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## The Regional Impact on Medieval Text and Image: Exploring Representations of Anti-Semitism in English and Northern French Medieval Bestiaries

Sarah Elizabeth Spencer

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# **The Regional Impact on Medieval Text and Image: Exploring Representations of Anti-Semitism in English and Northern French Medieval Bestiaries**

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at  
Syracuse University

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## Abstract

This thesis endeavors to explain the variations in representations of anti-Semitism between medieval bestiaries. Medieval bestiaries, compilations concerning animals and their moralized characteristics, were a type of medieval literature commonly produced throughout Western Europe.<sup>1</sup> In order to make a more concrete analysis, this study focuses on two particular medieval bestiaries comparable in both date and style – *The Aberdeen Bestiary* from England and *Le Bestiaire* from northern France. Both date from the early 13<sup>th</sup> century and are classified as Second-family moralizing bestiaries, that is, they both derive from the Latin text *Physiologus*.<sup>2</sup>

The analysis of these two bestiaries will focus specifically on how they reflect medieval stereotypes of Jews and anti-Semitic themes. First, both bestiaries are individually examined for depictions of medieval anti-Semitism. *The Aberdeen Bestiary* focuses on the medieval perception of Jews as potentially dangerous and terrifying “others,” who allegedly prey upon Christians, while *Le Bestiaire* focuses on the perception of Jews as a religious threat in need of conversion.<sup>3</sup> As these two bestiaries are comparable in both date and format, the question arises, why do they vary so significantly with regard to anti-Semitic representations? While both *The Aberdeen Bestiary* and *Le Bestiaire* originate in northwestern Europe shortly before the period of mass Jewish expulsion, the particular regions of medieval England and northern France differed significantly in political, economic, and societal environments.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, by analyzing the regional character of anti-Semitism in medieval England and in northern France the variations in the anti-Semitic representations appearing in *The Aberdeen Bestiary* and *Le Bestiaire* become comprehensible. Consequently, this thesis argues that there is a strong regional impact on medieval text and image, as understood through an analysis of representations of anti-Semitism in medieval bestiaries.

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<sup>1</sup> Willene B. Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: The Second-family Bestiary* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), 10, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: The Second-family Bestiary*, 10, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid; Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews* (Princeton: Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 95-96.

<sup>4</sup> Raphael Langham, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology* (Houndsmill: Basingstoke: Hampshire: New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 8-9, 22-23; Robert Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500* (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 146.

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## Introduction

Some of the most fascinating and fantastical literature produced during the Middle Ages was a genre of text known as bestiaries. Medieval bestiaries were often illustrated compilations concerning animals, both common and exotic, and their characteristics. This type of medieval literature was produced throughout Western Europe and was extremely popular, as evidenced by the number of manuscripts that survive.<sup>5</sup> In particular, this study will focus on the genre of moralizing bestiaries that flourished in northwestern Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>6</sup> These moralizing bestiaries emphasized not the realistic behavior of animals, but rather a moral interpretation of each animal's behaviors. While these moralizing bestiaries common throughout northwestern Europe were similar in content, they varied significantly in theme and focus.

In order to evaluate and understand these variations, this paper will focus on the differences in content between two of these moralizing bestiaries –*The Aberdeen Bestiary* from England and *Le Bestiaire* from northern France.<sup>7</sup> Both date from the early 13<sup>th</sup> century and are classified as Second-family moralizing bestiaries. The classification as Second-family bestiaries indicates that they both essentially derive from the Latin text *Physiologus*, meaning that they fall into the

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<sup>5</sup> Willene B. Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: The Second-family Bestiary* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), 10, 14.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, “The Aberdeen Bestiary Project,” <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/>; Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, Translated by Guy R. Mermier (Lewiston: Queenston: Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), x-xii.

same category for basic format and content.<sup>8</sup> The classification as moralizing bestiaries denotes that both these bestiaries focus their content and style on a moralized explanation of each animal's behavior as a way of teaching medieval Christian values.<sup>9</sup> This contrasts significantly in both tone and content with the later bestiaries of love that began appearing during the thirteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, both *The Aberdeen Bestiary* and *Le Bestiaire* arise from the same traditions of content and style and, consequently, provide an acceptable basis for comparative analysis.

This analysis will focus specifically on how the bestiaries reflect medieval stereotypes of Jews and anti-Semitic themes. Jews occupied a difficult place in medieval society. As Debra Strickland states, Jews were viewed as “ugly, evil, physically abnormal, sorcerers, image-desecrators, well-poisoners, ritual murderers, world conspirators, and the perpetrators of numerous other atrocities.”<sup>11</sup> However, they also filled a necessary economic role as traders and moneylenders that was often exploited by the governments of medieval Western Christendom.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, medieval Jews endured a great deal of stigmatization that led to the perpetuation of numerous anti-Semitic stereotypes in both medieval literature and art.

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<sup>8</sup> Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: The Second-family Bestiary*, 10, 14.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>10</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, iii.

<sup>11</sup> Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews* (Princeton: Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 95.

<sup>12</sup> By the twelfth century there was already an entire governmental office dedicated to Jewish affairs, called the Exchequer of the Jews.; Robert Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500* (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 153-155.



Both *The Aberdeen Bestiary* and *Le Bestiaire* offer rich commentary on the medieval perception of Jews as potentially dangerous and terrifying “others,” who allegedly prey upon Christians.<sup>13</sup> So if these two bestiaries are comparable in both date and format, why do they vary so significantly with regard to anti-Semitic representations? This thesis will argue that the regional context within which each bestiary was produced represents a major reason behind these differences. While both *The Aberdeen Bestiary* and *Le Bestiaire* originate in northwest Europe shortly before the period of mass Jewish expulsion, the particular regions of medieval England and northern France differed significantly in political, economic, and societal environments.<sup>14</sup> By analyzing the regional character of anti-Semitism in medieval England and in northern France in relation to the variation in the anti-Semitic representations appearing in *The Aberdeen Bestiary* and *Le Bestiaire*, I hope to demonstrate that there is a decisive regional impact on medieval text and image.

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<sup>13</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 95-96.

<sup>14</sup> Raphael Langham, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology* (Houndsmill: Basingstoke: Hampshire: New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 8-9, 22-23; Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 146.

Chapter One: Understanding *The Aberdeen Bestiary* as a Representation of  
Medieval English Anti-Semitism

The following two chapters will focus on *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, which is a thirteenth-century English work. While this Second-family bestiary primarily describes and depicts the natural behaviors of animals, it also clearly reflects medieval English anti-Semitism. A careful examination of particular entries reveals that *The Aberdeen Bestiary* portrayed and perpetuated harmful stereotypes of Jews.

As *The Aberdeen Bestiary* is the focus of the next two chapters, it is important to better understand its origins. The manuscript known as *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, which includes both text and illustrations, was created in England around the beginning of the thirteenth century.<sup>15</sup> The first actual historical record of *The Aberdeen Bestiary* was in 1542 in the inventory for the Old Royal Library at Westminster Palace. While “The Aberdeen Bestiary Project” cites Willene Clark’s argument that *The Aberdeen Bestiary* was created in southern England, there are a number of competing theories that make a decisive conclusion concerning the bestiary’s specific geographical origin currently impossible. However, because of its consistent style, this manuscript is believed to have been created by a single author.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, “The Aberdeen Bestiary Project,” <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/>.

<sup>16</sup> A number of studies have attempted to determine a more specific location of origin for *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, however current theories present contradictory findings disagreeing between north-eastern and south-eastern England. As a result, a more specific region of England has not been identified; Ibid.

While the bestiary's author and patron remain unknown, there are a number of theories concerning its purpose. Due to its subject matter and literary style, *The Aberdeen Bestiary* most likely was created for an ecclesiastical patron rather than for a "secular aristocrat."<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, a study of the wear on the physical manuscript shows that unique worn patches appear on the top margin and possibly indicate that an instructor held this bestiary for viewing by his students.<sup>18</sup> Willene Clark notes that, "the lessons of the Second-family text teach morality and ethics."<sup>19</sup> Moreover, stories and examples from bestiaries were used in "vernacular sermons."<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the current scholarly consensus is that *The Aberdeen Bestiary* was "used for the moral education of...members of the monastic community...[and] the moral instruction of the lay congregation."<sup>21</sup>

*The Aberdeen Bestiary* belongs to the category of Second-family bestiaries, and as such follows a general format and inspiration. This classification indicates that a particular bestiary draws from the Latin text *Physiologus* and, in subject and style, resembles other bestiaries that were produced starting around the mid-twelfth century.<sup>22</sup> However, this bestiary shows the influence of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* as well. This influence can be clearly seen in an

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid; Here, the project's section on *The Aberdeen Bestiary*'s historical background specifically references an argument by Debra Hassig that certain phrases such as 'Keep away from women' would be more appropriate for or appreciated by a cleric rather than a layperson.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Willene B. Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: The Second-family Bestiary* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), 84.

<sup>20</sup> Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews* (Princeton: Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 140.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 139-140.

<sup>22</sup> Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: The Second-family Bestiary*, 10, 14.

Aberdeen entry such as the raven that begins with, “In his book of Etymologies, Isidore says that the raven picks out the eyes in corpses first, as the Devil destroys the capacity for judgment in carnal men, and proceeds to extract the brain through the eye.”<sup>23</sup> Isidore was a scholar who lived from 560 to 636, and one of his most influential works was his *Etymologies*. *Etymologies* was a compilation of entries including descriptions of animals in a similar manner as a bestiary, but lacking the moralizing slant of *The Aberdeen Bestiary*.<sup>24</sup> Since *Physiologus* is a “second-century Alexandrian treatise on beasts and their Christian meanings” written long before *Etymologies*, *Physiologus* functioned as the most basic foundation for *The Aberdeen Bestiary* and other second-family bestiaries.<sup>25</sup>

These Second-family bestiaries are considered to be moralizing works, meaning that they provide the theological or moral explanation for the nature of the animals described.<sup>26</sup> The moralizations in Second-family bestiaries stress the most fundamental tenets of Christianity namely, “a belief in God the Father, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Resurrection, and individual salvation.”<sup>27</sup> This underlying purpose in the bestiary of teaching Christian values supports the theory that *The Aberdeen Bestiary*’s original function was to serve as a tool for instructing monks and lay congregations.

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<sup>23</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 37v.

<sup>24</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 31.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

<sup>26</sup> These moralizing bestiaries contrasted significantly in tone and content with the later bestiaries of love that only began to appear during the thirteenth century; Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, Translated by Guy R. Mermier (Lewiston: Queenston: Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), iii.

<sup>27</sup> Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: The Second-family Bestiary*, 21.

According to Willene Clark, forty-nine manuscripts have been identified as Second-family bestiaries, the majority of which originated in England between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>28</sup> As the numbers and quality of surviving English manuscripts show, the Second-family bestiary achieved relative success in England.<sup>29</sup> These English bestiary manuscripts are typified by both “luxurious execution and artistic brilliance,” a level of care and richness that further supports the idea of their appeal.<sup>30</sup> The artistic, highly stylized renditions included in *The Aberdeen Bestiary* created the unique impression that the bestiary made, as did the fact that the majority of the medieval English population had limited knowledge of these beasts, which were known only from “stylized versions carved on provincial church facades and capitals, or in wall paintings.”<sup>31</sup> However, these bestiary images also enhance the meaning of the text by providing information not explicitly expressed in the accompanying text.<sup>32</sup>

This idea that medieval art provided meaning that complemented or supported the text is integral to understanding *The Aberdeen Bestiary* as a source for representations of anti-Semitism. Medieval illustrations function as a sort of text themselves by offering information that reinforces or adds to the message of the corresponding text. Interestingly, this very idea is not simply a modern interpretation of medieval art; it was both recognized and addressed in medieval

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>32</sup> A prime example of manuscript illustrations providing commentary on the accompanying text is the Initial “H” from the *Moralia in Iob* written by Gregory the Great in 1111; Matilde Mateo, “Book Illustrations and Monastic Ideals,” *Romanesque Art* (Syracuse University, October. 27 2011).

Europe. Debra Hassig, in her article “Beauty in the Beasts: A Study of Medieval Aesthetics,” cites Pope Gregory the Great, who stated, “What Scripture is to the educated, images are to the ignorant, who see through them what they must accept; they read in them what they cannot read in books.”<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, she draws on the twelfth-century example of Honorius of Autun “a theologian popular in England...[who] declared that pictures were the ‘literature of the laity’.”<sup>34</sup> Both these quotations demonstrate the idea that medieval illustrations were to be “read” just like their accompanying text. Therefore, medieval images can be seen as more than simply aesthetic contributions, but as a source that conveys allegorical or symbolic messages as well.

For example, a copy of Gregory the Great’s commentary on the Book of Job includes illustrations that both literally depict his message and simultaneously reinforce the monastic ideals of the manuscript’s Cistercian audience.<sup>35</sup> Gregory wrote the *Moralia in Iob* in the sixth century to provide a “reflection on the apparent contradiction between the material success of evil people and the sufferings of the good ones.”<sup>36</sup> In the beginning of the twelfth century, one copy of this text was illustrated to address specifically a Cistercian audience.<sup>37</sup> One

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<sup>33</sup> Debra Hassig, "Beauty in the Beasts: A Study of Medieval Aesthetics," *Anthropology and Aesthetics* 19/20 (1990/1991): 137-161, 141.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Mateo, “Book Illustrations and Monastic Ideals.”

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> The Cistercians were an order of Benedictine monks, who strove to return to the “primitive severity and simplicity of the earlier monastic traditions.” Their first official objectives as an order were drawn up around the year 1101, and by 1113 the Cistercian order had entered into a period of significant and widespread growth; Alice M. Cooke, “The Settlement of the Cistercians in England” *The English Historical Review* 8, no. 32 (Oct. 1893), 625-628, 631.

such illustration is the Initial “I” from Book 21 of Cîteaux’s copy of the *Moralia in Iob* made in 1111.<sup>38</sup> This initial depicts a monk cutting the root of a tree, while a layperson hacks away at the uppermost branches. In her discussion of this image, Matilde Mateo argues that the overall message of this illustration is that the layperson tackles the smaller branches of evil as they come by, while the monk tackles the source or root of evil and is able to eliminate it. However, Mateo argues further that the image also more subtly promotes particular Cistercian ideals of asceticism through the monk’s appearance and clothing, as well as in the way the message itself is represented. Closer inspection shows the monk’s clothing to be severely simple and well worn, complete with tattered edges. This monk thus represents the Cistercian ideals of poverty and asceticism. Furthermore, this illustration depicts a monk engaging in manual labor, which was another important Cistercian ideal.<sup>39</sup> The imagery here clearly provides information and meaning that supplemented what was written in the actual text, and the image thus becomes a separate type of literature in itself.

Since medieval images acted as more than simple embellishments for accompanying texts, it is logical to read *The Aberdeen Bestiary*’s images as representing more than just the animals described in the text. This concept receives further support from Isidore of Seville’s analysis of a medieval image of a beast. Consequently, his *Etymologies* provide insight into medieval understandings of images of beasts as symbolic, rather than literal. To close his

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<sup>38</sup> See Figure 1; “Initial I” in book 21, *Moralia in Iob*, scriptorium de l’abbaye de Cîteaux 1111, Bibliothèque Municipale de Dijon, MS 173, fol. 41.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

section on monstrosities, Isidore writes that, “Other fabulous monstrosities of the human race are said to exist, but they do not; they are imaginary. And their meaning is found in the causes of things, as Geryon, King of Spain, who is said to have had a triple form. For there were three brothers of such harmonious spirit that it was, as it were, one soul in three bodies.”<sup>40</sup> Debra Strickland interprets this passage as Isidore proposing “that monsters function symbolically,” and convey characteristics and ideas through more abstract forms.<sup>41</sup> Thus, if medieval monsters can be seen to function symbolically, *The Aberdeen Bestiary*’s beasts can also be interpreted as functioning symbolically.

In general, there are many instances of medieval art conveying a social or political message. In addressing the use of the “Monstrous Races” in the Middle Ages, Debra Strickland goes further to suggest that, “If the physical forms of the Monstrous Races are assigned symbolic value, it is also possible to read some of them as signs of specific contemporary social or political ideas.”<sup>42</sup> In this way, the *Door of the Lions* from the Cathedral of Toledo provides an excellent example of medieval art conveying a particular political and social message about the Jews. While this portal was produced between 1453 and 1465, a period a few hundred years later than *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, it still demonstrates how art was used to express ideology.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, cited in Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 52.

<sup>41</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 52.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>43</sup> Matilde Mateo, “Art and Ideology,” *Art and Ideology in Medieval Spain* (Syracuse University, November. 30 2010).



Matilde Mateo claims that this portal's outer tympanum expresses an anti-Semitic commentary on the Jews living in Toledo.<sup>44</sup> On the outside of the tympanum there is a depiction of the death, burial, and assumption of the Virgin Mary. In particular, the relief of the burial of the Virgin illustrates the story of how the singing and noise of the burial procession bothered the Jews and caused them to interfere. However, when the Jews attempted to stop the procession, a miracle occurred and their hands became attached to the coffin. In the tympanum relief, the Jews are shown in contemporary medieval outfits complete with the stereotypical Jewish hat and their hands stuck to the Virgin's coffin.<sup>45</sup> The Jews' contemporary dress brings a new layer of modern commentary to the relief. Instead of simply being a rendition of the burial story of the Virgin Mary, this relief becomes an anti-Semitic message to the inhabitants of Toledo concerning the Jews in their midst.

However, this social message becomes even more interesting when compared with the depiction of the Tree of Jesse on the other side of the tympanum, located inside the church. Mateo reads this Tree of Jesse as an image of the "regeneration of the Jewish People."<sup>46</sup> The way in which the tree's vines are depicted suggests that they double as veins. And as these "veins" are wrapped around the Old Testament Jewish figures, the image comes to mean that these Jewish figures are being "injected" with the new blood of Christ.<sup>47</sup> This connection through blood then paints a positive image of Jews as "God's chosen

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid; Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 134.

<sup>46</sup> Matilde Mateo, "Art and Ideology,"

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

people, typological forerunners to Christians,” with the important qualification that their goodness is conditional upon their conversion to Christianity.<sup>48</sup> Thus the outside tympanum depicts anti-Semitism against contemporary Jews, while the inside tympanum shows a respect for Old Jewish figures as fathers of Christianity who are consequently “allowed” a place within the church.

