 103-4.

Yom Tob was not only a Hebrew scholar but also a minor official of the king--one of the Jewish chirographers of the London Exchequer of the Jews.[67] Elias is mentioned in official documents as the "king's Jew"--or adviser to the king on Jewish matters.[68] He, too, was a scholar and like his father stood high in the eyes of the crown. Benedict's brother, Hagin, was the "Chief Rabbi of the Jews of England" and official Jewish representative to the crown, yet documents never refer to him as "Master". This designation was never granted to Hagin, for he had incurred the displeasure of both Henry III and his son Edward I.[69] It appears that the title "Master" when applied to Jews in thirteenth century English documents did not merely denote scholarship, but also signified official position and royal favor.

In the year 1255 Benedict was among the Jews of Lincoln who were accused of murdering a Christian child, presumably for ritual purposes. This was the same Hugh of Lincoln later glorified by Chaucer at the conclusion of his "Prioress' Tale" (The Canterbury Tales).

> O younge Hugh of Lyncoln slayn also
> With cursed Jewes as it is notable,
> For it is but a litel while ago
> Preye eke for us, . . . [70]

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67 C.E.J., I, 128.

68 Ibid., p. 106-7; Calendar of the Close Rolls (1272-9) (London, 1893), pp. 150, 161, 271.

69 C.Ch.R. (1257-1300), p. 8; Roth, p. 80.

70 VII, lines 684-91.

Evidently Chaucer based his whole story on this anti-Jewish tale. Hugh was the illegitimate son of a woman called Beatrice and was born in the year 1247. He disappeared on July 31, 1255, and according to Matthew Paris' account of the event the mother of the child did not become concerned over his disappearance until several days had elapsed. It was only then that she began a search for the child.[71] Evidently the mother cared little for Hugh and only displayed great affection for the child when he was found dead and acclaimed a martyr. On August 29, 1255 Hugh was found dead due to drowning in a well or cesspool of a Jew named Josce (Joscefin or Copin). Apparently the child fell into the water while at play but to the average thirteenth century mind the Jews were to blame.[72] It happened that toward the end of August, Jews from all over England had come to attend the marriage of Belaset (Esther), daughter of Rabbi Berechiah (Benedict) of Lincoln. It was rather an odd coincidence that the body of Hugh was discovered on the day of the wedding--August 29, 1255. On the promise of having his life spared and by means of torture, Josce was "induced to confess" by John of Lessington (or Lexington), a priest, who was conveniently present at the time of the discovery of the body. Josce was forced to confess that

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71 J.A. Giles, translator, Matthew Paris's English History (London, 1854), III, 138-40. For the Jews of Lincoln and particularly this incident see Hill, pp. 217-38.

72 Roth, p. 56.

the child had been put to death by his co-religionists for ritual purposes, and that the wedding of the rabbi's daughter was merely a pretext for the Jews to assemble in Lincoln in large numbers.[73] The body of little Hugh was escorted to the cathedral by clergy and public officials bearing crosses, candles, and censers. Various miraculous manifestations were attributed to the corpse, making it obvious to the crowd that the Jews had murdered a saint.[74] At a later date a shrine was erected over little Hugh's tomb in the Cathedral of Lincoln and it soon became a place of pilgrimage for the faithful.[75] One hundred Jews of Lincoln including a number of prominent visitors were brought to London where they were to be tried by a jury of twenty-four Christian citizens and twenty-four knights. An official inquiry into this case was made under the leadership of John of Lessington--the priest who discovered the dead child.[76] Eighteen of the accused preferred not to submit to such a biased tribunal and demanded a mixed jury of both Christians and Jews. This was taken as a confession of guilt and they were hanged. The remainder, with

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73 J.E., VI, 487-8.

74 Roth, p. 56. Mathew Paris in his account of the event accuses the Jews of crucifying the boy for magic and sacrificial purposes. He also states that Hugh was crucified for the purpose of insulting the savior. Chronica Majora, V, 516-8, 522, 546, 552. The Annals of the abbey at Burton on Trent claims that the Jews cut off his nose as well as crucifying him. It was only after the Jews had become frightened that they threw the body of little Hugh into the well. Annales Monastici, I, 340-8.