In light of the political and social atmosphere of Spain during the period that produced this portal, these tympanums convey a message encouraging the conversion of Jews in Toledo. During the fifteenth century in Spain there was a great social divide between the Old Christians and the New Christians, or *conversos*, who were recently converted Jews. The Old Christians were unaccepting and suspicious of these new converts. However, the imagery of this portal in Toledo suggests a more accepting message. Since those Jews who were “injected” with the blood of Christ, or converted, were depicted favorably and placed inside the church, the portal can be read as a declaration that regardless of past or background, anyone who converts is an equal Christian.<sup>49</sup>

Since medieval art can certainly convey political or social messages, it is important to look next at how medieval art turns images of Jews into images of beasts like those in *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. Integral to understanding this idea of Jews as beasts, is understanding the common portrayal of Jews as “others.” The Ebstorf Map is a famous example that clearly depicts the Jews being placed with

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<sup>48</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 97.

<sup>49</sup> Mateo, “Art and Ideology.”

“the others,” and firmly outside European society.<sup>50</sup> The Ebstorf Map is a thirteenth-century *mappa mundi*, or world map, and was meant to represent the physical world as perceived by medieval cartographers.<sup>51</sup> This particular map is divided into three general sections: Asia, Europe, and Africa with Jerusalem located at the center. The areas outside of Europe, and particularly Africa, are filled with images of bizarre creatures. However, what is most interesting is the placement of Jews amongst these monstrous races. In the upper left of Figure 3 is an image of two naked men with pointed white caps. This headwear became typical of medieval representations of Jews by the twelfth century, and acts as a sort of identifier in medieval art. The hats vary slightly in style from the “wide...round caps...[to] the most exaggerated types look[ing] like an inverted funnel.”<sup>52</sup> Their typically Jewish hats turn these figures of the naked men into representations of medieval Jews. Therefore, the Jews are depicted as naked, like the other monstrous races, to indicate these races’ shared “otherness” and inferiority.<sup>53</sup>

While this example merely suggests the medieval view of Jews as belonging to the monstrous races, other medieval images make this idea explicit by actually representing Jews as deformed creatures. One such example is an illustration of a Giant and other fantastical creatures from the Westminster Abbey

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<sup>50</sup> See Figures 2 and 3; Matilde Mateo, “The Romanesque World,” *Romanesque Art* (Syracuse University, September. 1 2011).

<sup>51</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 41.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 105.

<sup>53</sup> Mateo, “The Romanesque World.”

Bestiary, which dates from between 1270 and 1290.<sup>54</sup> Notably, both the three faced Giant and the Sciopod below him are prominently wearing the stereotypical “Phrygian hat that also identifies him as a Jew.”<sup>55</sup> And many other similar examples of these images of disfigured Jews exist, such as the bearded Pygmy outfitted with the Jewish hat in the 1260 Rutland Psalter in London.<sup>56</sup> Thus Jews are not simply grouped with the monstrous races, they are depicted as a monstrous race themselves.

More specifically, Jews are represented as actual beasts rather than just deformed humans. The Salisbury Bestiary image of the Manticore provides the final bridge to connect these ideas of Jews in art to *The Aberdeen Bestiary* beasts.<sup>57</sup> The Salisbury Bestiary was produced between 1240 and 1250 in England – a date and location comparable to *The Aberdeen Bestiary*.<sup>58</sup> Its image of the dangerous Manticore depicts the “ferocious, blood-red, high-jumping, man-eating creature with the face of a man, the body of a lion, and a hissing voice.”<sup>59</sup> However, the most striking aspect of the accompanying illustration is the way the man’s head is represented. The bearded face and conical, red hat are representations stereotypical of Jews in medieval art. As this Jewish head on the Manticore is depicted with bared teeth closing viciously around a severed human

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<sup>54</sup> See Figure 4; Giant, Sciopod, Bragmanni, Westminster Abbey Bestiary, York (?), c. 1270-1290. London, Westminster Abbey Library, MS 22, fol. 3 cited in Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 134.

<sup>55</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 134.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 135.

<sup>57</sup> See Figure 5; Manticore. Bestiary. Salisbury (?), c. 1240-50. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 764, fol. 25 (detail); Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 11.

<sup>58</sup> *Aberdeen Bestiary*; Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 11.

<sup>59</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 136.

leg, this image of the Manticore strongly conveys an image of Jews as violent monsters.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, the manner in which the Manticore is depicted both expresses particular anti-Semitic ideas and transforms the accompanying text into anti-Semitic commentary. But more relevantly, this bestiary image of a Jew as a beast indicates that beasts with particular traits in *The Aberdeen Bestiary* can be interpreted as images of medieval Jews as well. Since this Manticore clearly proves that bestiary images can be purposefully endowed with anti-Semitic characteristics, it is logical to conclude that other bestiary images are similarly, if not more subtly, endowed. Therefore, this representation of a Jew as a beast provides an excellent basis for viewing *The Aberdeen Bestiary* beasts as similar expressions of medieval anti-Semitism.

While *The Aberdeen Bestiary* may not be as explicit as the example from Salisbury, the artistic and literary choices behind it can be interpreted as expressive of broader ideological values. More specifically, when the illustrations and text are combined, it becomes clear that *The Aberdeen Bestiary* is a rich source for exploring the mindset of some of medieval England's Christians, particularly in relation to the work's promotion of anti-Semitic themes.<sup>61</sup> Not every entry in *The Aberdeen Bestiary* depicts anti-Semitic themes or represents medieval Jews. However, the entries which portray beasts in a manner that unmistakably reflect the anti-Semitic stereotypes of the period can be understood as images of medieval English anti-Semitism. Thus, these entries allow deeper interpretations of additional anti-Semitic themes and ideas.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 95.

Four anti-Semitic themes stand out in *The Aberdeen Bestiary*: the derogatory view of the Jews based on their role as usurers, the Jews as desecrating devils, the Jews as cunning and deceptive, and the Jews as the enemies of Christ. The following chapter will discuss more specifically how these medieval English anti-Semitic views appear in *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. For, whether explicitly stated or not, *The Aberdeen Bestiary* does more than just reflect anti-Semitic themes. An analysis of the artistic choices behind the manuscript illustrations illuminates numerous bestiary animals as clear representations of medieval Jews and expressions of English anti-Semitism.

Chapter Two: Depictions of Jews as Dangerous Others, Corrupters, and Devils in  
*The Aberdeen Bestiary*

While *The Aberdeen Bestiary* portrays many different visions of English anti-Semitism, the four most basic and frequently used themes are Jews as corrupting usurers, Jews as desecrating devils, Jews as cunningly deceptive, and Jews as the enemies of Christendom. This chapter will address each of these themes and analyze how they are represented by different entries in *The Aberdeen Bestiary*.

The first of these anti-Semitic themes, usury, constitutes the practice of lending money at interest. As this was a practice forbidden to medieval Christians and consequently relegated to Jews, usury became linked with Judaism.<sup>62</sup> This relegation stems from the New Testament, where usury is associated with greed and theft, most notably in the book of Matthew. This book relates the incident of Jesus and the moneylenders in the Temple, which vividly illustrates the basis for Christian contempt of usury. After overturning the coin tables in the synagogue, Jesus declares to the moneylenders, “My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.”<sup>63</sup> This association between handling money and sin acted as a warning for Christians against engaging in the practice of usury – a warning that is repeated in variations throughout the Bible.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Strickland describes usury as the “Jewish crime;” Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews* (Princeton: Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 124.

<sup>63</sup> *Douay-Rheims Bible*. Matthew 21:12-13.

<sup>64</sup> *Douay-Rheims Bible*. Exodus 22:25-27, Leviticus 25:35-37, Deuteronomy 23:19-20, Nehemiah 5:10-11, Psalm 15:5, Proverbs 28:8, Isaiah 24:1-3, Jeremiah

Subsequently, the necessary economic function of lending money, at interest, in the medieval economy fell to the only ones not forbidden to practice usury – the Jews. In fact, around the year 1150 Pope Alexander III officially determined usury to be a sin and “the Church condemned usury outright.”<sup>65</sup> Therefore, because the Jews were the ones to carry out this practice, the entire Jewish community was labeled with the all the stigmas associated with usury.<sup>66</sup>

To understand the different stigmas associated with usury, it is worthwhile to consider the logic behind the medieval view of usury, which is closely related to the logic behind the medieval view of homosexuality. Dennis Romano’s analysis of how one Renaissance fresco illustrates attitudes toward homosexuality reveals this important logical connection. Lorenzetti’s *Sala dei Nove* depicts the consequences of bad and good government respectively, but, according to Romano, also includes a partially concealed image of same-sex seduction.<sup>67</sup> One side of Lorenzetti’s fresco depicts a moral city, busy with the raising of new buildings and full of profitable markets, which illustrates the effects of good government. The other side of the fresco offers a contrasting city under bad

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15:10, Ezekiel 18:7-9, Ezekiel 18:17, Ezekiel 22:12, Matthew 25:14-29, Luke 19:11-26.

<sup>65</sup> Shael Herman, *Medieval Usury and the commercialization of feudal bonds* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1993), 23-24.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 93; According to Shael Herman, Church usury policy focused on Jewish moneylenders even though non-Christians were not included in the Church’s ban on the practice of usury (technical non-Christians such as heretics and Muslims).

<sup>67</sup> This work dates from 1338 and was commissioned for the meeting hall of the government in Siena, Italy; John T. Paoletti and Gary M. Radke, *Art in Renaissance Italy* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2005), 116.



government, rife with economic and moral breakdown.<sup>68</sup> The fact that homosexuality was depicted on the side of the immoral and broken-down society suggests the perceived danger of same-sex seduction.

Homosexuality in medieval and Renaissance Europe was viewed as both a free willed choice to commit unnatural acts and as a rejection of God in “a form of idolatry;” it was believed that homosexuals worshipped each other’s bodies rather than God as a form of paganism.<sup>69</sup> In addition to these convictions, medieval people believed homosexuals were to blame for social and economic disasters, such as famine and disease, which resulted in the loss of families.<sup>70</sup> This allocation of blame derived from the nature of homosexuality as engagement in non-procreative sex. Non-procreative sex was considered dangerous because it did nothing to replenish the population and ensure the perpetuation of society through the continuation of families. Homosexuals were thus called, “murderers of the children.”<sup>71</sup> Consequently, not only were sodomites threatening their own souls by their unnatural behaviors, they were considered a very real threat to the survival of society.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Dennis Romano, “A Depiction of Male Same-Sex Seduction” (research presented at Passions and Transgressions Conference at Syracuse University, 2010), now published in *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 21, no. 1 (January 2012).

<sup>69</sup> Arno Karlen, “The Homosexual Heresy” *The Chaucer Review* 6, no. 1 (Summer 1971), 44-46; Dennis Romano, “A Depiction of Male Same-Sex Seduction in Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s *Effects of Bad Government* Fresco,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 21, no. 1 (January 2012), 2.

<sup>70</sup> Romano, “A Depiction of Male Same-Sex Seduction.”

<sup>71</sup> Ibid; Franco Mormando cited in Romano, “A Depiction of Male Same-Sex Seduction in Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s *Effects of Bad Government* Fresco,” 3.

<sup>72</sup> The work of art Professor Romano focuses on to make his argument concerning homosexuality is from the later Renaissance period. However, I see such a strong

The perceived dangerous and sterile nature of homosexuals' role in medieval society is very similar to the medieval view of usury. In the same way that homosexuals were considered a threat, since their non-procreative sexual practices did not stimulate the perpetuation of society, the Jews were considered a threat because their role as usurers did not contribute to society. In general, the medieval Church followed Aristotle's idea that "money was barren," that "usury [should be] detested above all and for the best of reasons; it [makes] a profit out of money itself, not from money's natural object."<sup>73</sup> In other words, usury creates more money out of money by doing nothing other than letting interest accumulate, rather than requiring real productive labor. Furthermore, St. Thomas Aquinas writes on the "Sin of Usury," that, "to take usury for money lent is unjust in itself, because this is to sell what does not exist, and this evidently leads to...[that] which is contrary to justice."<sup>74</sup> The phrase "to sell what does not exist," implies that usury was associated with a sort of trickery leading to injustice. As seen in Lorenzetti's *Sala dei Nove*, injustice was clearly linked to the degeneracy of civilization.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, usury was believed to be an empty practice that

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similarity to the documented medieval view of usury that I am making the application in order to better explain that view of usury. For more information on medieval views of sexuality and depictions of the homosexual sin in Lorenzetti's fresco, see Romano article "A Depiction of Male Same-Sex Seduction in Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Effects of Bad Government* Fresco."

<sup>73</sup> Herman, *Medieval Usury and the commercialization of feudal bonds*, 23, 69.

<sup>74</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, "On Usury" in *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (London: R. T. Washburne, Ltd., 1918), pp. 330-340, reprinted in Roy C. Cave & Herbert H. Coulson, *A Source Book for Medieval Economic History*, (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1936; reprint ed., New York: Biblio & Tannen, 1965), p. 182, cited in *Medieval Sourcebook*, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/aquinas-usury.asp>.

<sup>75</sup> Romano, "A Depiction of Male Same-Sex Seduction."

created no real progress and worked towards the devolution of medieval society. Therefore, as usury was so closely linked with the Jewish community, the Jews themselves became stereotyped as a barren or degenerate group in medieval society.

By particularly emphasizing the sloth of the owl, *The Aberdeen Bestiary* promotes this anti-Semitic stereotype of the Jews as dangerously “sterile” usurers.<sup>76</sup> The bestiary states,

It [the owl] is classed among the unclean creatures...[and] weighed down with its plumage, as the sinner is with an excess of carnal pleasure and with fickleness of mind; but it is truly hampered by the weight of its sloth. It is hindered by the weight of its idleness and sloth, as sinners are lazy and slothful in acting virtuously...The owl is known, therefore, as a miserable bird, just as the sinner, who behaves in the way we have described above, is a miserable man.<sup>77</sup>

Here, the owl is described as representative of sinners, and in particular those who are “slothful in acting virtuously.”<sup>78</sup> This description of the lazy sinner brings to mind the medieval view of Jews as usurers who did not contribute honestly to society. In this way, sloth, one of the seven deadly sins, can be understood to ideologically resemble sterility. Sterility was one of the most dangerous aspects of homosexuality, which did not allow for the production of children. Similarly, usury was considered to be a slothful practice as it neither created nor contributed

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<sup>76</sup> See Figure 6; *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 50r; Mariko Miyazaki, *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life, and Literature*, 27.

<sup>77</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 50v.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

anything to society; instead usury simply “moved” money around.<sup>79</sup> In this sense then, the sloth involved in usury mirrors the sterile nature of practicing usury. Therefore, the owl’s sloth promotes the stereotype of Jews as dangerous, non-contributing “others” in medieval society.

This medieval view of the Jews, or usurers, as degenerate or socially sterile is evident in the focus on the sterility of crossbreeds in *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. *The Aberdeen Bestiary*’s entry on the leopard describes one such dangerous crossbreed. The text explains the medieval notion that a leopard is the result of a coupling between a lion and a pard – a coupling reflected in the name leopard: *leo*, for lion added to *pard*, a cat-like beast, creates the word “leopard.” However, the bestiary describes this coupling as a more sinister act, stating,

The leopard is the product of the adultery of a lioness with a pard; their mating produces a third species. As Pliny says in his Natural History: the lion mates with the pard, or the pard with the lioness, and from both degenerate offspring are created, such as the mule and the burdon.<sup>80</sup>

This text then implies that because leopards result from an “adulterous” or inherently immoral coupling they were supposed to be degenerate “such as the mule and the burdon.”<sup>81</sup> As the mule is a breed known for its sterility, the word degenerate in this case can be interpreted to imply the sterility of these crossbreeds. This description of infertility is the key to understanding the leopard as an anti-Semitic symbol. As previously discussed, the practice of usury, and by implication the Jews who practiced it, were understood as dangerous, degenerate,

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<sup>79</sup> Herman, *Medieval Usury and the commercialization of feudal bonds*, 69.

<sup>80</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 8v-9r

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

and sterile. Therefore, the inherent evil and sterile nature of the “unnatural” cross-bred species both makes the leopard a representation of the Jews and portrays the Jews as dangerous threats to Christian souls and society alike; this acts as a subtle encouragement of Jewish stereotypes and discrimination.

The subtle anti-Semitism found in *The Aberdeen Bestiary* is merely one artistic representation of a medieval attitude that often resulted in violence. Such violence was illustrated by the York Massacre of 1190 that occurred shortly before the creation of *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, in which discontented and indebted Christians executed the Jews of York and then “destroyed the records of their indebtedness to Jews.”<sup>82</sup> Later in the thirteenth-century, a proclamation declaring the arrest of all Jews in England was issued. Subsequently, two hundred and ninety-three Jews were hanged in London and elsewhere in the country while widespread pillaging and looting of Jewish property occurred.<sup>83</sup>

In the bestiary, the mating between a lion and some other species results in monstrous offspring. This theme can be better understood by first examining the lion’s symbolic definition in the context of *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. The bestiary entry moralizes lions as representations of both God and Christ, a connection that is particularly apparent in the description of the birth of new cubs. The entry states,

The name lion, leo, of Greek origin, is altered in Latin. For in Greek it is leon; it is not a genuine

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<sup>82</sup> Robert C. Stacey, “The Conversion of Jews to Christianity in Thirteenth-Century England,” *Speculum* 67, no. 2 (Apr. 1992), 265, 272-273; Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 140.

<sup>83</sup> Raphael Langham, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology* (Houndsmill: Basingstoke: Hampshire: New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 22.

word, because it is in part corrupted. For the Greek word for lion is translated 'king' in Latin, because the lion is the king of all the beasts... Thus our Saviour, a spiritual lion, of the tribe of Judah, the root of Jesse, the son of David, concealed the traces of his love in heaven until, sent by his father, he descended into the womb of the Virgin Mary and redeemed mankind, which was lost... when a lioness gives birth to her cubs, she produces them dead and watches over them for three days, until their father comes on the third day and breathes into their faces and restores them to life. Thus the Almighty Father awakened our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead on the third day; as Jacob says: 'He will fall asleep as a lion, and as a lion's whelp he will be revived' (see Genesis, 49:9).<sup>84</sup>

Therefore, the bestiary lion is meant to represent God and Christ. Consequently, the lion can be interpreted to represent Christians or Christianity when it is used elsewhere in *The Aberdeen Bestiary*.

Thus when the lion, representing Christ and Christianity, mates outside its species, a defective and unnatural breed results signifying the ungodliness of that coupling. Furthermore, the bestiary states that creatures resulting from “unnatural” cross species breeding, such as the leopard, mule, and crocote, end up being defective in some manner.<sup>85</sup> And even more than being unnatural, some of these crossbreeds are considered actual monsters. In the description of the crocote, the bestiary states,

In a part of Ethiopia the hyena mates with the lioness; their union produces a monster, named crocote. Like the hyena, it too produces men's voices. It never tries to change the direction of its glance but strives to see without changing it. It has no gums in its mouth. Its single, continuous tooth is

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<sup>84</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 7r-7v.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, fol. 8v-9r, 12r.

closed naturally like a casket so that it is never blunted.<sup>86</sup>

Peter the Venerable expresses the idea of Jews as such monsters by declaring his doubt “whether a Jew can be human, for he will neither yield to human reasoning, nor find satisfaction in authoritative utterances,” such as Christian teachings or the Bible.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, bestiary crossbreeds can be read as a derogatory commentary that sends a two-fold message. First, the bestiary emphasizes that Christians mating outside their “species” with people such as the Jews is ungodly. Second and more importantly, the bestiary entries on crossbreeds are themselves both negative representations of medieval Jews, and also portray Jews as defective monsters in a manner similar to the discussion in the first chapter.

This idea of usury rendering medieval Jews as monstrous is also reflected in *The Aberdeen Bestiary*’s entry on the hyena, particularly in its confusing sexuality and gender.<sup>88</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary* states that the gender of the hyena is in constant flux; “Its nature is that it is sometimes male, sometimes female, and it is therefore an unclean animal.”<sup>89</sup> Because the hyena’s gender is constantly changing, it has no one distinct sex. As a result, the hyena essentially becomes a hermaphroditic creature, possessing both genders at once because it possesses neither exclusively. According to Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, “hermaphroditism was interpreted as a form of homosexuality” in the Middle

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, fol. 12r.

<sup>87</sup> Peter the Venerable cited in Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 52.

<sup>88</sup> See Figure 7; *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 11v.

<sup>89</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 11v.

Ages.<sup>90</sup> Consequently the hyena's sexuality can be interpreted as homosexual, and all the previous stigmas attached to medieval homosexuality can be applied to the hyena. However, the hyena is described as a representation of the "sons of Israel...[and] those among us who are slaves to luxury and greed," which brings to mind the role of medieval Jews as usurers.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, the hyena can be understood as an image of medieval Jews rather than homosexuals. Therefore, the hyena becomes a foul symbol of usury, and subsequently a derogatory image of medieval Jews as monsters.

The idea of Jews as inhuman is taken even further by *The Aberdeen Bestiary's* portrayal of medieval Jews as devils. To understand how these crossbreed entries represent the Jews as devils, it is necessary to take a more in-depth look at Jewish-Christian sexual relationships in medieval society. The condemnation of inter-species mating found in the bestiary is a relatively pale shadow compared to the incredibly aggressive discouragement of inter-faith relations in medieval European society. The abhorrence of Jewish-Christian sexual relations stems from long before the creation of *The Aberdeen Bestiary*. For example, in 388 the Christian Emperor Valentinian II determined that even a marriage between these two religions was considered adultery, and a crime punishable by magistrates.<sup>92</sup> In fact, to further decrease the chances of these

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<sup>90</sup> Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, eds., *The Monstrous Middle Ages* (Toronto: Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 12; Debra Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 146.

<sup>91</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 11v.

<sup>92</sup> James A. Brundage, *Law, sex, and Christian society in medieval Europe*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 105; This further supports the idea



couplings, Pope Innocent III issued a decree at the influential Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 to that effect. As stated in the Council's edict, all Jews were to distinguish themselves through their clothing so that no Christian would accidentally mate with that "lesser race" – thus preventing Christians from "excusing themselves in the future for the excesses of such accursed intercourse."<sup>93</sup> The reference to Christians mating with a "lesser race" is highly reminiscent of the bestiary cross breeds that result from lions, representing Christians, mating with lesser or monstrous beasts such as the hyena. The fact that inter-species coupling in *The Aberdeen Bestiary* consistently results in disgraceful degenerates can then be interpreted as a reflection of the church's efforts to extinguish intermingling of Christians and Jews and create a more defined segregation. A Christian mating with a Jew would both be stained by contact with an inferior "race" and would spiritually and socially "condemn" any children from that union, just as the bestiary crossbreeds are "condemned" to be unnatural monsters cursed with degeneracy.

This fear of Jewish sexuality is integral to the medieval stereotype of Jews as desecrating and predatory devils. More specifically, this predatory component turns sexuality into an expression of violence and monstrosity. At the time *The Aberdeen Bestiary* was produced, a common Christian stereotype held that Jews were sexual predators or frequent violators of women.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, overt sexuality in bestiary entries that are veiled depictions of Jews turns those entries into

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of the leopard as a degenerate offspring of Jewish-Christian mating because the leopard was earlier described as the result of an "adulterous" coupling.

<sup>93</sup> Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology*, 147-148.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 147-152.

expressions of Jews as predatory monsters in a way reminiscent of the devil and his associations with sexual depravity.<sup>95</sup>

The hyena's physical representation in the bestiary image is blatantly sexual due to its prominently displayed genitals, and therefore represents Jews in their stereotypical role as sexual predators.<sup>96</sup> In order to grasp the full implications of this imagery in *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, it is useful to contrast the sexuality of the hyena and beaver.<sup>97</sup> Beavers were frequently hunted for their testicles, which were believed to have a distinct medicinal value.<sup>98</sup> According to *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, when being pursued by a hunter the beaver will rip off his own testicles in an extreme act of self-preservation.<sup>99</sup> The bestiary follows this description with the statement that, "every man who heeds God's commandment and wishes to live chastely should cut off all his vices and shameless acts, and cast them from him into the face of the devil."<sup>100</sup> The moralized meaning behind this extreme act of casting off the genitals emphasizes the holiness of chastity and abstinence from sexual vices.<sup>101</sup> In other words, the importance of the beaver's decisive lack of genitals in the bestiary entry symbolizes both purity and Christian virtues. According to Debra Hassig, medieval Christians believed that "ultimate virtue

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<sup>95</sup> Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 199.

<sup>96</sup> See Figure 7; *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 11v; Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology*, 150; Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 153.

<sup>97</sup> See Figure 8. *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 11r.

<sup>98</sup> Debra Hassig, "Sex in the Bestiaries," 77-78.

<sup>99</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 11r.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Debra Hassig, "Sex in the Bestiaries," 77-78.

[was] achieved only through complete denial of sex.”<sup>102</sup> Therefore, it follows that the presence of and emphasis on the genitals in the portrayal of the hyena represents Jews as licentious and lacking both Christianity and virtue.

Since the bestiary imagery of the hyena is so over-sexualized, and sexuality is linked to the absence of Christianity, the hyena becomes a representation of medieval Jews while simultaneously reflecting heightened anti-Semitic stereotypes in England. Consequently, the imagery of the overtly sexual hyena that “inhabits the tombs of dead and feeds on their bodies,” can be seen as an implication of Jews as sexual, and even violent, predators.<sup>103</sup> This sinister symbolism illustrates and reinforces the idea of medieval Jews as depraved devils lacking all Christianity, and in conjunction with the hermaphroditic hyena’s representation of usury, equates Jews with both violent sexuality and financial greed.

Tales casting medieval Jews as violent aggressors against the Christian community are well documented. One common portrayal makes Jews desecrators of the host, or Eucharist. As the Eucharist in thirteenth-century Christianity was believed literally to be the body of Christ, the torturing and defiling of the host by Jews was considered an actual act of aggression against Christ. This concern over Jewish violation of the host reflects the medieval Christian belief that the Jews were the murderers of Christ.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>103</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 11v.

<sup>104</sup> Robert C. Stacey, "From Ritual Crucifixion to Host Desecration: Jews and the Body of Christ," *Jewish History* 12, no. 1 (Spring, 1998): 11-28, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20101321>, 12-13.

The other stereotype of violent Jewish aggression that gained great popularity in medieval England was that Jews performed ritual crucifixions. The majority of accounts on this subject, “date from the period between 1144 and 1270,” and are exemplified by Thomas of Monmouth’s *The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich* written in late-twelfth-century England.<sup>105</sup> Thomas of Monmouth, a Benedictine monk of Norwich, wrote this account to testify to the sainthood and supposed martyrdom of William of Norwich.<sup>106</sup> The story goes that William was kidnapped, tortured, and crucified in the days before Easter by a group of Jews, and then dumped in the woods by his persecutors. While describing the tortures the Jews inflicted on William, Thomas of Monmouth states,

Then the boy, like an innocent lamb, was led to the slaughter...Having shaved his head, they stabbed it with countless thorn-points, and made the blood come horribly from the wounds they made. And cruel were they and so eager to inflict pain that it was difficult to say whether they were more cruel or more ingenious in their tortures...And thus, while these enemies of the Christian name were rioting in the spirit of malignity around the boy, some of those present adjudged him to be fixed to a cross in mockery of the Lord’s passion, as though they would say, “Even as we condemned the Christ to a shameful death, so let us also condemn the

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<sup>105</sup> “From Ritual Crucifixion...” provides another excellent account with “the ritual crucifixion and martyrdom of Adam of Bristol” dating from the mid thirteenth century in England, which includes the particularly gruesome line where the Jew’s wife removes Adam’s nose and lip and declares “Behold how beautifully the God of the Christians smiles!” Furthermore, upon his wife and child desiring to convert, the Jew Samuel supposedly murders them and proceeds to bury Adam underneath the latrine. Ibid, 15-18.

<sup>106</sup> Thomas of Monmouth, Translated by John M. McCulloh, "Thomas of Monmouth, Life and Passion of St. William of Norwich," in *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology* (New York: Garland, 2000), ix.

Christian, so that, uniting the Lord and his servant in a like punishment, we may retort upon themselves the pain of that reproach which they impute to us. Conspiring, therefore, to accomplish the crime of this great and detestable malice, they next laid their blood-stained hands upon the innocent victim.<sup>107</sup>

This passage once again portrays the Jews as murderers of Christ, with William representing Christ's body and sacrifice, and the Jews as the desecrators of the Christian religion.<sup>108</sup>

However, the gruesome and violent nature of the descriptions in *The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich* goes even further, implying that Jews are agents of the devil against Christianity. In the above passage, the Jews are represented as devilish torturers who take delight in acting out their violent hatred for Christians, placing particular emphasis on the ingenuity of their tortures.<sup>109</sup> The Jewish community was commonly regarded as a collection of devils that practiced all sorts of satanic killings, as demonstrated through the torturous

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 520-525.

<sup>108</sup> A contemporary of Thomas of Monmouth describes the story thus, "In his [King Stephen's] time, the Jews of Norwich brought a Christian child before Easter and tortured him with all the torture that our Lord was tortured with; and on Good Friday hanged him on a cross on account of our Lord, and then buried him. They expected it would be concealed, but our Lord made it plain that he was a holy martyr, and the monks took him and buried him with ceremony in the monastery, and through our Lord he works wonderful and varied miracles, and he is called St. William;" *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. Dorothy Whitelock (London, 1961), xvi, 200 cited in Gavin I. Langmuir, "Thomas of Monmouth: Detector of Ritual Murder" *Speculum* 59, no. 4 (Oct., 1984), 820.

<sup>109</sup> Thomas of Monmouth, Translated by John M. McCulloh, "Thomas of Monmouth, Life and Passion of St. William of Norwich, 520-523.

slaughters of children by the Jews in the story of William as well as others.<sup>110</sup> Particularly gruesome medieval rumors concerned the Jews' need for Christian blood. It was believed that Christian blood was a requirement for the enactment of Jewish religious rituals, and especially in the creation of unleavened bread at Passover.<sup>111</sup> And even more remarkable was a medieval belief that Jews needed "a constant supply of Christian blood in order to counteract a continuous hemorrhage with which they were burdened as punishment for spilling Christ's blood, a need they allegedly met by murdering Christians and drinking their blood."<sup>112</sup> Perhaps most pertinent to this examination of *The Aberdeen Bestiary* is the medieval superstition that Jews actually had physical horns and tails. In particular, this myth features prominently in the horned, devilish illustrated depiction of the hyena in *The Aberdeen Bestiary*.<sup>113</sup>

The hyena constitutes the most graphic representation of medieval Jews and anti-Semitic themes in *The Aberdeen Bestiary*.<sup>114</sup> The entry states,

There is an animal called the hyena, which inhabits the tombs of the dead and feeds on their bodies...In its search for buried bodies, the hyena digs up graves. The sons of Israel resemble the hyena...Therefore those among us who are slaves to luxury and greed, are like this brute.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid; Miyazaki, Mariko, "Misericord Owls and Medieval Anti-Semitism," in *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life, and Literature* (New York: Garland, 1999), 33.

<sup>111</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 119.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>113</sup> Debra Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology*, 152. Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 133.

<sup>114</sup> See Figure 7. *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 11v.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, fol. 11v-12r.

Significantly, the text specifically cites hyenas as representations of “the sons of Israel,” a biblical term referring to the ancient Israelites but here referring to Jews.<sup>116</sup> Thus, the bestiary’s gruesome description of the hyena feeding off dead flesh can be interpreted as Jews symbolically feeding off dead flesh.<sup>117</sup> According to Debra Hassig, since these bodies are described as buried in Christian tombs, it can be assumed that the hyenas are actually feeding upon the bodies of dead Christians.<sup>118</sup> Consequently, the hyena’s illustrated depiction and textual description as a desecrator who corrupts and destroys the bodies of Christians clearly reflects the tales of host desecration that expose the idea that Jews desired to corrupt and destroy the “body of Christ.” Therefore, this image translates to a striking expression of Jews as violent defilers of the Christian faith who gain strength from their acts of desecration. The actual portrayal of the hyena in the bestiary’s image features horns and a tail along with prominently displayed genitalia. The hyena’s skeletal horns and tail, coupled with the animal’s unholy act of devouring entombed Christians, turn the hyena into the devil.<sup>119</sup> This depiction clearly emphasizes the hyena as an unholy and unclean being, and by extension, emphasizes the unholy and evil nature of medieval Jews.

The next major anti-Semitic stereotype present in *The Aberdeen Bestiary* is the portrayal of Jews as cunning and deceitful. This stereotype of the deceitful

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, fol. 11v.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Debra Hassig, "Sex in the Bestiaries" in *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life, and Literature* (New York: Garland, 1999), 71-87; This imagery of Jews gaining sustenance and power from the eating of Christians brings back to mind the practice of usury again; Jews growing richer from taking the Christian’s money – one’s means for living.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid; Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 153-154.

Jew is excellently outlined in Thomas of Monmouth's *The Life and Passion of St. William of Norwich*, especially in the descriptions of the deceptive Jewish community that performs a mock crucifixion. In this account, the young boy William is "deluded with cunning wordy tricks" so that "the simple boy was deceived and trusted himself to the man," a Jew intent on religious murder.<sup>120</sup>

Describing an act of even greater deception, Thomas of Monmouth states,

Then the boy, like an innocent lamb, was led to the slaughter. He was treated kindly by the Jews at first, and, ignorant of what was being prepared for him, he was kept till the morrow. But on the next day...the Jew aforesaid suddenly seized hold of the boy William as he was having his dinner and in no fear of any treachery, and illtreated him in various horrible ways.<sup>121</sup>

All these passages depict the Jews attempting to hide behind a façade of innocence, but nonetheless fooling the young Christian boy with a web of false words and actions until it was too late.

This theme of the deceitful Jews also appears in *The Aberdeen Bestiary's* entry for the hyena, which is described as deceitful by nature; by implication, the Jews are deceitful as well. The bestiary states,

First, it [the hyena] stalks the sheepfolds of shepherds and circles their houses by night, and by listening carefully learns their speech, so that it can imitate the human voice, in order to fall on any man whom it has lured out at night. The hyena also [imitates] human vomit and devours the dogs it has enticed with faked sounds of retching.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Thomas of Monmouth, Translated by John M. McCulloh, "Thomas of Monmouth, Life and Passion of St. William of Norwich," 521-522.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, 523.

<sup>122</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 11v.



The idea of sheepfolds and shepherds is strongly reminiscent of Christian allegories used in the Bible, such as in the Book of Peter that states, “For you were as sheep going astray; but you are now converted to the shepherd and bishop of your souls.”<sup>123</sup> Therefore the sheep and shepherds in the bestiary passage can be interpreted as medieval Christians and the Church. As the bestiary hyena represents the Jews, the imagery involved in these descriptions portray Jews as predators who trick innocent and unsuspecting Christians by blending into the accepted Christian society through mimicry. So the bestiary hyena also alludes to the stereotype of Jews as masters of deception, an idea that becomes even clearer in other bestiary entries such as the fox and the weasel.

The behavior of the bestiary’s fox mirrors the tale of William of Norwich, and reflects the same idea of Jews as using deception to lure unsuspecting Christians to their death.<sup>124</sup> Because the bestiary’s description of the fox places such emphasis on deception, and deception is a common anti-Semitic stereotype, the fox becomes a representation of medieval Jews. According to *The Aberdeen Bestiary*,

When it [the fox] is hungry and can find nothing to eat, it rolls itself in red earth so that it seems to be stained with blood, lies on the ground and holds its breath, so that it seems scarcely alive. When birds see that it is not breathing, that it is flecked with blood and that its tongue is sticking out of its mouth, they think that it is dead and descend to perch on it. Thus it seizes them and devours them.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> *Douay-Rheims Bible*, Peter 2:25.

<sup>124</sup> Figure 9. *Ibid*, fol. 16r.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*.

Here the fox pretends to be “dead,” effectively convincing other animals that he is incapable of harm and therefore not a threat. By building upon the idea that the Jew is a master of deception introduced by the bestiary’s hyena, the fox’s deception becomes an allegory for Jews in medieval society. As the fox cunningly cloaks his dangerous intentions from other animals, medieval Jews could be seen blending into society as a hidden menace. In fact, both the hyena and the fox portray the symbolized Jew as a masked danger, a lurking threat waiting to strike. Moreover, the deception that precedes William’s supposed ritualized crucifixion is just like the fox’s deception that precedes its devouring of the birds; as the Jews lure William to his death by disguising their true malicious natures, the fox lures his prey by feigning vulnerability in death. Therefore, the fox in *The Aberdeen Bestiary* not only represents medieval Jews, but also leaves a chilling impression of suspicion and fear of medieval Jews in the minds of Christian readers.

Furthermore, the fox’s deceptive nature is emphasized by the way it “never run[s] in a straight line but twists and turns.”<sup>126</sup> The fox’s twisting motion resembles the twisting and slippery words and character of the Jews as described in the story of William of Norwich. Thomas of Monmouth’s account describes the speaker for the Jewish community persuading William’s mother to allowing the boy to go with him as his “apprentice.” For a good while the mother is able to resist the Jew’s “wordy tricks,” but she is ultimately “seduced by the glitter of money to the lust of gain...and the boy William was given up to the betrayer.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 16r.

<sup>127</sup> Thomas of Monmouth, Translated by John M. McCulloh, "Thomas of Monmouth, Life and Passion of St. William of Norwich," 521-522.