75 J.E., VI, 488; Roth, p. 57.

the exception of two Jews who were pardoned, were convicted and sentenced.[77] Normally the king would have benefited by the forfeiture of the property of the executed or convicted Jews. Henry III, however, had sold all the rights in the Jews to his brother, Richard of Cornwall, in February 1255. In carrying out this agreement Henry III appointed commissioners on November 26, 1255 to have a jury value the possessions of the Lincoln Jews who fled, or were hanged, or were still imprisoned for the death of Hugh, and to take account of the debts due to them. The revenue derived was to be turned over to Richard, Duke of Cornwall in payment of debts owed by Henry III to him. On March 27, 1256 another commission was appointed to inquire into the murder in order to determine whether other Jews were involved in this crime. On August 20, 1256, the houses of the Jews declared guilty of the death of little Hugh were ordered to be sold and another effort was made to collect all their possessions.[78] Rabbi Berechiah (Benedict) was among those Jews who were pardoned. The jury was at first reluctant to declare him free, accusing Benedict of having given sanction to the crime before it was committed.[79] Benedict owed his freedom to Garcias Martini de Toledo, a knight and special envoy of Alfonso X of Spain

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77 Roth, pp. 56-7; J.E., VI, 487.

78 Hill, p. 227

79 C.P.R. (1247-58), p. 453.

to the court of Henry III of England.[80] It is quite possible that Benedict would have been declared guilty and would have been sentenced to death or imprisoned had not the representative of the Spanish crown intervened in his behalf. The testimony of Hugh's mother, that Benedict was innocent of the crime, and the influence of Garsias Martini prompted the court to grant a pardon. The constable of the Tower of London was ordered to release Benedict and place him in the custody of Martini.[81] Why did the representative of Spain exert his influence to secure the pardon of an obscure English subject? Did the Jews of Spain petition Alfonso X of Castile to intervene in the behalf of this outstanding Hebrew scholar? Benedict's Talmudic commentaries were probably studied in the rabbinical academies of Spain. The Jews of thirteenth century Spain were highly cultured and not only prized rabbinical studies but science and medicine as well. Alfonso X was a patron of learning and was called by scholars "el Sabio" (the Wise). At his court were gathered not only Christian men of learning, but also Jews as well. Learned rabbis frequently corresponded with the king on intellectual and legal matters.[82] Jews were members of the royal court and advised Alfonso on problems concerning science, finance and govern-

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80 C.P.R. (1247-58), p. 453.

81 Loc. Cit.

82 Abraham A. Neuman, The Jews in Spain (Philadelphia, 1942), II, 99-100, 102, 242.

ment.[83] Toledo was one of the most important centers of Jewish learning in thirteenth century Spain.[84] The Jews of Toledo must have exerted their influence upon Alfonso X to save the life of Benedict of Lincoln--the Talmudic scholar. Garsias Martini was a native of the city of Toledo[85] and may have had a deep respect for Jewish scholarship. At the court of Henry III he exerted pressure in the name of the Spanish crown and was successful in securing Benedict's release.[86] The Jews of Lincoln who were convicted for the death of little Hugh remained in prison until Richard, Earl of Cornwall secured their release.[87]

Benedict's career as a money-lender did not come to an end as a result of this sordid trial. We have no record of him from 1255 until 1265. From 1265 until 1273 we find Benedict actively engaged in finance and apparently in the king's favor. During the civil war in 1264 attacks were made on the Jews throughout England. They were massacred in London and Canterbury and were certainly attacked in Lincoln where the chirograph chest was demolished to destroy evidence of debts owing to Jews. Henry III was angry at this unwarranted attack on the Jews. On May 6, 1265 a letter was sent

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83 Neuman, II, 242-3.

84 Ibid., II, 242.

85 C.P.R. (1247-58), p. 311.

86 Ibid., p. 453.

87 Roth, p. 57.

in the king's name to twenty-four citizens to protect the Jews of Lincoln "in person and goods." After the disorders, the king again took the Jews of England under his special protection. He granted to Benedict, Hagin, and other Jews of Lincoln, compensation for the losses they suffered during the civil war.[88] In November 1265 Henry III refused to extend the payment of debts owed to Benedict as requested by his debtors--Ralph de Ringedon, Philip de Marton, Roger de Eyvill, Thomas Basset, and others.[89]

In 1268 a Jewess, Muriel Mutun of Royston, chose Benedict of Lincoln as her attorney in a case involving payment of a debt by Nicholas de Wadingham.[90] This information reveals that learned Jews were permitted to represent their co-religionists in court cases against Christians. Thirteenth century England may have had a high opinion of scholars, which applied even to Jews. Benedict was an outstanding authority on Jewish Law.[91] Many of the educated Jews of England and the continent knew Latin as well as the vernacular and were acquainted with the culture and legal processes of their neighbors. Benedict may have had a thorough knowledge of English law and was thus qualified to act as legal counsel for a fellow Jew. As a rule, however, Jews were represented in court by Christian attorneys. In 1270 Benedict brought

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88 Hill, p. 209.

89 C.P.R. (1258-66), pp. 510, 581, 617.

90 C.E.J., I, 162-3.

91 J.E., III, 55.

suit against Walter, Archbishop of York, for non-payment of a debt of £20. The archbishop appeared in court to answer these charges, and Benedict for reasons unknown withdrew his suit.[92] Perhaps Benedict did not press the case against the archbishop for fear of drawing the ire of this influential Catholic churchman.

In 1273 Benedict failed to pay his tallage, and as a result was penalized by the crown. An order was given that all debts owed to him would revert to the king until this tallage was paid.[93] From 1273 to 1275 Benedict appears to be in financial difficulties. Perhaps he was too engrossed in his business affairs, but this seems doubtful. Benedict's financial decline may possibly be attributed to illness. He became ill in 1273 and was reported too sick to appear in court in a case against John de Stavele.[94] During this period a number of his debtors petitioned the Exchequer of the Jews for pleas of account against Benedict--hoping by this means to cancel or extend the terms of their indebtedness.[95] Benedict did not appear when summoned and was represented in court by his attorneys.[96] One of these debtors was John de

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92 C.E.J., I, 243.

93 Ibid., II, 19, 64. Tallage in thirteenth century England was a direct negotiated levy by the king upon his cities, demesne, and the Jews. Powicke, pp. 529-30; C.E.J., II, xiv-v.

94 Ibid., II, 92.

95. Ibid., II, 227, 260, 296.

96 Ibid., II, 123-4, 136, 227, 260, 292.

Stravele who it appears borrowed money frequently and used every legal means to evade payment. He owed money to a number of Jews and even to Christians as well.[97] Documents are silent regarding Benedict of Lincoln after the year 1277.[98]

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97 C.E.J., II, 31, 92, 266.

98 Ibid., II, 261.

CHAPTER V

MASTER ELIAS, SON OF MASTER MOSES II

A third son of Master Moses II reached prominence in Jewish religious and secular life. Elijahu (Elijah) Menachem, better known in contemporary manuscripts as Master Elias, was without doubt the most outstanding and influential Jew of thirteenth century England.[99] His fame does not rest on finance or wealth alone, for he was also distinguished as an eminent Biblical scholar and physician.[100] During the reign of Edward I he was counsel to the king on financial and religious matters relating to Jews, and was referred to in official documents as the "king's Jew."[101] Master Elias was the leader of the Jewish community of London during the latter half of the thirteenth century. He was a noted authority on Jewish law and the author of numerous scrip-

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99 C.Cl.R. (1272-9), p. 197; C.P.R.(1266-72), p. 536; C.Ch.R. (1257-1300), p. 41. Also called R. [Rabbi] Menachem of London, Master Elias of London, and Master Elias, son of Master Moses. Jacobs, pp. 287-8; C.E.J., II, 64; C.Cl.R. (1272-79), p. 271.

100 Marmorstein, pp. 113-4; Roth, pp. 114, 121, 127; His reputation as a doctor had spread beyond England. In the year 1280 Master Elias was summoned by the Count of Hainault to come to Flanders to attend him. Roth, p. 114; C.P.R. (1272-81), p. 364.

101 C.E.J., II, 41, 108; C.Cl.R. (1272-79), pp. 150, 161, 271. The chief rabbi was supposed to advise the king on such matters. Elias' brother, Hagin, held this post but was often in royal disfavor. C.E.J., III, p. 103.

tural commentaries. Master Elias held the honored position of Ab Beth Din, or head of the rabbinical court of London.[102] The Jews of thirteenth century England were permitted to govern themselves to a large extent according to their own law. The Beth Din (rabbinical court) served as the only court of justice for the entire Jewish community. It ruled on cases involving religious problems, divorce, and in disputes arising between Jews--which were frequent enough. The Beth Din did not have any jurisdiction in disputes between Jews and Christians, for such cases were handled by the civil courts.[103] Some of the decisions handed down by Master Elias as head of this court have been preserved. Dr. Jacobs tells of two of these decisions:

> A case happened of a Jew who borrowed a horse from his neighbor and gave it to a Gentile to ride upon, and the horse was lost. Then the loser was to pay the full value. Such a case came before R. Menachem, of London, and was thus decided.
>
> A certain woman came to ask penance before R. Menachem of London because she had committed adultery. He replied that since she had come to fulfill her obligations towards heaven, she must swear in the most solemn manner that she had not set her heart on another man. If she took this oath she was to be divorced, as she had come to confession, but she was not to receive her settlement [dowry].[104]

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102 Marmorstein, p. 114.