Therefore, the “twists and turns” of the bestiary fox are like the “wordy tricks” of the Norwich Jew and make the bestiary entry an expression of the stereotype of the deceitful Jew who preys upon Christians.

Interestingly, this seduction by glittering gold is also reminiscent of *The Aberdeen Bestiary* entry pertaining to leopards. After a kill, the leopard was said to produce a belch “so sweet that the other beasts [would] come and follow.”<sup>128</sup> The leopard’s seductive method of enticement is like the Jew with his money who again lures Christians to their doom – this time with malicious bribery rather than false manners.

Similarly, *The Aberdeen Bestiary* depicts the weasel as the embodiment of cunning and greed and consequently reflects a powerful anti-Semitic stereotype.<sup>129</sup> The key to understanding the weasel as representative of Jewish cunning and greed is its method of giving birth. The bestiary text specifies that weasels “conceive through the mouth and give birth through the ear”.<sup>130</sup> This seems to be an unnatural and backwards way of producing offspring and brings to mind the unnatural crossbreeds. However, the real message behind this description derives from an analysis of the body parts involved in this alleged birthing process. By examining the statement that weasels “signify [those] who listen willingly enough to the seed of the divine word but...ignore it and take no account of what they have heard,” the conception through the mouth takes on

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<sup>128</sup> Wilma George and William B. Yapp, *The Naming of the Beasts: Natural History in the Medieval Bestiary* (London: Duckworth, 1991), 53.

<sup>129</sup> Figure 10. *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 23v.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 24r.

another meaning.<sup>131</sup> The conception through the mouth represents the Jews receiving or “being fed” the word of God, while giving birth through the ear represents the Jews casting off or ignoring that divine knowledge. This exact sentiment also appears in Peter the Venerable’s treatise *Against the Inveterate Obstinacy of the Jews*. He writes, “How long, wretched ones, will you not believe the truth?...All tongues affirm him; you alone deny him.”<sup>132</sup> In other words, the Jews receive the word of God, yet it passes through and “goes out the other ear”. Therefore, the weasel demonstrates the Christian perception of Jewish disregard for Christianity and its teachings.

This apparently deliberate disdain for Christian values and teachings manifests in the Jew’s practice of usury – the suspicious handling of money and lending at interest. In light of the earlier bestiary entries connected with the condemnation of usury, the weasel can then be seen as reflecting the anti-Semitic stereotypes of wickedness, cleverness, and avarice. At the most basic level, the disregard for Christian scriptures could pertain to heretics in general. However, Peter the Venerable’s vehemence towards the Jews in particular and the weasel’s emphasized characteristics of cunning, deception, and greed indicate that the weasel is actually a derogatory symbol for medieval Jews.

Another entry that illustrates the view of medieval Jews as deceptive is the snake. The snake is commonly associated with dark powers and unsavory,

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Peter the Venerable, *Against the Inveterate Obstinacy of the Jews* cited in Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 98.

slippery qualities, and *The Aberdeen Bestiary* proves no exception.<sup>133</sup> The very first description of the snake in the text mentions the nature of the snake's motion:

The word *anguis* is applied to the entire species of snake, because the snake's body can be folded and bent; as a result, it is called *anguis* because it forms a series of angles, *angulosus*, and is never straight. The snake is also called *coluber*, either because it lives in the shadows, *colere umbras*, or because it wriggles along in a slippery way, in sinuous coils. For anything that slithers when you hold it, like a fish or a snake, is called *lubricus*, 'slippery'. The snake gets its name, *serpens*, because it creeps up under cover, not by visible steps, but crawling along by the tiniest movements of its scales.<sup>134</sup>

This twisting, sinuous, and slippery method of motion is strongly reminiscent of the bestiary description of the fox, which is depicted as “never run[ning] in a straight line but twists and turns.”<sup>135</sup> The fox's constantly winding and tricky path is moralized as denoting the fox's inherently cunning or deceitful nature.<sup>136</sup> Similarly, the crookedness in the snake's path implies that the snake's moralized character is similarly cunning and dishonest.<sup>137</sup> And again as with the fox, the snake's deceitful and suspicious character suggests the stereotypical Jew from the narrative of William of Monmouth who uses his “wordy tricks” against the poor, weak, Christian mother.<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, the bestiary's text describes the

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<sup>133</sup> Figure 11. *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 65v. In particular cases and representations, the snake can also be a symbol for martyrs; Matilde Mateo, *Art and Ideology in Medieval Spain* (Syracuse University, November. 16 2010).

<sup>134</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 65v.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, fol. 16r.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 65v.

<sup>138</sup> Thomas of Monmouth, Translated by John M. McCulloh, "Thomas of Monmouth, Life and Passion of St. William of Norwich," 521-522.

snake as a creature that lives “in the shadows.”<sup>139</sup> This deception or predator-like lurking in the shadows can once again be seen in Thomas of Monmouth’s account of *The Life and Passion of St. William*. Throughout the account, Thomas of Monmouth depicts the Jews as circling predators hiding behind masks or living “in the shadows” of Christian society. Therefore, the bestiary snake can be seen as portraying medieval Jews as deceptive predators in wait for Christians.

The final and most important stereotype in this examination of anti-Semitism in *The Aberdeen Bestiary* is the portrayal of Jews as enemies of Christ. This theme was touched upon during the discussion of host desecration and ritual crucifixion, and is an extension of the anti-Semitic representation of Jews as masters of deception. While the phrase “enemies of the Lord” most obviously refers, in the thirteenth-century, to Saracens and heretics and brings to mind the Crusades, medieval Christians equally cast both Jews and Muslims in this category. This grouping most notably occurred over a hundred years before *The Aberdeen Bestiary* was compiled, in Fulcher of Chartres’ transcription of Pope Urban II’s famous speech at the Council of Clermont in 1095.<sup>140</sup> According to this document, the Pope called for the end of inter-Christian violence and instead advocated a redirection of that violence into what became The First Crusade, declaring the “Turks and Arabs,” or any “despised and base race, which worships demons,” to be “enemies of the Lord.”<sup>141</sup> While this denunciation specifically

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<sup>139</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 65v.

<sup>140</sup> H. E. J. Cowdrey, *Popes Monks and Crusaders* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1984), VII 57.

<sup>141</sup> Fulcher of Chartres, ed., "Speech at Council of Clermont, 1095" *Medieval Sourcebook*, Jan. 20, 1996.

targeted Muslims, the concept was applied to other groups with disastrous results – namely the massacre of the Rhineland Jews in 1096 at the start of the first Crusade.<sup>142</sup> While the official Church response to these attacks against the Jews was overwhelmingly negative, the idea of Jews as enemies of Christ had taken root and began to flourish.<sup>143</sup>

Furthermore, Jews were not only considered devils due to stereotypes of their depraved sexuality, financial greed, and gleeful violence, but were also believed to be the followers of the Antichrist – the ultimate enemy of Christ. In many twelfth-century plays such as the *Play of the Antichrist*, Jews were consistently placed on the side of evil as the Antichrist’s disciples.<sup>144</sup> A segment of the thirteenth-century Chester Whitsun cycle even opens with the Antichrist declaring that he vows to restore his “people of Jewes.”<sup>145</sup> Therefore, the Jews are clearly and specifically represented as enemies of Christ, and by extension, of medieval Christian society.

An explicit and graphic representation of the Jews as enemies of Christendom is *The Aberdeen Bestiary*’s description of the snake, particularly in conjunction with the accompanying illustration that depicts the snake strangling an elephant.<sup>146</sup> Here, the inclusion of the elephant is the most significant point.

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<sup>142</sup> Helen Nicholson, *The Crusades* (Westport, Connecticut: London: Greenwood Press, 2004), 7. The Jews were seen as the original enemies of Christ as they “not only rejected Christ, [but] they turned aggressively against him...[and] murdered him;” Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 99.

<sup>143</sup> H. E. J. Cowdrey, *Popes Monks and Crusaders* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1984), VII 57-59.

<sup>144</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 220.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> See Figure 11; *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 10v.

*The Aberdeen Bestiary* describes elephants as intelligent creatures that carry on chaste monogamous relationships; “They never fight over female elephants, for they know nothing of adultery.”<sup>147</sup> This description echoes the Church’s definition of a good Christian marriage as described by St. Augustine,

That chastity in the married state is God’s gift, is shown by the most blessed Paul, when, speaking on this very subject, he says: "But I would that all men were even as I myself: but every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that." Observe, he tells us that this gift is from God; and although he classes it below that continence in which he would have all men to be like himself, he still describes it as a gift of God.<sup>148</sup>

Moreover, according to the bestiary, elephants are unable to bend their knees, which results in the problem that a fallen elephant cannot rise again without aid. Even with the efforts of all the other grown elephants in the group, the fallen elephant cannot be righted. It is not until the lone baby elephant attempts to lift the fallen creature that the elephant is able to get to its feet:

As the elephant falls, it trumpets loudly; at once a big elephant goes to it but cannot lift it. Then they both trumpet and twelve elephants come, but they cannot lift the one who has fallen. Then they all trumpet, and immediately a little elephant comes and puts its trunk under the big one and lifts it up.<sup>149</sup>

The fact that the smallest and most innocent member is the only one able to right the fallen elephant symbolizes the ability of the peaceful Christ to save the fallen

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<sup>147</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 10v.

<sup>148</sup> St. Augustine, “On Marriage and Concupiscence” cited in *St. Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, Translated by Peter Holmes, Robert Ernest Wallace and Benjamin B. Warfield. Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Ser. 1, Vol. V (New York, 1893) cited in *Medieval Sourcebook*, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/aug-marr.asp>.

<sup>149</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 10v.



mankind.<sup>150</sup> Additionally, elephants are cited in the bestiary as representing Adam and Eve before they were introduced to sin by a serpent.<sup>151</sup> The elephant represents the ideal Christian, and the bestiary illustration chooses to depict a snake strangling Christianity. More explicitly, the snake is referred to as the “arch-enemy” of the elephant; a clear reference to the idea of the Jews as the “enemies of the Lord.”<sup>152</sup> Therefore, the artistic choice to illustrate the entry for the snake by showing it strangling an elephant becomes a commentary on the Jew’s perceived desire to choke Christianity out of existence. Once again, this bestiary entry represents the stereotype of medieval Jews as both spiritual and physical threats to Christianity.

*The Aberdeen Bestiary*’s salamander is similarly representative of the perceived Jewish threat to Christian society. The salamander is not only analogous to the snake in physical characteristics, but also in its textual and ideological representation.<sup>153</sup> The text states that the creature’s most powerful weapon is its deadly poison – evidently the strongest poison in the animal kingdom. The passage relates that if a salamander crawls into a tree, “it poisons all the apples and kills those who eat them.”<sup>154</sup> This phrasing immediately brings to mind the biblical story of Adam and Eve, where Eve was tempted to eat the fruit by a serpent. The poisoned fruit in the bestiary description then can be seen

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<sup>150</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 10r; Hassig, Debra. *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 130.

<sup>151</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 10r; Hassig, Debra. *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology*, 130-131.

<sup>152</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 10r; Fulcher of Chartres, ed., "Speech at Council of Clermont, 1095."

<sup>153</sup> Figure 12; *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 70r.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, fol. 69v.

to represent the forbidden fruit that when eaten poisoned the perfection of mankind, resulting in the banishment and subsequent mortality of Adam and Eve.<sup>155</sup> The death that results from eating apples poisoned by the salamander reflects Adam and Eve's punishment, mortality. Furthermore, the bestiary states that the salamander "can exist in the midst of flames."<sup>156</sup> This description of living among the flames also brings to mind an image of devilry and can be related to the idea of the Jews as both devils and followers of the Antichrist. Thus the serpent, and by extension the salamander, become representations of medieval Jews and portray Jews as a poisonous presence in Christian society.<sup>157</sup>

*The Aberdeen Bestiary* expands upon this idea of Jews as a religious and societal poison in the entry for the owl.<sup>158</sup> The actual name given to the owl in the bestiary is *bubo*, which can also be defined as the swelling of the lymph nodes due to disease or plague.<sup>159</sup> Although the most famous manifestation of this disease is the later outbreaks of the Bubonic or Black Plague in the mid-fourteenth century, plague had been intermittently ravaging Europe since perhaps as early as the sixth century.<sup>160</sup> So the term *bubo* in the bestiary can be seen to indicate disease and death. Therefore, through this linguistic connection the owl becomes a symbol of disease and poison. Then by using the connection between

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<sup>155</sup> *Douay-Rheims Bible*. Genesis 3.

<sup>156</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 70r.

<sup>157</sup> "Medieval Christians believed they were also victims of conspiracies in the here-and-now, as accusations were made against Jews...of attempting to destroy Christendom through large-scale poisoning plots." Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 233.

<sup>158</sup> Figure 6. *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 50r.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*; Joseph Patrick Byrne, *The Black Death*, (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2004), 1-5.

<sup>160</sup> Byrne, *The Black Death*, 1-5.

Judaism and poison already established by the analysis of the salamander, the bestiary owl could now be seen to represent the same stereotype and fear of the poisonous Jews.

However, as a more convincing argument, the term *bubo* relating to a plague-like infection can also be symbolically interpreted as heresy. Caesarius of Heisterbach, a well-known and high-ranking Cistercian author of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries whose works certainly reached Cistercian houses in England, wrote on this subject of heresy as a disease.<sup>161</sup> In reference to the presence of Albigensian heretics in France Caesarius states that, “The errors...spread to such an extent that in a short time it had infected more than a thousand towns, and if it had not been cut back by the swords of the faithful I think it would have corrupted the whole of Europe.”<sup>162</sup> This passage clearly speaks of heresy as a very real threat and a deadly infection that had to be exterminated for the survival of Christendom. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 condemned “all heretics under whatever names they may be known, for while they have different faces they are nevertheless bound to each other by their tails”<sup>163</sup> However, this reference to heretics having demonic figurative “tails” again brings to mind the Jews who were stereotyped as devils with physical tails, as shown graphically in the bestiary’s hyena illustration. And the statement that heretics have “different faces” is also reminiscent of the stereotypical idea of Jews as hiding behind masks

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<sup>161</sup> Matilde Mateo, “The Cistercian Reaction,” *Romanesque Art* (Syracuse University, October 20, 2011).

<sup>162</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, "Medieval Heresies," cited in *Medieval Sourcebook*, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/caesarius-heresies.html>.

<sup>163</sup> H. J. Schroeder, trans., "Fourth Lateran Council: Canon 3 on Heresy 1215," *Medieval Sourcebook*, Jan. 20, 1996.

in Christian society. Therefore, the owl represents plague and heresy and attaches these superstitious stereotypes to medieval Jews.

The theme of heresy is most obviously demonstrated in the fact that this creature “shuns the light and cannot bear to see the sun.”<sup>164</sup> Historically the light, or the sun, signifies both Christ and Christianity in general.<sup>165</sup> Therefore, the owl’s shunning of the light represents the Jews’ shunning of Christianity and the Word of God. *The Aberdeen Bestiary* claims “This bird symbolises the Jews who, when the Lord our Saviour came to save them, rejected him, saying: 'We have no king but Caesar', while the Gentiles accepted Christ as their Lord.”<sup>166</sup> This quotation not only illustrates the Jews turning away from Christ and Christianity, but the Jews rejecting the “truth” in favor of an earthly power.<sup>167</sup> This earthly power can be equated to the power of money, again recalling the stereotype of Jewish avarice. Consequently, the owl embodies the Jewish rejection of the Christian faith as well as the Jewish lust for earthly gains.

The themes and commentaries in *The Aberdeen Bestiary* certainly did not create the anti-Semitism so entrenched in medieval English society, but they reflected the anti-Semitic climate already in existence. As this bestiary was a product of medieval England, the strength of the anti-Jewish portrayals in *The Aberdeen Bestiary* demonstrate the level of anti-Semitism already present in England necessary to inspire such representations. Since the relationship between

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<sup>164</sup> Mariko Miyazaki, *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life, and Literature*, 27.

<sup>165</sup> David Fideler, *Jesus Christ, sun of God: ancient cosmology and early Christian symbolism*, (Wheaton: Quest Books, 1993), 373.

<sup>166</sup> *Douay-Rheims Bible*, John 19:15; *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 51r.

<sup>167</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 137.

literature and society is not stagnant, the depictions in *The Aberdeen Bestiary* then demonstrate a potential for this bestiary to act as a tool for perpetuating and strengthening medieval English anti-Semitism. As Debra Strickland comments, “the Imaginary Jew came to represent everything medieval Christians feared or doubted about their own religion...Virtually all medieval anti-Jewish images function on the broadest level as a continual warning to Christendom against the...Jewish influence in their midst.”<sup>168</sup> Consequently, *The Aberdeen Bestiary*’s texts and illustrations both reflect and promote an image of Jews as deceptive, greedy, devils, and poisonous “others.” Clearly *The Aberdeen Bestiary* fits into the category of medieval art that provides “a warning about the dangers of the Jews and their associated sins to Christian society.”<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 141.

Chapter Three: Depictions of Medieval French Jews in *Le Bestiaire* and the  
Insistence on Conversion

The focus of this chapter is the French bestiary, *Le Bestiaire*, attributed to the medieval French author Pierre de Beauvais. Like *The Aberdeen Bestiary* discussed at length in the previous two chapters, *Le Bestiaire* provides rich material for analysis. Examining a number of key entries shows that *Le Bestiaire* clearly represents medieval French anti-Semitic stereotypes and sentiments.

Pierre de Beauvais, also first referred to as Pierre le Picard after the province of Picardy located in the northeast of France, was renamed Pierre de Beauvais in 1892 for the more specific town of Beauvais in Picardy.<sup>170</sup> While there is little information about Pierre de Beauvais, a number of works besides *Le Bestiaire* are attributed to him, including a number of saints' lives.<sup>171</sup> Although *Le Bestiaire* has long been attributed to Pierre de Beauvais, it is now believed that it was most likely not written by this medieval French author.<sup>172</sup> Regardless of this controversy, *Le Bestiaire* is believed to have originated in the northeast region of France.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, Translated by Guy R. Mermier (Lewiston: Queenston: Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), xii.

<sup>171</sup> *Vie de saint Eustache, Vie de saint Germer, Vie de saint Josse, Mapemonde, La Diète du corps et de l'âme, L'Oeuvre quotidienne, Les Trois Mansions de l'homme, Les Trois Maries, Le Bestiaire* (short and long versions), *L'Olympiade, Turpin, La Translation et les Miracles de Saint-Jacques*; Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> The facts concerning the author of *Le Bestiaire* remain in question; Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.; , The region of northern France was a vastly different cultural area than the "heretical" south of France known as Languedoc; John M. O'Brien, "Jews and Cathari in Medieval France," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 10, no. 2 (Jan. 1968), 215.