103 Roth, p. 118.

104 Jacobs, pp. 288-9, translated from M.S. Halberstamm, No. 345, ff 40a, 43a, 71b, 77a.

The authority of the Beth Din was recognized by the crown,[105] and sentences imposed by this court were often carried out by the civil authorities.[106] The Calendar of the Plea Rolls of the Exchequer of the Jews mentions a third decision of Master Elias. In 1273 he was called upon to render judgment in a dispute between two Jews. Isaac of Warwick was behind in the payment of his tallage. Aaron Crespyn owed him the sum of 100s 4d which he refused to pay. Isaac hailed Aaron before the Beth Din (rabbinical court) of London. Both men agreed to accept the judgment pronounced by Master Elias, the head of this court. The court decided that the claim of Isaac of Warwick was just. Aaron Crespyn was ordered to be sent to prison, and to remain there until he paid the disputed 100s 4d directly to the Exchequer of the Jews. The amount would be recorded in Isaac of Warwick's name, and thus release him from his indebtedness to the king.[107]

Master Moses was married to Fluria of Northampton, a woman of considerable financial means.[108] They had seven

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105 Jacobs, pp. 372-3. Also called the Capitulum Judaeorum. The Jewish court of a community was conducted by three "Dayanim" or judges. One of these served as the Ab Beth Din, or head of the court. Loc. Cit.

106 Roth, p. 116; C.E.J., II, 41.

107 C.E.J., II, 41. A number of the religious writings of Elijahu Menachem [Master Elias] have survived. The Decisions, Commentaries, and Midrash of Master Elias are mentioned in the Halachic Yalkut. His Pesakim and Responsa have also been preserved. Marmorstein, pp. 112-3.

108 C.E.J., I, 155, 234; C.E.J., II, 20, 169; C.P.R. (1281-1302), p. 224.

sons: Abraham, Benedict, Cresseus, Deulacres, Elias, Jacob, and Pictavin.[109] It is interesting to note that Master Elias named a son after himself, and that his sons Abraham, Benedict, and Cresseus, were named after his brothers. The custom of naming children after living relatives was widespread among the Jews of thirteenth century England and was apparently adopted from the Sephardic Jews of Spain. The Spanish Jews actually encouraged the practice of naming a child after a living relative. This was motivated by the belief that the child would grow up and be like his father or grandfather. The Ashkenaz Jews of middle Europe, on the other hand, frowned on the idea of naming children after living relatives. This was due to the superstition that the angel of death might become confused by the similarity in names, and take the child instead of the elder.[110] The Jews of England evidently were in close touch with their brethren in Spain and derived much inspiration from them on matters of religion and social customs.

Master Elias was the most prominent Jewish financier of thirteenth century England. His money-lending transactions are mentioned more frequently in official documents than those of any other Jew of his day. Master Elias' financial success may be partly attributed to his good standing with

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109 C.P.R. (1266-72), p. 532; C.P.R. (1272-81), pp. 129, 157; C.P.R. (1281-92), pp. 4, 244; C.Cl.R. (1272-9), pp. 176, 177, 306, 343, 344; C.E.J., II, 20, 51, 160, 166, 168, 189.

110 Jacob Z. Lauterbach, "The Naming of Children in Jewish Folklore, Ritual and Practice," Central Conference of American Rabbis: Yearbook (1932), XLII, 335-9.

the crown. He was well liked by Henry III, who often bestowed favors upon him. In 1258 Henry III made him a gift of all the lands formerly owned by Elias le Eveske in the city of London and the town of Northampton.[111] This man had been the chief rabbi of the English Jews until his apostasy. The lands of Elias le Eveske had reverted to the king at the time of his conversion.[112] In 1268 the king excused Master Elias from all taxes for a period of four years--an honor seldom extended to a Jew.[113] Master Elias was the favorite Jew of Edward I, and his adviser on Jewish affairs. He was accorded special privileges even after the king had placed restrictive measures against the Jews.[114]

The Church during the latter half of the thirteenth century vigorously opposed the practice of usury and urged all Christian rulers to suppress it.[115] Many Englishmen openly ignored the injunction of the Church by loaning

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111 C.Ch.R. (1257-1300), p. 8. Both are often referred to as Master Elias (Elyas), Jew of London. Joseph Jacobs (J.E., V, 144-5), considers them to be the same individual. Roth believes that this view is "fantastic" for the two are mentioned individually in the same document. Roth, pp. 47, 278.

112 C.Ch.R.(1257-1300), pp. 8, 16. A Jew upon his conversion would lose all his possessions to the crown. The Church complained that the crown discouraged conversions by such measures. Jacobs, p. xxi.

113 C.P.R. (1266-72), p. 205.

114 C.P.R. (1272-81), pp. 212, 392; C.Cl.R.(1272-9) p. 463.

115 Cecil Roth, "The Jews in the Middle Ages", Cambridge Medieval History, VII, 655.

money to fellow Christians at a substantial profit. Records regarding Christian usurers appear as early as 1179.[116] Another group feared to openly engage in money-lending and purchased debts through Jewish intermediaries.[117] Interest bearing debts were eagerly acquired by all classes of Englishmen, and the Church was forced to prevail upon the crown to suppress this new form of usury. In 1269 the Provisions of Jewry was enacted which forbade the transference of usurious debts to Christians.[118] Only half hearted attempts were made to restrict the sale of interest bearing debts. The crown readily gave Master Elias and other Jews permission to sell these debts to Christians.[119] In 1267 Master Elias sold the debt of Sir William Mungomery to another titled Englishman--Sir Robert de Wauton and his heirs.[120] In the same year Robert Burnel, king's clerk, purchased the debt of William de Mariny from him with all "the usuries and penalties."[121] Even members of the church hierarchy openly violated the injunction against usury. In 1273 Master Elias sold a writ of indebtedness to Godfrey, Bishop of Worcester, who in turn sold it to John de Solar.[122] Eleanor of Castile, wife of

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116 Jacobs, p. 63.

117 Roth, pp. 108-9, 276.

118 C.P.R.(1266-72), p. 376; C.Cl.R. (1268-72), p. 101.

119 C.P.R. (1266-72), pp. 532, 534, 536.

120 C.E.J., I, 155.

121 C.P.R., (1266-72), p. 69.

122 C.E.J., II, 31.

Edward I, was one of the largest purchasers of usurious debts during the closing years of the thirteenth century, despite popular disapproval. England was also shocked by her frequent use of Jews as agents to purchase castles and estates throughout the realm.[123] The profits derived from interest bearing debts were enormous. A single debt purchased from Master Elias and his associates guaranteed the queen a large profit.[124] The Archbishop (Peckham) of Canterbury was forced to reprimand the queen because of her greediness in money matters.[125] Some of Queen Eleanor's investments were purchased from Jews on credit. In the year 1275 she owed Master Elias the sum of 300 marks which the king deducted from his taxes.[126] King Edward actually encouraged his wife to continue her usurious practices by giving royal sanction to her numerous business ventures.[127] He even gave her as a gift a number of interest bearing debts formerly owned by Elias' brother, Hagin, and now in the possession of the crown.[128] Thus it is evident that

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123 Charles T. Martin, editor, Registrum Epistolarum Fratris Johannis Peckham (Rolls Series) (London, 1885), II, 619; III, 937.

124 C.P.R. (1272-81), p. 113; C.E.J., III, pp. 282, 309.

125 Peckham, II, 619: III, 937.

126 C.Cl.R., (1272-9), p. 150.

127 C.E.J., II, 303, 309, 310; C.P.R. (1272-81), pp. 96, 265.

128 C.Cl.R. (1272-9), p. 547.

during the latter half of the thirteenth century the injunction against usury was violated by all classes of Englishmen. The economic function of the Jew was gradually being taken over by Christians. This transfer was completed in 1290 with the expulsion of the Jews from England.

Edward I had begun his reign with a tolerant attitude towards his Jewish subjects. They were at first well treated and their money-lending activities were actually encouraged by the crown. The king was soon forced by circumstances to pass restrictive measures against the Jews. In the year 1274 at the Council of Lyons, Pope Gregory X had called upon all Christian princes to suppress usury in their realms.[129] Ironically the pope permitted Christian banking firms to exist in Italy and even in Rome itself. Edward I had been borrowing heavily from Italian banking firms and undoubtedly realized that the Church lacked sincerity on the usury problem.[130] On the other hand the Church was a powerful political force during the early years of Edward's reign. The king could not easily ignore the pressure brought upon him by the clergy--to stop the usurious activities of his Jewish subjects.[131] Thus in 1275 the Statutum de Judaismo was passed which absolutely forbade Jews from lending money at interest. The law provided

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129 C.M.H., VII, 665.