*Le Bestiaire* is comparable to *The Aberdeen Bestiary* in both era and form; both date from the beginning of the thirteenth century and are classified as second family bestiaries, meaning they derive from the Latin *Physiologus*.<sup>174</sup> However, *Le Bestiaire* is more explicit about this connection – almost every entry begins with or includes the phrase “Physiologus says...”<sup>175</sup> However, like *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, *Le Bestiaire* is a moralizing bestiary and acted as “didactic treatises teaching moral or religious lessons.”<sup>176</sup>

The content of *Le Bestiaire* is very similar to the three other famous and roughly contemporary French bestiaries. The earliest of these four is the Bestiary of Philippe de Thaon dating from the mid-twelfth-century. Next is the Bestiary of Gervaise from the beginning of the thirteenth century, and the Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc de Normandie dating from the middle of the thirteenth century.<sup>177</sup> Of these four, only Pierre de Beauvais’ Bestiary is not written in verse or rhymed lines. Also, *Le Bestiaire* is quite unusual in that there are two versions of this bestiary, a short version made up of thirty-eight chapters and a longer, expanded version containing seventy-one chapters.<sup>178</sup> There is speculation concerning which version was the original, and this is a question that has yet to be

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<sup>174</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, x-xi; Florence McCulloch claims that both versions of *Le Bestiaire* were produced sometime before 1218; Florence McCulloch, *Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 66.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid*, 27, 33, 39, 45, 51, 57, 69, 75, 79, 85, 89, 95, 101, 107, 113, 117, 123, 135, 153, 169, 175, 181, 203.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid*, iii.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, x.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*, x.

answered.<sup>179</sup> However, this study will focus on the shorter, thirty-eight chapter version of *Le Bestiaire*.

Unlike *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, *Le Bestiaire* does not use illustrations to enhance the textual message. However, this absence is not detrimental to understanding *Le Bestiaire* as a representation of medieval French Jews and the accompanying anti-Semitic stereotypes. While it was necessary to read the illustrations of *The Aberdeen Bestiary* in addition to the text in order to understand particular entries as representations of medieval Jews, the text of *Le Bestiaire* is sufficiently explicit to accomplish the same effect unaided.

As in *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, there are a number of particular anti-Semitic themes present in *Le Bestiaire*. The four most frequent and intriguing themes are the Jews as servants of avarice, the Jews as sexual devils, the Jews as desecrators of Christianity, and the Jews as “lost” or “stray” Christians. Besides these four themes, there is a further emphasis on encouraging the conversion of Jews to Christianity that runs throughout *Le Bestiaire* that is absent in *The Aberdeen Bestiary*.

As established in the previous chapter, the Jews of Europe had been irrevocably associated with the practice of usury, which Christian doctrine viewed as a sin.<sup>180</sup> As usury is the practice of lending money at interest, it was viewed as the creation of more money out of the original amount without any real labor. Since usury entails the collection or even hoarding of money, it is therefore also

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid, x-xi.

<sup>180</sup> Shael Herman, *Medieval Usury and the commercialization of feudal bonds* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1993), 23-24; See Chapter Two, 17-26.



imbued with the sin of avarice, or greed. Consequently, according to medieval thought, “Avarice, the pursuit of wealth for its own sake, could divert a person’s consciousness from God, its proper focus. Usury, the lending of money or goods at an interest, was considered a form of avarice, and was seen as making a profit out of the need of another person.”<sup>181</sup> Therefore, as Jews became synonymous with usurers, medieval Jews were branded with the stigma of avarice.<sup>182</sup>

This idea of medieval Jews as the perpetrators of avarice through their practice of usury is clearly reflected in the entries of *Le Bestiaire*. As part of the description of the hyena, *Le Bestiaire* states that,

You, Christian, whoever you are, if there is avarice in you, know that avarice is the root of all evils according to the Apostle who says: “Those who serve avarice can be compared to this unclean beast because they are neither men nor women, neither faithful nor unfaithful, but they are like those about whom Solomon says: “A man of double mind is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8) like the hyena who is neither man nor woman. Our Lord said to men like this: ‘You cannot serve both God and the devil’ (Matt. 6:24).<sup>183</sup>

As usurers, the Jews would be viewed as “those who serve avarice,” and therefore, according to this text, they were comparable to unclean beasts that serve the devil rather than God. Therefore, this text tells the reader to compare the Jews to the hyena and consequently to interpret this entry as a representation of and commentary on medieval Jews. Furthermore, the phrase that “avarice is the

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<sup>181</sup> Josua Rossoux, “Business Ethics: Where Have All the Christians Gone?” *Journal of Business Ethics* 13, no. 7 (July, 1994), 558.

<sup>182</sup> Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews* (Princeton: Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 142.

<sup>183</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, 101.

root of all evils” then becomes a powerful condemnation of the Jews and implies that they, as servants and representations of avarice, are in fact the greatest evil and the most fundamental problem.<sup>184</sup>

This premise of Jews as “the root of all evils” depicted here in *Le Bestiaire* is a sentiment expressed in many other northern French medieval sources. One such example is a Psalter originating in northern France and dating from the early thirteenth century.<sup>185</sup> This Psalter depicts two contrasting scenes, the Virgin and child in heaven and sinners being burned in hell where even kings and monks, identified by their crowns and tonsured heads, are included. The top scene is the traditional representation of the enthroned Madonna and child accompanied by angels.<sup>186</sup> However, the bottom scene of sinners being thrown into a cauldron by devils places special emphasis on the Jews.<sup>187</sup> Through an examination of the figure of the sinner located in the center front of the cauldron in hell, it becomes clear that this figure is wearing both the “soft pointed hat” typical to medieval renderings of contemporary Jews and a moneybag that hangs around the neck. The symbolism of the moneybag is a common denotation for greed in medieval art, and is frequently seen on figures that are part of scenes of hell and punishment.<sup>188</sup> However, the moneybag around the neck is a symbol offering a more specific viewpoint concerning Jews than just associations of greed – Debra

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> See Figure 13.

<sup>186</sup> Matilde Mateo, “Romanesque Sculpture,” *Romanesque Art* (Syracuse University, Sept. 15 2011).

<sup>187</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 124.

<sup>188</sup> Matilde Mateo, “The Protagonists: The Artists,” *Romanesque Art* (Syracuse University, October. 11 2011).

Strickland declares it is “a stark contemporary reference to the supposedly “Jewish crime” of usury.”<sup>189</sup> Consequently, as this front central figure represents a Jew, this figure’s prominent placement amongst the other sinners makes “the Jew...the focus of the hell scene.”<sup>190</sup> Strickland further claims that this focus is emphasized by the Jewish figure’s placement directly above the gaping monster’s mouth and on the same vertical axis as the Virgin. Strickland views the positioning on the axis as “a stark contrast...from the blessed to the damned.”<sup>191</sup> As the focus of hell and the sinners, this placement of the figure of the Jew can be interpreted as a representation of Jews as the focus, or “root,” of evil. This very idea of the Jews as the source of avarice and evil evident in this work is similarly expressed in the text of *Le Bestiaire*.

The damnation and wickedness of those who practice usury, and consequently promote avarice also appears in the entry for the whale in *Le Bestiaire*. The text begins with the description of the whale appearing as an island to sailors, who then tie their ships to the whale only to be pulled down to the depths of the ocean.<sup>192</sup> In this case, the whale does not represent the Jews but rather the devil. In this entry it is the *sailors* who represent the Jews. This becomes clear in *Le Bestiaire*’s moralization of the whale that states,

In the same way [as the sailors] are killed those who do not believe in God and who do not know the tricks of the devil. They are killed like those who put their hope in the devil and who dedicate themselves to his works, just like those who tied

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<sup>189</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 124.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, 143.

their ship to the beast, they are plunged into the eternal fire of hell.<sup>193</sup>

The earlier entry concerning the hyena makes clear that Jews in *Le Bestiaire* figure as the promoters of avarice through their practice of usury and therefore as servitors of the devil. Therefore, the sailors “who dedicate themselves to his [the devil’s] works” represent the Jews who serve the devil through usury.<sup>194</sup>

Consequently, because the Jews in the entry are equated to the sailors who put their faith in the false land of the whale, it is the Jews who are “plunged into the eternal fire of hell.”<sup>195</sup> Thus, *Le Bestiaire* not only promotes the image of Jews as evil usurers but also condemns them in particular to hell for their sins.

*Le Bestiaire* combines these textual representations of the condemned usurer with other anti-Semitic ideas, making the representations even more sinister. For example, the entry for the ibis connects avarice and monetary gain with a rejection of Christianity in a way that mirrors the betrayal and crucifixion of Christ. In the entry for the ibis, *Le Bestiaire* states that “if you refuse to enter into the high waters in order to get spiritual food, then you will become fat from the dirty corpses and from the stinking carrion...These are the carnal and deadly foods by which unfortunate souls are nourished.”<sup>196</sup> The first part of this statement clearly references a refusal of baptism. Baptism in the medieval Christian Church was the “ritual washing...for the remission of sins in preparation for one who was to come with apocalyptic judgment,” and a

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, 79.

sacrament of the medieval Catholic Church that acted as a sort of “rite of membership – the ordinary means by which one becomes a member of the Church, the Body of Christ, the people of God of the new Covenant.”<sup>197</sup>

Therefore, since the Jews did not accept Christ they were seen as having rejected Christ, Christianity, and the sacrament of baptism. So the textual reference to the refusal to enter the waters that contain spiritual food, or Christian knowledge, offers an unmistakable reference to the Jews’ refusal to be baptized or converted into the Christian Church.

Because the initial idea in the ibis entry represents the Jews’ refusal of baptism, the entire entry can be understood as a depiction of medieval Jews and to present the idea of the Jews as amoral and avaricious. Because Jews reject entering the “high waters,” *Le Bestiaire* claims that they will “become fat from the dirty corpses and from the stinking carrion.”<sup>198</sup> The implication of the imagery used here is that as the ibis gains sustenance from corpses, the Jews feed on the flesh or substance of others.<sup>199</sup> According to Canon 67 of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, “The more the Christians are restrained from the practice of usury, the more are they oppressed in this matter by the treachery of the Jews, so

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<sup>197</sup> Bryan D. Spinks, *Early and medieval rituals and theologies of baptism: from the New Testament to the Council of Trent* (Aldershot, England: Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), xi-xii.

<sup>198</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, 79.

<sup>199</sup> This idea of the Jews feeding off corpses is also related to the discussion of blood libel briefly mentioned later in this chapter as part of the larger discussion of host desecration.

that in a short time they exhaust the resources of the Christians.”<sup>200</sup> Here the draining of resources from Christians is strikingly similar to the imagery of the ibis draining the bodily resources from flesh of the corpses.<sup>201</sup> Therefore, the parasitic imagery in the entry for the ibis becomes a commentary on the usurers or Jews maliciously gaining money and power from others in medieval society.

However, the rejection of baptism for monetary gain illustrated in *Le Bestiaire* leads to another image of the Jews where the stereotype of greed turns the Jews into Christ-killers. In the New Testament, Christ is betrayed by Judas for the sum of thirty pieces of silver. The book of Matthew states,

Then went one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, to the chief priests, And said to them: What will you give me, and I will deliver him unto you? But they appointed him thirty pieces of silver... Then Judas, who betrayed him [Christ], seeing that he was condemned, repenting himself, brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and ancients, Saying: I have sinned in betraying innocent blood. But they said: What is that to us? Look thou to it. And casting down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed: and went and hanged himself with an halter.<sup>202</sup>

Here Judas betrays Christ for worldly gains, and in particular for money.

Similarly, the Jews as alluded to in the ibis entry reject Christianity and “grow

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<sup>200</sup> H. J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937). pp. 236-296 cited in *Medieval Sourcebook*, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.asp>.

<sup>201</sup> While the ibis feeds off corpses in *Le Bestiaire*'s entry and medieval Jews were viewed as feeding off the resources of the Christian community, these two ideas are easily equated because both involve a parasitic draining of assets: a physical draining in the case of the ibis and a financial draining in the case of medieval Jews.

<sup>202</sup> *Douay-Rheims Bible*, Matthew 26: 14-15; *Douay-Rheims Bible*, Matthew 27:1-5.

fat” off society rather than participate in baptism and Christianity. As discussed by Debra Strickland, the episode of Judas’ betrayal of Christ was “an ugly point of comparison that supposedly proved the malicious intentions of Jewish moneylenders, who loved money more than anything, as demonstrated by the one who sold out Christ.”<sup>203</sup> Therefore, as the ibis chooses to avoid the waters of baptism and instead prefers to “grow fat” off corpses, Judas rejected Christ to grow rich. Through this comparison, the ibis entry then suggests that since the Jews serve avarice over Christianity their avarice also denotes the Jews as the betrayers of Christendom – the devils who murdered Christ.

The next theme prevalent in *Le Bestiaire* is the condemnation of Jews as devils, defined as such by their sexual depravity and violence against Christianity, with a particular emphasis on their alleged sexuality. The question and threat of Jewish sexuality was a great concern for medieval Christians. In fact, the subsequent fate of death and damnation in store for any participant in a Judo-Christian sexual union is the subject of numerous medieval texts and stories, including the thirteenth-century Caesarius of Heisterbach’s *Dialogus miraculorum*.<sup>204</sup> However, these predictions of doom were not limited to representations in medieval texts and images. According to Debra Hassig, by “medieval law, sex between a Christian and a Jew was tantamount to bestiality and punishable by death... a common punishment was to burn or bury the

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<sup>203</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 142.

<sup>204</sup> Ivan G. Marcus, “Jews and Christians Imagining the Other in Medieval Europe,” *Prooftexts* 15, no. 3 (Sept. 1995), 217-223.

offenders alive.”<sup>205</sup> Concerns over these forbidden sexual liaisons indeed led to specific measures being put in place by the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. Canon 68 of this Council decreed that both Jews and Saracens were commanded to distinguish themselves “in the eyes of the public from other peoples through the character of their dress,” so as to prevent any accidental inter-religious mating.<sup>206</sup> The level of perceived sexual threat posed by medieval Jews supports the idea that this stereotype appears reflected in the entries of *Le Bestiaire*.

This anti-Semitic stereotype of predatory sexuality is also depicted in the entry for the ibis. *Le Bestiaire* states that,

And if you refuse to enter into the high waters in order to get spiritual food, then you will become fat from the dirty corpses and from the stinking carrion about which the Apostle says: “The works of the flesh are plain: which are they?: fornication, lust, drunkenness, avarice, covetousness” (Gal. 5:19-21). These are the carnal and deadly foods by which unfortunate souls are nourished to suffer pain.<sup>207</sup>

By refusing the baptism and spirituality offered by the waters, the ibis is then forced to serve the works of the flesh instead. These “work[s] of the flesh” are reflected by the ibis literally feeding off of flesh for sustenance, implying that the Jews are sustained by “flesh” rather than God.<sup>208</sup> The definition of the flesh is then more specifically outlined as, “fornication, lust, drunkenness, avarice, covetousness, etc.” *Le Bestiaire* already has linked avarice to representations of

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<sup>205</sup> Debra Hassig, “Sex in the Bestiaries” in *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life, and Literature* (New York: Garland, 1999), 74.

<sup>206</sup> Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary*.

<sup>207</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, 79.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*



medieval Jews. However, this passage introduces the elements of fornication and lust into the definition of the flesh, a definite sexual element has been added. In viewing the ibis as a representation of the medieval Jew, this passage now more explicitly ascribes a stereotype of the Jews as sexual sinners – creatures of fornication and lust. Therefore, this representation reflects the concern over sexual relationships expressed by the Fourth Lateran Council, and further transforms the medieval Jew into a maliciously sexual figure.

This concern over forbidden sexual relations between Jews and Christians is further emphasized in *Le Bestiaire*'s discussion of the hyena, which, as in *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, is identified as representing “the children of Israel.”<sup>209</sup> The entry begins by stating that “There is an animal which is called the hyena. The Law forbids us to eat of its meat because it is a dirty beast (Lev. 11:27).”<sup>210</sup> If we again view the act of eating as a metaphor for sexual relations, this passage becomes another warning against the “prohibited intercourse” between Jews and Christians.<sup>211</sup> Most significantly, in this scenario the Jew is specified as the “dirty beast” that is forbidden to Christians. The reason given by *Le Bestiaire* for its depiction of the hyena as a dirty animal is that it exhibits the behavior of both genders. This hermaphroditism turns the hyena into a figure outside the realm of normality.<sup>212</sup> Hermaphrodites were commonly depicted as among the “monstrous

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>211</sup> Fourth Lateran Council, Canon 68 cited in Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary*.

<sup>212</sup> Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, eds., *The Monstrous Middle Ages* (Toronto: Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 14-15.

racess,” a classification that also included heretics and Jews.<sup>213</sup> Therefore, the hermaphroditic nature of the hyena aids in characterizing the Jews as more monstrous than human. Combined with the idea of Jews serving the devil through avarice and “works of the flesh,” this additional interpretation depicts medieval Jews as terrifying sexual monsters working against both virtue and Christianity.<sup>214</sup>

The next prominent theme present in *Le Bestiaire* concerns the Jews as desecrators of Christianity. The clearest example of the medieval Christian fear of desecrating Jews is the numerous stories of host desecration that circulated throughout medieval Europe. Like the tales of ritual crucifixion exemplified by Thomas of Monmouth’s *The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich* discussed in Chapter Two, tales of host desecration elaborated on an image of medieval Jews as violent aggressors against Christianity.<sup>215</sup> In the medieval Church, the host, or the Eucharist, was believed literally to transform into the body of Christ during the Mass through the process of transubstantiation – the bread becoming the body and the wine becoming the blood of Christ.<sup>216</sup> In fact, during the twelfth century Christ’s body was considered to be present in three different forms as “the body of Christ in human form, the body of Christ in the Sacrament [of the Eucharist], and the body of Christ in the church.”<sup>217</sup> Consequently, the Eucharist came to play the role of Christ, symbolically

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<sup>213</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 44, 187-88, 203.

<sup>214</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, 79.

<sup>215</sup> See Chapter Two, 29-33.

<sup>216</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 116.