130 Tout, p. 176.

131 C.M.H., VII, 397.

that any Jew entering a usurious contract would be liable to punishment, and such agreements would no longer be enforced by law. This statute does not reveal any deep seated anti-Jewish bias on the part of Edward I. The Statutum de Judaismo, while forbidding usury, granted the Jews permission to engage in commerce, manufacturing, and farming--thus encouraging the gradual assimilation of these people.[132] Shortly after this law had gone into effect the king violated its provisions by giving Master Elias and a small number of other Jews "special license" to practice usury. The crown had merely utilized the Statutum de Judaismo to limit the number of Jewish usurers. Jews not favored by the crown had to seek other means of livelihood.[133] Edward I had not taken any serious steps towards the actual outlawry of usury from his realm. No binding laws were passed restricting the money-lending activities of his Christian subjects. Christians were thus encouraged to take over the economic functions of the Jews.

Contemporary records still speak of Master Elias as the "king's Jew" even after the Statutum de Judaismo had become the law of the land.[134] He never lost favor with the king and was permitted to carry on his money-lending activities even after other restrictive measures were placed against the

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132 C.M.H., VII, 655.

133 C.P.R., (1272-81), p. 212.

134 C.Cl.R. (1272-9), p. 271.

Jews.[135] Master Elias' name does not appear in the mass accusations leveled against the Jews in 1278. In that year many Jews were arrested on charges of clipping the coins of the realm. The punishment meted out by the courts was drastic. Hundreds of Jews were declared guilty and imprisoned in the Tower of London. In the following year 293 Jews were hanged in London for this crime.[136] The crown soon discovered that a large number of the Jews had been falsely accused by their Christian neighbors, and ordered a halt to such accusations.[137] The Jews who were not charged with this crime ironically were asked to pay a sum of money "for the king's use."[138] These accusations clearly reveal the general animosity that existed against the Jews and ultimately led to their expulsion.

In 1279 official records again mention Master Elias in the role of head of the Jewish community of London. A prominent London Jew, Aaron, son of Vives, was threatened to be hailed before the Jewish religious authorities on charges brought against him by fellow Jews.[139] Aaron, son of Vives, was the favorite Jew of Edmund, the king's brother. Edmund held his vassal in such high esteem that he permitted him to live in his castle. Edmund obtained from the crown special

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135 C.P.R. (1272-81), pp. 356, 371-2, 392.

136 Roth, p. 75.

137 Ibid., p. 76; C.Cl.R (1272-9), pp. 529-30.

138 C.Cl.R. (1272-9), p. 529.

139 Ibid., pp. 570-1.

privileges for Aaron not accorded to other Jews. Aaron was allowed to reside and do business in any city in the kingdom. He was also exempted from paying taxes of any kind to the crown. This arrangement benefited Edmund financially for he received a substantial percentage of Aaron's usurious profits.[140] Edmund interfered in behalf of his vassal and freed him from the authority of the Jewish community. He restrained Master Elias from summoning Aaron, son of Vives, before the Jewish court of justice, or from pronouncing judgement upon him. Edmund arranged to have Aaron appear before the next parliament where he was to be judged in the presence of the king.[141]

As late as 1281 Edward I showed favor to the Jewish community of London. In that year the king confirmed a charter, previously granted by his brother Edmund, which gave the London Jews permission to build a new synagogue (scholam) "in the Parish of Saint Lawrence, in Cattestrete".[142] Master Elias, Cok Hagin, and Moses, son of Aaron, served as witnesses at the royal confirmation of this charter. The land for this new house of worship had been donated by Aaron,

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140 C.P.R. (1266-72), pp. 471, 515.

141 C.Cl.R. (1272-9), pp. 570-1.

142 C.Ch.R. (1257-1300), p. 253. This charter was first presented to Edward I for confirmation in the year 1280, but was rejected. Ibid., p. 245.

son of Vives.[143] This synagogue was orignally located in Ironmonger Lane and was called the Magna Schola Judaeorum.[144] John Peckham, Archbishop of Canterbury, deeply resented this action of the king, considering it an offense to Christianity. He ordered the Bishop of London to prevent the completion of this synagogue by threatening all Christians responsible for its construction with excommunication or interdict.[145] In 1282 Archbishop Peckham succeeded in gaining royal sanction for the destruction of all London's Jewish houses of worship. The archbishop gave the Jews special permission to retain and complete the new synagogue, which he felt was sufficient for their spiritual needs. Thus until the expulsion this new building served as London's only Jewish house of prayer.[146]

Edward I held Master Elias in high esteem even though he did not renounce his Jewish faith. In 1282 the king presented to his Jewish favorite a number of houses in the town of Northampton.[147] Master Elias died in the year 1284, and with his passing the Jews lost their only representative close

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143 C.Ch.R. (1257-1300), p. 253. Cok Hagin, son of Deulacres, was chosen chief rabbi of England after the death of Hagin, his uncle. He owed his position to the influence of the queen [Eleanor of Castile] in whose favor he stood highly. C.P.R. (1272-81), p. 433.

144 Jacobs, p. 343.

145 Peckham, I, 212.

146 Ibid., II, 407, 410-11, Roth claims that all synagogues were destroyed by the above order. He also states that after the destruction of the synagogues public worship was held only in the house of Chief Rabbi Cok Hagin fil' Deulecresse. Roth, p. 80

147 C.Ch.R. (1257-1300), p. 261.

to the English crown.[148] While he was alive the Jews had a champion who could speak before the king in their behalf. Had Master Elias been alive in the year 1290, perhaps Edward I would not have issued the order for the expulsion of the Jews from England.

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148 C.Cl.R. (1279-88), pp. 268, 281.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The Jews of medieval England were looked upon as transgressing aliens by all classes of Englishmen. They were disliked on religious, economic, social, and nationalistic grounds. The Church could not tolerate the presence of a conflicting religion on English soil. The Jews also did not conform to the habits and social customs of the rest of the population. Because of these differences they were considered to be foreigners in the land of their birth. The apparent success of the Jews in the field of finance and their unique position as personal chattels of the king (and accountable to him alone) caused great resentment against them. Edward I tried to solve the Jewish problem with mandates designed to encourage their assimilation and conversion.[149] The Statutum de Judaismo tried to lead the Jews into other fields than usury. It granted the Jews permission to engage in professions and trades formerly closed to them--thus speeding up the process of assimilation.[150] In the year 1280 Edward I issued an order forcing all Jews to listen to con-

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149 C.M.H., vii, 655; C.P.R. (1272-81), pp. 356, 371-2. The clergy had prevailed upon the king to take these measures against the Jews.

150 C.M.H., vii, 655.

versionist sermons aimed at their spiritual salvation. He also promised protection and shelter for those Jews who would forsake Judaism for the Catholic faith.[151] The reluctance of his Jewish subjects to assimilate may have prompted Edward I to issue the order for their expulsion in 1290.

The Jews of medieval England enjoyed a cultural renaissance similar to that of their co-religionists in Spain.[152] Medieval Spain permitted its Jews to participate in the political, social, and literary life of the country and thus made lasting contributions to Spanish culture. The Jews of England were barred from all these fields. Anglo-Jewry therefore centered its literary endeavors on Hebrew theology and science. Religion played an important role in the lives of these Jews. Great emphasis was placed on the study of the scriptures and Biblical commentaries. Scholarship was held even higher than worldly goods. The high literacy rate among the English Jews was due to the stress placed upon education. Many Anglo-Jewish scholars were not only versed in Hebrew lore but also in secular studies as well. A number of them were physicians, astronomers, and mathematicians of note. They were often well acquainted with the culture of their Christian neighbors. The knowledge of Latin, French, Spanish, and Arabic was widespread among the English

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151 C.P.R. (1272-81), pp. 356, 371-2.

152 Marmorstein, pp. 103-15.

Jews.[153]

Where did the English Jews obtain their higher rabbinical education? The synagogue or synagogues of every Jewish community furnished the necessary Hebrew and secular instruction on a primary and secondary level. The children of the well-to-do were usually educated by private tutors. Education was compulsory for every male child until his thirteenth birthday. Instruction was not mandatory for girls, yet there are indications that even they received the rudiments of an education.[154] The synagogue did provide some form of informal instruction of an advanced nature for those who wished to continue their studies in scriptural or Talmudic lore. Thirteenth Century Anglo-Jewry possessed a number of outstanding Hebrew scholars. Did England have schools of advanced studies capable of producing such scholars or did these men receive their rabbinical training on the continent? There is no concrete evidence pointing to the existence of rabbinical academies in medieval England. English and continental sources are silent on this subject.[155]

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153 Roth, pp. 124-30.

154 Ibid., pp. 124-26; Jacobs, pp. 342-44.

155 Jacobs, p. 343. Jacobs mentions a manuscript recording the existence of the "Magna Schola Judaeorum" of London. This institution was said to be the most important school of Jewish learning in the capital. We do not know whether this school functioned as a center of higher Jewish learning due to the lack of authentic records on this subject. Loc. Cit.