<sup>217</sup> Alger of Liege cited in Robert C. Stacey, "From Ritual Crucifixion to Host Desecration: Jews and the Body of Christ," *Jewish History* 12, no. 1 (Spring, 1998): 11-28, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20101321>, 12.

allowing the biblical story of the Jews as Christ-killers to be “updated” through a new role imposed on the Jews as host desecrators; as the biblical Jews had tortured and murdered the “historical body” of Christ, medieval Jews supposedly tortured and “murdered” the Eucharistic body of Christ.<sup>218</sup> In these stories of host desecration, the Jews would first torture and then destroy stolen hosts in a modernized crucifixion story.<sup>219</sup>

This idea of an “updated” torture and murder of Christ can be clearly seen in an image of the Crucifixion found in *Madame Marie’s Book of Images* dating from 1300 in France.<sup>220</sup> At first glance, this image displays the traditional biblical subject matter of the crucified Christ surrounded by the two crucified criminals.<sup>221</sup> However, also included is the sponge-bearer described in the Book of Matthew as “running [he] took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar; and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. And the others said: Let be, let us see whether Elias [the sponge-bearer] will come to deliver him. And Jesus again crying with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.”<sup>222</sup> An initial interpretation of this text suggests that the sponge-bearer’s action was one of mercy. However, in the Middle Ages this “act of giving the vinegar took on symbolic significance as the last “torture” of the living Jesus, an unnecessary and peculiarly repulsive humiliation of the dying

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<sup>218</sup> Stacey, "From Ritual Crucifixion to Host Desecration: Jews and the Body of Christ," 13.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>220</sup> See Figure 14; “Crucifixion with sponge-bearer,” *Madame Marie’s Book of Images*. Hainaut, c. 1300. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, MS nouv. Acq. Fr. 16251, fol 38 cited in Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 25.

<sup>221</sup> *Douay-Rheims Bible*, Matthew 27:38.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, Matthew 27: 48-50.

man.”<sup>223</sup> Since the sponge-bearer represents the last torturer of Christ, the way in which the sponge-bearer is represented in *Madame Marie’s Book of Images* becomes significant. The sponge-bearer is clearly dressed as a contemporary medieval Jew complete with the stereotypical hat and beard.<sup>224</sup> Therefore, not only does this image represent Jews as the torturers responsible for the death of Christ, but reinforces the idea that medieval Jews were currently responsible for similar actions. This idea of the medieval Jew as active in this sort of torture and murder of Christianity then directly ties into the stories of ritual murder and host desecration. And besides this more general example, there are numerous textual and pictorial representations of the medieval Jews engaging in host desecration from a wide range of medieval sources including letters, devotional manuscripts, and stained glass.<sup>225</sup>

In fact, this fear of Jews as aggressive desecrators is also addressed in the canons drawn up during the Fourth Lateran Council. Canon 20 states that all churches must protect the Eucharist “with locks and keys” so they may not fall into the wrong hands and be used for “blasphemous purposes.”<sup>226</sup> While the previously mentioned tales of ritual crucifixion mainly originated from England, mainly between 1144 and 1270, stories of host desecration appeared later in France with the “first fully developed host desecration narrative...[coming] from

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<sup>223</sup> William Chester Jordan, “The Last Tormentor of Christ: An Image of the Jew in Ancient and Medieval Exegesis, Art, and Drama,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series 78, no. 1/2 (Jul.-Oct., 1987), 23.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 116.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

Paris.”<sup>227</sup> Thus the theme of Jews as host desecrators had a traceably stronger tradition in France, particularly in the north, where *Le Bestiaire* originated. Therefore, this powerful and demonic view of medieval Jews is particularly relevant to an examination of *Le Bestiaire*.

The most explicit image relating to this theme in *Le Bestiaire* is found in the entry on the hedgehog, which states,

Physiologus says that the hedgehog has the appearance of a suckling pig. Outside he is covered with quills, and when the grapes are ripe, he goes into the vineyard and, upon seeing the beautiful berries on the grapes, he climbs up the plant and shakes it so that berries fall to the ground. Then the hedgehog jumps down and rolls himself all over the berries so that they become fixed upon the quills, and he carries them off to his young.

So you, Christian man of God, be careful of the hedgehog for he is the devil who is full of quills, that is to say that he is full of tricks.<sup>228</sup>

Therefore, the hedgehog represents tricky devils who are “full of quills.” This description is very like the stereotypes of medieval Jews who were believed to use trickery to prey upon Christians.<sup>229</sup> Moreover, by assigning particular identities to the hedgehog and the grapes in this scene related by *Le Bestiaire*, this entry becomes another story of host desecration and supports the understanding of the hedgehog as an anti-Semitic representation. To reflect a tale of host desecration, the hedgehog “full of quills” is meant to represent the violent and desecrating

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<sup>227</sup> Stacey, "From Ritual Crucifixion to Host Desecration: Jews and the Body of Christ," 14.

<sup>228</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, 75.

<sup>229</sup> See the discussions of Thomas of Monmouth's *The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich*.

Jews while the grapes are meant to represent Christ, since the grapes become the wine that transforms into the blood of Christ through the Christian Mass. The hedgehog climbs the plant and shakes the grapes down from their lofty position down to the earth. This action of stealing the grapes from the vine can be interpreted as that of the Jews stealing the Eucharist or winning it through trickery. Next the hedgehog rolls in the berries so that they are run through and transfixing upon his quills. This action can be interpreted as the Jews torturing the Eucharist – rolling upon it with dagger-like quills, and then destroying it – transfixing the transformed body of Christ upon the quills.<sup>230</sup> Therefore, the hedgehog in *Le Bestiaire* is actually a symbolic depiction of medieval Jews as malicious desecrators of both Christ and Christianity.

The fact that the hedgehog then uses these grapes to feed its young is further evidence that this passage should be read as a representation of the desecrating Jews. It was rumored in the Middle Ages that medieval Jews suffered from “a continuous hemorrhage with which they were burdened as punishment for spilling Christ’s blood.”<sup>231</sup> As a result, it was believed that medieval Jews counteracted the effects of this punishment by drinking the blood of murdered Christians.<sup>232</sup> As mentioned before, the Eucharist was viewed as synonymous with the literal body of Christ as well as the body of the Church, or

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<sup>230</sup> The transfixion on the grapes by the quills of the hedgehog could also be interpreted as a reflection of ritual crucifixion, in that the quills piercing the grapes parallel the nails that pierced Christ’s hands and feet during the crucifixion; *Douay-Rheims Bible*, Luke 24:39-40.

<sup>231</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 138.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

Christianity.<sup>233</sup> Therefore, the fact that *Le Bestiaire*'s hedgehog uses the pierced grapes to feed its young can be read as the desecrating Jew feeding off the blood of Christians.

The clearest and most frequently utilized themes in *Le Bestiaire* are, however, the idea of medieval Jews as "fallen" or "lost" Christians and the subsequent need for their conversion. In other words, *Le Bestiaire* depicts Jews as potential Christians who, through their rejection of Christ, had failed to remain part of the true faith. This view of the Jews led to varied and conflicting representations, from the "good Jews" of the Old Testament to the "evil Jews" responsible for the death of Christ.<sup>234</sup> *Le Bestiaire* combines these views to create an image of Jews who initially followed God, but refused to convert and consequently fell from grace.

The idea of the Jews as failed Christians is most explicitly stated in *Le Bestiaire*'s entry on the owl which states,

The great owl is a symbol of the Jews who rejected our Lord when he came to save them, saying: "We have no king but Caesar, we know not who this man is" (John 19:15). Thus they loved the darkness more than the light. Then the Lord turned to us Gentiles and brought us light while we were in darkness and in the region of death; so light was brought to us...And our Savior said: "Those whom I knew not have become old because they have strayed away from the right path" (Ps. 18:44-45) and so, just like the owl hates the light of day, these people hate to see (cf. John 3:19).<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Alger of Liege cited in Stacey, "From Ritual Crucifixion to Host Desecration: Jews and the Body of Christ," 12.

<sup>234</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 97, 107.

<sup>235</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, 39.

This passage first references the medieval view of Jews as “Christ-killers,” by citing the fact that they failed to recognize him as their Savior unlike the Gentiles who became Christians.<sup>236</sup> The following phrases then imply that “the owl hates the light of day” because it has “strayed away from the right path.”<sup>237</sup> Reading this behavior as *Le Bestiaire* instructs, the owl represents the Jews who “hate[s] the light of day,” with the light of day representing Christ.<sup>238</sup> Therefore, this passage indicates that the Jews hate Christ and Christianity because they deviated from the path or failed to stay true to the correct religion. Thus, the owl portrays medieval Jews as initially potential Christians who failed to respond at the most critical juncture of Christ’s ministry, and therefore, fell into metaphorical darkness hating the light.

This conceptualization is again found in the entry for the hyena where the unclean beast is likened to “the children of Israel who in the beginning served God, but later they abandon themselves to the pleasures of the world and to lust, and they adored the idols of the infidels (II Tim. 6:10). For this reason the Prophet says that the synagogue is like this unclean beast.”<sup>239</sup> Here the Jews are described as the followers who have lost their way, and in abandoning God for the “works of the flesh” they are ideologically placed alongside medieval heretics worshipping false idols.<sup>240</sup> Therefore, medieval Jews are represented as failed

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<sup>236</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 99.

<sup>237</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, 39.

<sup>238</sup> David Fideler, *Jesus Christ, son of God: ancient cosmology and early Christian symbolism*, (Wheaton, III: Quest Books, 1993), 373.

<sup>239</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, 101.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid*, 80.



Christians, now serving the devil as a result of their deviation from the evolution into proper Christians.

This idea is expressed in a more allegorical manner in *Le Bestiaire's* chapter on the ape. Citing *Physiologus*, *Le Bestiaire* describes the ape as both representing the devil and an ugly creature without a tail.<sup>241</sup> But the entry goes on to explain the meaning behind the ape's lack of a tail; "Similarly the devil has no tail. What does this mean? It means that at first the devil lived in Heaven with the angels, but because he became an hypocrite and a traitor, he lost his head."<sup>242</sup> According to the notes accompanying the translation of *Le Bestiaire*, the phrase "he lost his head" most likely should actually be read as "he lost Heaven."<sup>243</sup> In this case, the entry then depicts a figure that fell from grace and lost the chance for entering the Christian Heaven, instead being transformed into the devil. Particularly in light of this pervasive medieval stereotype of Jews as the servants of the devil in their betrayal of Christ, the ape can be then interpreted as another representation of the Old Testament Jews who failed to convert and therefore fell outside the realm of salvation to join the devil.

Besides failing to remain part of the "correct" religion that became medieval Christianity, *Le Bestiaire* represents medieval Jews as failing to understand the true meaning of the Bible, and therefore, God. In multiple chapters, *Le Bestiaire* emphasizes the fact that the Jews follow only the text of the Bible and fall short of understanding the true spiritual meaning. The entry on the

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid, 123.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, 123.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 124.

ant clearly demonstrates this emphasis through a discussion on the proper way to read spiritual texts. The chapter of the ant begins with a description of the ant as an orderly, focused, and industrious creature that gathers barley during the summer. But after carrying the food back to its home, the ant divides each barley seed into two so that it does not spoil during the winter months.<sup>244</sup> *Le Bestiaire* interprets this action as a demonstration of the correct way to read the Bible, and as the Bible is the word of God, the way to truly understand God. The entry states,

you Christian man of God, you must divide the writings of the Old Testament into two parts, that is according to the story and its spiritual meaning. Separate truth from fiction, the spiritual from the corporeal and keep the spiritual meaning which is life-giving so that you do not die of hunger because the letter has become rotten during the winter, that is on the day of Judgment, as the Apostle says: “The law is spiritual (Rom. 7:14) and not corporeal”, “the letter kills, but the spirit gives life” (II Cor. 3:6). The Jews follow the letter and shun the prophets, and their very Lord they condemned to death. And so, ever since, they are left dying of hunger for they prefer the straw to the grain, that is to say that they abandon the spiritual meaning for the letter.<sup>245</sup>

In order to better understand this passage, it is useful to understand the medieval approach to proper or scholarly reading. The medieval approach to reading was a four-fold process.<sup>246</sup> The first level was a literal understanding of the text. Next came an allegorical interpretation, followed by a spiritual reading of the text, and ending with a contextual understanding of the reading.<sup>247</sup> And with each level of

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>246</sup> Samantha Herrick, “Song of Solomon, or the Song of Songs,” *Mary Magdalene* (Syracuse University, September. 8 2010).

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

reading, one's understanding of the text would deepen until the truest meaning of the text was revealed. This method of reading was particularly applicable to interpretations of biblical books such as the *Song of Songs*, a poem that is full of sexual and graphic imagery.<sup>248</sup>

In my bed by night I sought him whom my soul  
loveth: I sought him, and found him not. I will rise,  
and will go about the city: in the streets and the  
broad ways I will seek him whom my soul  
loveth...My beloved put his hand through the key  
hole, and my bowels were moved at his touch. I  
arose up to open to my beloved: my hands dropped  
with myrrh, and my fingers were full of the choicest  
myrrh.<sup>249</sup>

The sexual content of these passages would have been troubling or problematic if they were only read at the literal level. However, an allegorical and spiritual interpretation of the text turns this passage into poem of searching and yearning for God rather than a poem of physical pursuit and love.<sup>250</sup> Similarly, while the bestiary passage concerning the ant only makes reference to two levels of reading, the overall concept is applicable to the method of reading stated in *Le Bestiaire*.

*Le Bestiaire* specifically promotes this method of reading the Old Testament in order to condemn the Jews for only applying this first literal level of reading to the Word of God. The passage commands good Christians to divide the literal reading of the Bible from the spiritual or allegorical reading of the Bible so as to allow them a truer understanding of God's message.<sup>251</sup> In contrast, *Le*

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid; *Douay-Rheims Bible*.

<sup>249</sup> *Douay-Rheims Bible*, Cantic of Canticles (Song of Solomon) 3:1-2. 5:4-5.

<sup>250</sup> Gregory the Great cited in Samantha Herrick, "Song of Solomon, or the Song of Songs."

<sup>251</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, 62.

*Bestiaire* comments that, “The Jews follow the letter and shun the prophets, and their very Lord they condemned to death,” implying that medieval Jews, by choosing to apply only a literal interpretation to the Old Testament, misunderstood God, and consequently murdered their own Savior.<sup>252</sup> Therefore, the passage about the ant represents Jews as failing to understand the Bible and God’s message for his people; the entry thus portrays Jews as a people who failed to follow the path towards spiritual enlightenment and Christianity.

The incompetence represented here is further emphasized in the entry for the panther, which relates the Jews to beasts in their inability to understand the Word of God. The panther supposedly sleeps for three days only to awake and emit a roar that sends forth a sweet odor from his mouth. *Le Bestiaire* moralizes this by stating that it “signifies that Jesus Christ arose from the dead on the third day and shouted so that the noise coming from his mouth was heard in every land, just as his words were heard in every country of this round earth.”<sup>253</sup> Therefore, the spreading sweet odor represents the sweet Word of God considered to be the salvation of humanity by the medieval Church. However, *Le Bestiaire* goes further to analyze the breath of the panther in relation to Jews and Christians, stating,

The fact that a sweet odor comes out of the panther’s mouth so that the beasts who are both close and afar follow him, means that we are all close or far away like the Jews who at times had the sense of beasts preaching through the Law, and the Gentiles who were far away because they were without the Law, we, hearing his voice, are filled

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, 136-137.

and renewed with his very sweet odor, that is to say with his commands. We follow him like the Prophet says: ‘Our Lord, thy words are sweet in my mouth and in my ears, sweeter than the sweetness of honey’ (Ps. 119-103).<sup>254</sup>

Here the Jews preach “through the Law” in the ignorance of the spirit, while the Gentiles instead respond to the “sweet odor” or the commands of Christ.<sup>255</sup> This represents the Jews as bound by their limited understanding of the literal Word or Law, while the Gentiles are open to the true spirit of the Word. Therefore, like the passage on the ant, this passage on the panther references the claim that the Jews merely follow the letter of the law, while the Christians, here denoted by the term Gentiles, follow both the law and the spiritual message of Christ. More than this though, the entry claims that the shortcomings of the Jews in understanding the spiritual meaning of the Bible put them on the same level as beasts.<sup>256</sup> While this may only exaggeratedly reference the medieval Christian perception of the Jews’ lack of spiritual intelligence, the comparison of the Jews to beasts is significant. This point ties back into the previous discussions of Jews as less than human, or monsters. Thus, this passage not only paints the picture of Jews as lost or failed Christians, but again presents them as monsters or devils opposed to Christian society.

However, the most prevailing and significant theme that runs throughout *Le Bestiaire* is the insistent condemnation of the Jews and the call for their conversion to Christianity. As previously discussed, Jews were considered to be

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

the betrayers or murderers of Christ that came with contemporary medieval associations that demonized the Jews in Christian European society. However, there was also the somewhat contradictory belief that medieval Jews should be protected.<sup>257</sup> St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans from the Book of Romans states,

For I would not have you ignorant, brethren, of this mystery, (lest you should be wise in your own conceits), that blindness in part has happened in Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles should come in. And so all Israel should be saved, as it is written: There shall come out of Sion, he that shall deliver, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. And this is to them my covenant: when I shall take away their sins.<sup>258</sup>

This passage seems to indicate that the deliverer, Christ, will not return until the metaphorical ignorance and blindness has been erased from the world. Debra Strickland asserts that in the Middle Ages this passage was consequently interpreted to mean that a “mass conversion [of the Jews] to Christianity was a prerequisite for Christ's Second Coming: there would be no resurrection of the dead and no dawning of the New Age until the Jews embraced Christianity.”<sup>259</sup> Therefore, because the final redemption of the world hinged upon the conversion of the Jews, it is only logical that medieval Christians would have been anxious to promote or hasten conversions from Judaism. In fact, this preoccupation with converting the Jews was such a relevant concern to medieval Christians that it was promoted by papal law. Pope Innocent IV (r. 1243-1254) decreed that it was within the right of papal authority to “compel Jews to listen to conversionist

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<sup>257</sup> Robert C. Stacey, “The Conversion of Jews to Christianity in Thirteenth-Century England,” *Speculum* 67, no. 2 (Apr. 1992), 263.

<sup>258</sup> *Douay-Rheims Bible*, Romans 11:25-27.

<sup>259</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 99.

sermons,” and Pope Nicholas III officially commanded both the Franciscans and Dominicans to preach amongst the Jews for the purpose of converting them.<sup>260</sup>

All this leads to the conclusion that the push for Jews to convert was viewed as urgent and necessary by medieval Christian religious leaders.

This intense concern explains why the theme of conversion is so present in *Le Bestiaire*. While segments from the entry for the ibis have already proven useful for the discussion of anti-Semitic representations of Jews as avaricious and maliciously sexual, the initial lines present an allegory for Jewish avoidance of baptism and conversion. *Le Bestiaire* states,

This bird [the ibis] seeks its food along shore because it cannot swim and does not dare to try. In spite of its taste for carrion, it does not have the courage to try to swim, and so it cannot enter into the deep waters where the fish is clean. On the contrary, the ibis avoids pure waters. So you, Christian man, reborn by water and by the Holy Spirit, enter into the spiritual waters, that is to say into the depth of God’s wisdom (Rom. 11:33) and there take the spiritual things and the clean nourishment which the Apostle names saying: ‘The fruit of the Spirit is charity, peace, patience, kindness, meekness, faith, temperance, continence, chastity and other virtues’ (Gal. 5:22-23).<sup>261</sup>

The moralization of the ibis first generally relates the “deep...[and] pure waters” the ibis avoids to the “spiritual waters,” which represent “the depth of God’s wisdom.”<sup>262</sup> This begins to suggest the idea that the ibis, representing the Jews, avoids the waters of baptism or spiritual knowledge. However, *Le Bestiaire* then specifies that Christian men have been “reborn by water and by the Holy Spirit,”

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid, 144.

<sup>261</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, 79.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

indicating that they have been baptized into the Christian Church.<sup>263</sup> This line is a direct reference to the Book of Mark where John the Baptist declares “I have baptized you with water; but he [Christ] shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.”<sup>264</sup> Therefore, the ibis is placed in opposition to these Christian men who have been baptized and the waters it avoids more clearly represent the waters of baptism. Bryan Spinks states that baptism was a “rite of passage” into the medieval Christian Church.<sup>265</sup> Therefore, the avoidance by the ibis of baptism can be read as an avoidance of initiation into the medieval Christian Church.

This conclusion is supported by further analyzing the descriptive choices in the passage on the ibis. In the description and corresponding allegorical interpretation, both the fish in the deep waters and the spiritual nourishment found there are referred to as pure and clean linking them linguistically, and indicating the deep waters and clean fish should be interpreted as symbolically spiritual. Also, the ibis is described as fearing to enter the waters that harbor the “clean” fish.<sup>266</sup> Traditionally, fish symbolically represent the “various Christian ideas such as baptism, and the gathering of the soul into the church; and of carrying in the Greek form of its name an anagram of many names of Christ.”<sup>267</sup> Therefore, the ibis’ avoidance of the fish in the “spiritual waters” of baptism can be interpreted as a depiction of the Jews’ avoidance of baptism and Christianity.

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<sup>263</sup> Spinks, *Early and medieval rituals and theologies of baptism: from the New Testament to the Council of Trent*, 5-6.

<sup>264</sup> *Douay-Rheims Bible*, Mark 1:8; Spinks, *Early and medieval rituals and theologies of baptism: from the New Testament to the Council of Trent*, 4.

<sup>265</sup> Spinks, *Early and medieval rituals and theologies of baptism: from the New Testament to the Council of Trent*, 10.

<sup>266</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, 79.

<sup>267</sup> Rush Rhees, “Christ in Art,” *The Biblical World* 6, no. 6 (Dec. 1895), 492.



Even though the Jew's reluctance to convert is to be expected, *Le Bestiaire* characterizes this reluctance as evidence of weakness. The ibis is described as lacking "the courage to swim" into the baptismal waters of spiritual knowledge and salvation.<sup>268</sup> Therefore, as the "unclean" ibis is to represent medieval Jews, their failure to convert now stigmatizes them as cowards unable to overcome their moral and spiritual weakness.

While the passage on the ibis clearly condemns the cowardly Jews for not converting, *Le Bestiaire's* chapter on the eagle is an explicit call for their conversion. After citing *Physiologus* to describe the eagle as a creature who is revived from old age and weakness by plunging thrice into a fountain and flying into the sun, *Le Bestiaire* states,

O you, Christians, Jews, and even pagans, pay attention to this... Whoever is baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and turns the eyes of his heart toward God who is the real sun of justice, he will be renewed like the eagle and will see clearly again. (Cf. Ps. 103:5)

...When he looks at the sun, the eagle never turns his eyes away no matter how bright the rays are. The eagle exposes his young to the sun rays holding them in his claws. Those who keep on staring at the sun, he considers them worthy to be his children, but he rejects and repudiates those who turn their eyes away from the rays of the sun.

Similarly God considers those who believe in him as his children, but he turns away from those who refuse to see him or to know him.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, 79.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid*, 45-46.

*Le Bestiaire* clearly addresses the Jews in the opening sentence of this passage and urges them to convert by being baptized into the Church. But more than that, this passage declares if they fail to convert that they will be rejected and repudiated by God, and subsequently condemned to hell. Such a strong threat of damnation and rejection would have provided a powerful image and incentive for conversion in the minds of medieval Christians.

However, this passage also addresses the fear of medieval Christians that Jews who had successfully been converted might slide backwards towards their old Judaic practices. Again using the canons from the Fourth Lateran Council. Canon 70 states that,

Some [Jews], we understand, who voluntarily approached the waters of holy baptism, do not entirely cast off the old man that they may more perfectly put on the new one, because, retaining remnants of the former rite, they obscure by such a mixture the beauty of the Christian religion...salutary coercive action may preserve them in its observance, since not to know the way of the Lord is a lesser evil than to retrace one's steps after it is known.<sup>270</sup>

The passage on the eagle from *Le Bestiaire* mentions that only those who continue to stare at the sun, or keep their eyes on the Christian God are “worthy.”<sup>271</sup> That metaphor then could be interpreted as implying that even those Jews who have converted are not worthy if their metaphorical eyes waver in the least from Christianity. This sentiment is echoed in the statement that, “not to know the way of the Lord is a lesser evil than to retrace one’s steps after it is

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<sup>270</sup> Fourth Lateran Council, Canon 70 cited in Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary*, 236-296.

<sup>271</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, 45-46.

known,” meaning a failed conversion is even worse than failing to convert in the first place.<sup>272</sup> Therefore, *Le Bestiaire* encourages medieval Jews to convert at the risk of damnation and to fear falling back into Jewish practices. However, the end of canon 70 that declares, “coercive action may preserve them,” implies an encouragement to use force to keep medieval converts in line. This intimation of violence linked with the issue of Jewish conversions adds an unsavory layer to the discussion of conversion present in *Le Bestiaire*. Coupled with the fact of Christian desperation to convert the Jews in order to bring about the Second Coming of Christ, *Le Bestiaire*’s threats of damnation can be interpreted as containing a hint of real world malice.<sup>273</sup> Regardless, *Le Bestiaire* certainly presents a preoccupation with the need for the conversion of medieval Jews and it threatens eternal punishment if conversion does not occur.

Like *The Aberdeen Bestiary* in England, *Le Bestiaire* did not generate the ongoing anti-Semitism present in medieval France. Nor does it reveal specific facts concerning any particular medieval view or mindset. However, it is a powerful image that mirrors the general strong anti-Semitic climate and further contributes to that climate through the portrayal of those anti-Semitic sentiments and stereotypes. Through *Le Bestiaire*, the presence of anti-Semitic stereotypes of medieval Jews as servants of avarice, sexual devils, desecrators of Christianity, and “lost” or “stray” Christians in need of conversion are confirmed for northern medieval France.

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<sup>272</sup> Fourth Lateran Council, Canon 70 cited in Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary*, 236-296.

<sup>273</sup> Stacey, “The Conversion of Jews to Christianity in Thirteenth-Century England,” 263-265.

Chapter Four: Regional Variations in Medieval Anti-Semitism: English  
Economy v. French Religiosity

This chapter will endeavor to understand the variation in themes between the English Aberdeen Bestiary and the northern French *Le Bestiaire* within the historical context of the regions that produced each work. By examining the changing political, economic, and social conditions of the regions that gave rise to these particular thirteenth-century bestiaries, the regional influences on both become clear. This chapter will examine the anti-Semitic climates in medieval England and northern France respectively in order to better understand the variation between these two medieval bestiaries.<sup>274</sup>

The relevant history of the Jews in medieval Anglo-Norman England for this analysis spans from the first charge of ritual murder against Jews in 1144 to the mass expulsion of the Jews in 1290.<sup>275</sup> But before beginning to explore the political and economic treatment of Jews in Anglo-Norman England during this time period, it is important to understand the way in which they were predominantly viewed by medieval Anglo-Norman society. It is the common assumption that the Jews migrated to England “following the Norman Conquest of 1066.”<sup>276</sup> They were therefore considered outsiders along with the French invaders in addition to their inherent status as outcasts due to their perceived

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<sup>274</sup> While medieval England occupied such a large area, unlike medieval France, its policies and culture were relatively uniform to the extent that it can be viewed as one collective region for the purposes of this analysis.

<sup>275</sup> Raphael Langham, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology* (Houndsmill: Basingstoke: Hampshire: New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 8-9, 22-23.

<sup>276</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 96-97.

rejection of Christianity.<sup>277</sup> Furthermore, unlike the situation of the Jews of northern France, the Jews of medieval Anglo-Norman England almost immediately became exclusively moneylenders or usurers. As usury was a practice banned and condemned by the Catholic Church, this placed a heavy burden of suspicion upon the already outcast Jews. However, as usurers, the Jews filled a necessary economic role and provided readily available cash for the every growing demand of the Anglo-Norman nobility. Thus it was in the interests of Anglo-Norman authority to protect the Jews as their assets. Also, rather than falling under the protection of smaller local lords, the English Jews were “owned” by the king from the beginning.<sup>278</sup> Consequently, “In England, since the newcomer status, the moneylending, and the alliance with the monarchy were far more pronounced, anti-Jewish hostility was considerably more intense,” than elsewhere.<sup>279</sup> Therefore, there was a definite, acute social tension in Anglo-Norman England that would only continue to strengthen throughout the thirteenth century.

Because of these “intensely strained relationships between Christians and Jews in contemporary social, political, and economic arenas,” it is perhaps not surprising that such tensions manifested in an increasingly violent way.<sup>280</sup> The first recorded charge of ritual murder dates from 1144 and is the very same incident chillingly recorded in Thomas of Monmouth’s *The Life and Miracles of*

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid; Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 154.

<sup>278</sup> By the twelfth century there was already an entire governmental office dedicated to Jewish affairs, called the Exchequer of the Jews.; Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 153-155.

<sup>279</sup> Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 154.

<sup>280</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 97.

*St. William of Norwich*.<sup>281</sup> According to this charge, the body of the twelve-year-old William was found abandoned dead in the woods the day before Easter. Furthermore, the Jews of Norwich were accused of murdering the boy as part of a ritual crucifixion.<sup>282</sup> However, the Jews were protected and sheltered by the local Sheriff and consequently came to no harm despite these charges of murder. Although this incident was the first of its kind to have been recorded in the medieval period, it was followed by many other bloody episodes in medieval Anglo-Norman England. Consequently, Robert Chazan refers to this ritual murder charge as the initiation of “a new stage in the history of Christian anti-Jewish sentiment.”<sup>283</sup>

The next infamous charge of ritual murder appeared in March 1168, this time in Gloucester.<sup>284</sup> In this case, the Jews supposedly seized a young Christian boy by the name of Harold whom they tortured and then tossed into the Severn River. However, once again the accused Jews were saved from any serious repercussions due to the fact they were protected by the English government – again by royal authority.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> See Chapter 2, Thomas of Monmouth, Translated by John M. McCulloh, "Thomas of Monmouth, Life and Passion of St. William of Norwich."

<sup>282</sup> Langham, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology*, 8-9.

<sup>283</sup> Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 158.

<sup>284</sup> Langham, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology*, 10.

<sup>285</sup> Another significant incident was the ritual murder charge at Bury St. Edmunds on June 10, 1181. However, a later incident in August of 1255 concerning Hugh of Lincoln did come with severe repercussions for the Jewish community with almost 100 arrested and 18 executed. This lack of royal protection could be explained by the waning royal favor towards the Jews nearing their expulsion in 1290.; Langham, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology*, 10-11.

What is significant about these charges of ritual murder besides the strong anti-Semitic sentiments they demonstrate, is the protection which was extended to the Jews by the Anglo-Norman government or authority figures.<sup>286</sup> This protection allegedly had its roots in the laws of Edward the Confessor (r. 1042-1066) who ruled England before the Norman invasion in 1066.<sup>287</sup> In the twelfth century a number of compilations recording these alleged laws were produced in the First Charter of Protection to Jews in England. Law 25 of this Charter states,

It should be known that all Jews, in whichever kingdom they may be, ought to be under the guardianship and protection of the liege king; nor can any one of them subject himself to any wealthy person without the license of the king, because the Jews themselves and all their possessions are the king's.<sup>288</sup>

Therefore, this charter expresses more clearly the relationship between the Jews and the monarchy – namely that the Jews and all their assets belonged to the King of England. Furthermore, this charter demonstrates a desire to discourage anti-Jewish violence by so publicly and explicitly declaring a protection that would guard the Jews against any such violent actions.

However, this protection was to wane significantly under the rule of Richard the Lion-Heart (r. 1189-1199), as the great crusader king left to fight in the Holy Land after his coronation in 1189.<sup>289</sup> Richard's crusade activity

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<sup>286</sup> Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 160.

<sup>287</sup> Langham, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology*, 6, 8.

<sup>288</sup> First Charter of Protection to Jews in England cited in Langham, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology*, 8.

<sup>289</sup> Langham, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology*, 12; Joe Hillaby, "Jewish Colonisation in the Twelfth Century" in *Jews in Medieval Britain* ed. Patricia Skinner (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003), 31.

coincided with the growth of crusade propaganda in England, which especially focused on the suffering of Christ. As the Jews were already by this time generally viewed as the torturers and killers of Christ, this crusade propaganda combined with the technical absence of the king led to increased violence against medieval English Jews.<sup>290</sup> Furthermore, the intense financial pressures left from the reign of Henry II created frustrations that were channeled against the scapegoat Jewish usurers on a scale that was completely unexpected and transmitted “to many other parts of the realm early in 1190.”<sup>291</sup>

The most infamous incident of Anglo-Norman violence against the Jews which arose out of this explosion of anti-Jewish feeling was the York Massacre occurring on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of March in 1190 shortly after King Richard’s coronation.<sup>292</sup> Sparked by other riots occurring throughout the country and “a prevailing anti-Jewish sentiment and hostility,” a collection of locals from York took action to forcibly erase their collective debts to the Jews. After breaking into the home of Benedict of York, a Jewish usurer who had recently been murdered, they murdered those remaining in the house and pillaged and burned what remained. While this was occurring, the other Jews in York came under attack and were threatened with execution unless they converted. The remaining Jews trapped in the town’s tower “decided to anticipate their fate and set fire to the tower and killed themselves.” The following day the few survivors were

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<sup>290</sup> Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 160.

<sup>291</sup> The first attack on in a provincial community occurred in January, followed by the slaughter of the Jews of Norwich in early February; Hillaby, “Jewish Colonisation in the Twelfth Century,” 29-30.

<sup>292</sup> Langham, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology*, 12-15.



“massacred by a mob...[and] the leaders of the riot burned the bonds.”<sup>293</sup> Despite the fact that the stated reason for the violence against these Jews during the attack was their refusal to convert, the overall motives for these attacks are believed to have been primarily economic. This conclusion is supported by the final act of burning the bonds detailing Christian debts to Jews after the actual Jews had been exterminated by the mob. Therefore, this anti-Semitic violence shortly before the beginning of the thirteenth century was already creating a sense that English anti-Jewish motivations were economic and social rather than religious.

The violence continued the next day at Bury St. Edmunds with another massacre of the Jews, an attack that elicited a royal response four days later in the form of another Charter confirming the royal protection for the Jews allegedly laid out by Edward the Confessor.<sup>294</sup> However, according to William of Newburgh in his *History of English Affairs* Richard responded more due to “a rage both for the insult to his royal majesty and for the great loss to the treasury, for to the treasury belonged whatever the Jews, who are known to be the royal usurers, seem to possess in the way of goods.”<sup>295</sup> Regardless, this pattern of violence and perceived retaliation against the Jews countered by edicts of royal protection would continue into the thirteenth century. And more importantly, the theme that the Jews were measured by their economic worth as the “royal

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid, 12-15.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>295</sup> According to Marcus, William of Newburgh “was a canon of the Augustinian priory at Newburgh, York, England;” William of Newburgh, “The York Riots (1190),” in *History of English Affairs* cited in Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Sourcebook*; Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 160.

usurers” makes for another trend in the medieval Anglo-Norman history of the Jews.<sup>296</sup>

This particular trend of treating Jews according to financial worth can be clearly seen in the tumultuous reign of King John (1199-1216).<sup>297</sup> The previous economic stresses on the monarchy were greatly compounded during his rule, which naturally again led to increased anger and violence against the Jews. To combat these economic pressures, beginning in 1210 King John sought financial relief through levying unprecedented tallages, or taxes, against the Jews.

According to Langham, “Most Jews throughout the land were imprisoned, their records seized and many were tortured in order to extract the money required. The overall effect was to impoverish the whole of the Jewish community.”<sup>298</sup> These actions whereby King John took advantage of his assets, the Jews, would be

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<sup>296</sup> This is seen again in 1201 with King John’s reconfirmation of the Charter of the Jews of England, which states: “John, by the grace of God, &c. Know that we have granted to all the Jews of England and Normandy to have freely and honourably residence in our land, and to hold all that from us, which they held from King Henry, our father's grandfather, and all that now they reasonably hold in land and fees and mortgages and goods, and that they have all their liberties and customs just as they had them in the time of the aforesaid King Henry, our father's grandfather, better and more quietly and more honourably,” for which, “The Jews of England give our Lord the King four thousand marks to have their charters confirmed, and the charters were sent to Godfrey son of Peter by Stephen de Portico that they should cause them to be read in their presence, and in the presence of the Lord Bishops of London and Norwich and when they have received security for the payment of these four thousand marks, viz., 1000 immediately, 1000 at Michaelmas, 1000 at Easter, 1000 at Michaelmas, then they shall deliver to them the Charters in the presence of the aforesaid.”; Rot. Cart., i. 93, from Joseph Jacobs, *The Jews of Angevin England: Documents and Records* (London, 1893), 212-15 cited in *Medieval Sourcebook*, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/kingjohn-jews.asp>.

<sup>297</sup> Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 160-163.

<sup>298</sup> Langham, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology*, 17.

continued by his successors, and turn medieval Anglo-Norman England into a land of increasing hardship for medieval Jews.<sup>299</sup>

Perhaps one of the clearest indicators that hostility towards the Jews arose directly from economic concerns is the April 4 Statute of 1233 concerning the Jews.<sup>300</sup> According again to Langham, “This [statute] expelled all Jews from England who could not be of service to the King.”<sup>301</sup> This proclamation then conversely implies that the king is only concerned with protecting those Jews who are of use to him, meaning those medieval Jews whose primary occupation as moneylenders caused them to be financially valuable to the crown.