The love of Hebrew scholarship is quite manifest in the family of Master Moses. This particular family group produced for over a period of two hundred years a continuous stream of Hebrew scholars. It is interesting to note that Master Moses and all other rabbis of thirteenth century England held pulpits while working at other occupations for a livelihood. It is apparent that they were carrying on the tradition which was slowly falling into disuse on the continent--prohibiting anyone from obtaining a living from the rabbinate. Thus we can readily see that the rabbinate in medieval England carried with it no salary but was a distinction of great honor, eagerly sought by men of learning.

In the Christian world scholarship was confined almost exclusively to the members of the clergy. The Church possessed some of the greatest minds of the Middle Ages. The vow of celibacy forbade these men of intellect and learning from transmitting their mental qualities to future generations. Intellectually Christianity may have suffered from the effects of clerical celibacy. Canon Law forced the genius of the great scholars of the Church to die with them.

The Jews frowned upon the Christian concept of clerical celibacy as unnatural and contrary to God's laws. The institution of marriage was advocated for every normal individual. The religious leaders of the Jewish community were not forced to take solemn vows of chastity. Jewish religious laws and customs actually encouraged the rabbi and

scholar to marry--for married life was considered the ideal state of existence. It was felt that family obligations would prove no hindrance to rabbinical duties or scholastic achievement.[156]

This study leads to interesting conclusions regarding the Jewish population of thirteenth century England. The data compiled on the family of Master Moses points to the relatively high life expectancy, high birth-rate, and low infant and child mortality among the Jews of this period. Master Moses raised nine sons to adulthood. This is also true of his son, Elias, whose seven sons later became associated with him in the family money-lending business.[157] Why do the vital statistics and other population data differ sharply between the Jews and the Christians of thirteenth century England? The birth-rate among the Christians was also relatively high. Christian families as a rule tended to be smaller because of the high mortality rate among infants and children.[158]

Medieval English Jewry may have profited by observing the Mosaic Laws, especially those regarding health measures. These placed great emphasis on sanitation and personal hy-

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156 Solomon Schechter, Studies in Judaism (Philadelphia, 1945), II, 175-7.

157 Master Moses and his son Elias may have had daughters as well as sons. However, contemporary records make no mention of them. Existing manuscripts are usually of a business nature and seldom reveal information regarding women members of this family.

158 Josiah C. Russell, British Medieval Population (University of New Mexico Press, 1948), pp. 164-69, 208-14.

giene. Dietary laws provided sets of rules to determine whether foods were fit for human consumption. The Christian communities of medieval England observed a lower standard of hygiene and sanitation, which may have contributed to the high mortality rate among infants and children. Many epidemics have been also attributed to the poor sanitation of the time. Anglo-Jewry may have also acquired a much greater resistance to certain communicable diseases. The Jews had been city dwellers centuries longer than the average Englishman. The Jews were exposed to such maladies as tuberculosis for a longer period of time than their Christian neighbors. They were thus able to build up greater immunity and resistance to certain diseases than the rest of the population of England.

The expulsion of the Jews was decreed by Edward I in the year 1290. All Jews were ordered to leave England before November 1 of that year, or suffer the death penalty.[159] The

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159 George H. Leonard, "The Expulsion of the Jews By Edward I: An Essay in Explanation of the Exodus, A.D. 1290," Transactions of the Royal Historical Society (1891), N.S. V, 136-8; J.E., V, 167; Roth, pp. 85-6. About sixteen thousand Jews were ordered to leave England in 1290. The decree did not apply to converted Jews who were permitted to remain. Only fragmentary information has survived regarding the Jews who were driven out of England. About 1,335 exiles sailed for Wissant near Calais. A storm was encountered and some of the ships were lost with all on board. The French king permitted the remaining Jews to settle temporarily in Amiens and Carcassonne. Four years after the expulsion the names of several English Jews were recorded on the tax rolls of the Paris Jewry. A tradition persists that some of the Jews found a haven in Scotland. A small number also settled in Flanders and Savoy. Roth, pp. 86-7; J.E., V, 167; Leonard, pp. 138-9.

English Jews did not strive to retain their cultural identity like their Spanish co-religionists who were exiled by the inquisition. Anglo-Jewry quickly assimilated with the numerous Jewries of the medieval world--leaving no vestiges of their English heritage.[160]

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160 Roth, p. 87. The decree forbidding Jews on English soil was never rigidly enforced. Despite this mandate Jews trickled into England and were permitted to remain. During the time of Cromwell they had become quite numerous and even dared to practice their faith openly. It was Cromwell who officially granted the Jews permission to settle in England once more. Roth, pp. 148-9, 164-7.

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