However, while the definition of this economic relationship between the crown and the Jews was evolving, social unrest was also growing and leading to further political action in November 1278.<sup>302</sup> On the 17<sup>th</sup> of that month, all the Jews in England were arrested; 293 were hanged in London and elsewhere and a widespread confiscation of Jewish property was carried out.<sup>303</sup> What is significant about these arrests, is the evidence of an ever-present economic slant since many

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<sup>299</sup> The most notable of these substantial tallages occurred in 1221, 1230, 1239, 1244, 1250, 1252, 1254, 1255, 1272, 1273, 1276, 1277, 1278, and 1287; Ibid; And according to Robert Chazan, King Henry III (r. 1216-1272) continued this trend of exploiting the Jews for the generation of royal revenue. In particular, the outrageous tax of 1239 was one from which medieval English Jews never truly recovered.; Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 162, 164.

<sup>300</sup> Langham, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology*, 19.

<sup>301</sup> “It also laid down certain regulations regarding loans, for example restricting interest to 2d. per £1 loaned per week (43.5 per cent p.a.);” Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> In 1222, the Provincial Council of Canterbury even prohibited all social contact with Jews; Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 163.

<sup>303</sup> Langham, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology*, 22.

of the alleged crimes included charges such as “coin-clipping,” and the arrests resulted in massive royal gains in property.

All this tension, both social and economic, that had been building since the Jews’ arrival in England finally culminated with the Edward I’s 1290 edict expelling all Jews from Anglo-Norman England.<sup>304</sup> While the exact reasons behind the expulsion are complex, the over-riding economic motivation is present even in this case. By this time, Edward I was plagued by how to solve the “Jewish Problem” that had been compounding for most of the thirteenth century; as the monarchy’s heavy taxes had nearly impoverished the Jewish population of medieval Anglo-Norman England, that population was no longer of significant financial value to the English crown. Furthermore, the anti-Jewish feelings that had arrived with the “outsider” Jews had only increased and spread throughout England, as evidenced by the wide spread violence. Consequently, Edward I took decisive action and cut England’s ties with the Jews in order to eliminate their growing economic and social liability as impoverished targets of violence and causes of social unrest.<sup>305</sup> According to Robert Chazan, the motives behind the 1290 expulsion were “immediately inspired by a need for tax revenues from his [Edward I’s] barons, who desired the removal of the Jews and were willing to grant the king revenue in return for the edict of expulsion.”<sup>306</sup> Therefore, the declining fortunes of the medieval Jews in Anglo-Norman England up to and

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<sup>304</sup> “The decree has been lost but a write to all Sheriffs is still extant – dated 18 July it informs them that a decree has been passed expelling the Jews.”; Ibid, 22-23.

<sup>305</sup> Despite receiving safe passage from the king, many were captured and murdered before reaching safety outside of England.; Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 166.

including the time of their expulsion seem to have been predominantly fueled by social hostility, suspicion of and violence against the Jews, and overwhelming economic motives.

That is not to say that there were no religious concerns or incentives behind medieval Anglo-Norman policies. A good portion of the social hostilities stemmed from the perception that the Jews had rejected Christianity. To combat this issue, in 1275 Edward I began to implement a number of policies previously undertaken by Louis IX of France, which included increased conversion efforts.<sup>307</sup> Reflecting existing papal policies, in 1279 Jews were “ordered to attend sermons delivered by Dominican Friars...[in order] to increase the number of converts.”<sup>308</sup> However, all of these efforts were insignificant compared to the plethora of economic and social policies against the Jews in medieval Anglo-Norman England. Consequently, these economic and social motivations can be clearly seen reflected in *The Aberdeen Bestiary*’s representational treatment of medieval Jews.

With regard to medieval France, it is important to make the distinction between the northern and southern regions.<sup>309</sup> Southern France was a less religiously restrictive region where Christians tried to go back to simpler roots

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<sup>307</sup> Robert Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 165.

<sup>308</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 144; Langham, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology*, 22.

<sup>309</sup> The southern area of France was known as Languedoc, with the name deriving from the fact that the inhabitants spoke a dialect where “yes” was pronounced as “oc.” Its northern counterpart was consequently referred to as Langue d’oii, again deriving from the regional dialect; Herrick, “Crusade on Heresy.”

and Jews placed an emphasis on mysticism.<sup>310</sup> Consequently, this movement alongside innovative Jewish spirituality in southern France caused this region to be “synonymous...with heresy.”<sup>311</sup> And as an area of such religious defiance, the “social and political status [of the Jews of Languedoc] compared favorably with that of their co-religionists in any part of Europe.”<sup>312</sup> However, this favorable situation for the medieval Jews of southern France did not extend to the vastly different northern region of France where *Le Bestiaire* was produced.<sup>313</sup> Thus, southern and northern France did not truly see themselves as part of the same region making only northern France relevant in analyzing of *Le Bestiaire*.<sup>314</sup>

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, France was primarily ruled by barons in the many principalities centered around “the Ile-de-France” and Paris. The Jews under the governance of these principalities flourished, mainly as traders, unlike their medieval English counterparts who were primarily usurers since their appearance in England.<sup>315</sup> In northern France, it was only over the course of the twelfth century that the shift from trade to usury occurred, with the profession of money lending being more “lucrative” yet also more

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<sup>310</sup> Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 85.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

<sup>312</sup> John M. O’Brien, “Jews and Cathari in Medieval France,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 10, no. 2 (January, 1968), 215.

<sup>313</sup> *Le Bestiaire* attributed to Pierre de Beauvais is believed to originate from the region around Picardy to the north of Paris, See Figure 15; William R. Shepherd, *Historical Atlas* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1929), 76; Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, Translated by Guy R. Mermier (Lewiston: Queenston: Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), xii.

<sup>314</sup> Herrick, “Crusade on Heresy.”

<sup>315</sup> Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 132.

“dangerous.”<sup>316</sup> Consequently, the verb *judaizare* (to behave like Jews) was created in northern France as a synonym for usury, indicating that despite their roots in trade, the Jews of medieval France were primarily seen as usurers by the end of the twelfth century.<sup>317</sup>

As in Anglo-Norman England, the Jews of medieval France relied on the nobility for both protection and business.<sup>318</sup> As the most valuable collateral that was available in northern France was land, “large-scale lending had to take place against landed property.”<sup>319</sup> Thus the Jews were dependent on noble support to carry out their business, causing the Jews of medieval France to become deeply involved with their provincial or royal lords.<sup>320</sup> In return for support, the Jews’ banking business was taxed substantially causing them to lose a significant portion of their profit.<sup>321</sup>

The thirteenth century was a time of great political change and rapid development of civilization in northern France, which caused medieval Jews to become more and more dependent on royal protection. This rapid development was primarily due to the consolidation of power beginning under the reign of

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid, 133; Furthermore, through his victories against England in 1204 and 1214 Philip Augustus solidified France’s position as one of the great powers of Western Christendom; Robert Chazan, *Medieval Jewry in Northern France: A Political and Social History* (Baltimore: London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1973), 33, 63.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid, 134.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

Philip II of France, also known as Philip Augustus (r. 1179-1223).<sup>322</sup> According to Robert Chazan, “the Capetian kings [ruled]...from their capital city Paris over larger and larger sectors of the north and subsequently over much of southern France as well.”<sup>323</sup> Along with this consolidation of power came a rise in urbanization along with increases in population, medieval Jewish communities included.<sup>324</sup> However, this urbanization and centralization also meant that the Jews of northern France like the Jews of England were increasingly reliant upon the king rather than local lords for protection and business. As a result, the Jews became perfectly placed to be manipulated by their protectors – a position that Philip Augustus thoroughly took advantage of.<sup>325</sup>

Jewish treatment under Philip Augustus was very similar to the politico-economic manipulations of the English Jews by the medieval Anglo-Norman kings – namely exploitation. The reign of Philip Augustus was riddled with a series of Jewish expulsions that would only be lifted some years later. The first of these expulsions occurred in 1182, and according to Esther Benbassa, “In expelling the Jews, Philip Augustus aimed simply at taking possession of their property and putting the treasury back on its feet, while winning popular support

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid, 141; Chazan, *Medieval Jewry in Northern France: A Political and Social History*, 30.

<sup>323</sup> Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 141; Philip Augustus also took pains to transform his city of Paris into a political and intellectual center.; Chazan, *Medieval Jewry in Northern France: A Political and Social History*, 63.

<sup>324</sup> Chazan, *Medieval Jewry in Northern France: A Political and Social History*, 32-33.

<sup>325</sup> Esther Benbassa, Translated by M. B. DeBevoise, *The Jews of France: A History From Antiquity to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 16.



for himself...In 1198, motivated still by economic need, Philip Augustus brought them back into the kingdom.”<sup>326</sup> This claim of economically motivated expulsions and recalls of the Jews can be seen reflected in Eude Rigord’s roughly contemporary *The Deeds of Philip Augustus*.<sup>327</sup> Under his description of Philip’s deeds in the second year of his reign, Rigord records the alleged reasons behind the expulsion stating,

But enough of these things; we now turn to what was done at God's inspiration by the king about the perfidious Jews... Others were bound under oath in the houses of the Jews and held prisoner almost as if in jail. When the most Christian king Phillip heard this, he was moved by benevolence (pietate) and asked a certain hermit named Bernard [de Bré] a holy and religious man who was living at that time in the forest of Vincennes for advice on what to do. At his suggestion he released all Christians in his realm from debts to the Jews, keeping for himself a fifth part of the whole sum...And then the King gave them leave to sell each his movable goods before the time fixed, that is, the feast of St. John the Baptist. But their real estate, that is, houses, fields, vineyards, barns, winepresses, and such like, he reserved for himself and his successors, the kings of the French.<sup>328</sup>

Beneath the Christian overtones, the fact that Philip retained a fifth of the sum for the crown as well as all the immovable goods left behind by the Jews strongly

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid, 15-16.

<sup>327</sup> Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 142; Eude Rigord was born around 1150 in southern France, and eventually became a monk and historiographer near Paris; H. Françoise Delaborde eds., *Oeuvres de Rigord et de Guillaume le Breton* (Libr. Renouard: Paris, 1882), Paul R. Hyams trans. 1998, <http://falcon.arts.cornell.edu/prh3/408/texts/Rigindex.html>; Jacob Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Sourcebook* (New York: JPS, 1938), 24-27 cited in *Internet Jewish History Sourcebook*, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/jewish/1182-jewsfrance1.asp>.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

suggests economic motivations. The obvious Christian bent to *The Deeds of Philip Augustus* likely stems from the views of the religious author and powerful patron. However, this emphasis on piety is far more stressed throughout Philip's anti-Jewish policies and their corresponding literature than similar policies in Anglo-Norman England.<sup>329</sup> While Philip's policies seemed to have been generally enacted for his own economic advantage, there was also an ever-present and significant religious concern in his policies that stemmed from the close alliance between the medieval French monarchy and the Church.<sup>330</sup> Throughout the twelfth century, there was also an increase in religious concern about the Jewish presence in northern France that further suggests the Jews' expulsion was due to more than merely economic incentives.<sup>331</sup> Therefore, this time focused on anti-Jewish policies that were outwardly based on religious concerns – a theme that was only intensified later in the reign of Saint Louis.

Saint Louis, or King Louis IX (r. 1223-1270) magnified this preoccupation with religiously fueled anti-Semitism in northern French policies. He continued the work of his predecessor by further consolidating royal power to the detriment

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<sup>329</sup> See the English statutes previously mentioned in this chapter; other reasons for this first expulsion are stated to be a religious indignation against the Jews' practice of usury and the story that "At that time therefore when the Jews were afraid that their house might be searched by the king's officials, it happened that a certain Jew who was then living in Paris and had some church ornaments, a gold cross augmented with gems and a Gospel book wonderfully decorated with precious stones, as well as silver goblets and other vases, put these in a sack and most vilely threw it down into a deep pit in which he was (alas!) accustomed to empty his bowels. All of this was soon afterwards revealed by God and found there by Christians." Furthermore, this impending expulsion was earlier referred to by Rigord as an act that would follow "in time by God's disposition."; *Ibid.*

<sup>330</sup> Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 144.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

of the French nobles “who found their position increasingly undermined,” and also continued the regular expulsions and arrests of the Jews begun by Philip Augustus.<sup>332</sup> However, Saint Louis’ most relevant legacy was that of his religious fervor in pursuing anti-Jewish policies, which likely contributed to arguments for his canonization.<sup>333</sup> Reflecting the French monarchy’s close relationship with the Church, Saint Louis was outwardly a great defender of Christianity. Already during his reign, the piety of King Louis IX and his mother had become legendary, and he espoused the goal to spread Christian ideals to their furthest extent.<sup>334</sup> According to Robert Chazan, northern France was considered to be the “center of crusading fervor,” where the idea of Jews as “here-and-now enemies of Christendom” was promoted.<sup>335</sup> In further support of this idea of religious rather than social or economic persecutions, Esther Benbassa states that in northern France,

Rather than a kind of racial discrimination, it was more a question of theological anti-Judaism, directed against a religious group regarded as deicidal for its refusal to submit to the message of the Gospels and to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. For this reason the Jews were stripped of their initial status, to the benefit of the Christians, who were now the *Verus Israel* (or “true Israel”). The Jews were not inexorably damned, since by conversion, the sign of the second coming of the Redeemer, they could be saved. Though canonical law continued to uphold the principle of tolerance of the Jews, the ecclesiastical hierarchy, which often also enjoyed political power, did not always

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<sup>332</sup> Benbassa, *The Jews of France: A History From Antiquity to the Present*, 17.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>334</sup> Chazan, *The Jews of Northern France*, 101-102.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

respect it...however, the church did not aim at their destruction, [merely their conversion].<sup>336</sup>

In fact, in the early to mid thirteenth century, Louis IX launched extensive campaigns for conversion and discrediting of the Jewish faith with special efforts made to promote the truth of Christianity.<sup>337</sup> As part of his eagerness to promote Jewish conversion, Saint Louis encouraged numerous public debates between Christians and Jewish scholars.<sup>338</sup> These public debates actually originated in thirteenth-century Paris, and were meant to accomplish a number of religious goals. Through these debates, King Louis IX hoped to discredit the Jewish faith, promote Christian ideals, and ultimately win over Jews listening in the audience to conversion.<sup>339</sup> However, these public debates also addressed the “Christian fear of conversion of their own brethren to Judaism...which helps to explain why so much effort was put into the composition of disputational literature and into public debate in which Christians carefully stacked the deck.”<sup>340</sup> Therefore, these public debates and related literature again suggest the very real northern French preoccupation with *religious* anti-Judaism. Ultimately, Saint Louis’ reign and his

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<sup>336</sup> Benbassa, *The Jews of France: A History From Antiquity to the Present*, 11.

<sup>337</sup> Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 150.

<sup>338</sup> Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Sourcebook*, 315-1791.

<sup>339</sup> Debra Strickland mentions that these public debates were frequently commemorated through art, such as in a thirteenth-century panel of stained-glass at Troyes Cathedral.; Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 102.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid*, 151; According to Esther Benbassa concerning a debate in 1240, “In the past, such discussion gave evidence of the intellectual relationships that could develop between Christian and Jewish scholars. In a period of lessened tolerance, they worked clearly to the disadvantage of the Jews. Whereas until then disputations had concerned the interpretation of certain passages in the Bible, the one held in Paris in 1240 took aim at the Talmud and ended by condemning it;” Benbassa, *The Jews of France: A History From Antiquity to the Present*, 18.

“anti-Jewish legislation [that] reduced Jews to the condition of pariahs,” became a guiding example for later French kings.<sup>341</sup>

Furthermore, the social anxieties over medieval northern French Jews seem to be primarily motivated by religious concerns, rather than concerns over their culturally distinct communities and practices. As previously discussed in Chapter Three, tales of host desecration sprang up throughout northern France, which demonized Jews as violent aggressors against Christianity.<sup>342</sup> These tales promoted the idea that Jews actively sought to torture and attack Christianity and the Christian faith.<sup>343</sup> However, this story of physical attacks against Christendom correlates to perceived spiritual attacks against Christianity that were highlighted in the public religious debates King Louis IX was so fond of promoting.

There exists a telling story concerning this relationship between the perceived spiritual and physical attacks in the records of Saint Louis’ “faithful seneschal,” Jean de Joinville (1224-1318).<sup>344</sup> Concerning a violent outcome of a Judo-Christian debate, Jean de Joinville writes,

So he [a knight] rose, and leant upon his crutch, and asked that they should bring to him the greatest clerk [clergyman] and most learned master among the Jews; and they did so. Then he asked the Jew a question, which was this: ‘Master’ said the knight, ‘I ask you if you believe that the Virgin Mary, who bore God in her body and in her arms, was a virgin mother, and is the mother of God?’

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<sup>341</sup> Benbassa, *The Jews of France: A History From Antiquity to the Present*, 19-20.

<sup>342</sup> Robert C. Stacey, "From Ritual Crucifixion to Host Desecration: Jews and the Body of Christ," *Jewish History* 12, no. 1 (Spring, 1998): 11-28, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20101321>, 12-13.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>344</sup> Chazan, *The Jews of Northern France*, 102.

And the Jew replied that of all this he believed nothing. Then the knight answered that the Jew had acted like a fool when-neither believing in her, nor loving her-he had yet entered into her monastery and house. 'And verily,' said the knight, 'you shall pay for it!' Whereupon he lifted his crutch and smote the Jew near the ear, and beat him to the earth. Then the Jews turned to flight, and bore away their master, sore wounded. And so ended the disputation.

The abbot came to the knight and told him he had committed a deed of very great folly. But the knight replied that the abbot committed a deed of greater folly in gathering people together for such a disputation; for there were a great many good Christians there who, before the disputation came to an end, would have gone away misbelievers through not fully understanding the Jews. 'And I tell you,' said the king, 'that no one, unless he be a very learned, clerk, should dispute with them; but a layman, when he hears the Christian law mis-said should not defend the Christian law, unless it be he with his sword, and with that he should pierce the mis-sayer in the midriff, so far as the sword will enter.'<sup>345</sup>

In this passage, the idea that the presence and words of Jews were considered dangerous threats is clearly outlined by the knight's violent response to the Jew's words. Furthermore, the final words of the knight in the story imply that there is no use arguing with the Jews except with physical violence. This suggests the fearful and aggressive sentiments stirred against the perceived threat of the mere outspoken presence of Judaism. Therefore, this record provides an interesting insight into the likely religiosity of anti-Jewish hostilities, rather than the clearly

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<sup>345</sup> Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Sourcebook*, 41-42.

economic and socially based hatred demonstrated in England through events like the York Massacre.

Thus with aroused religious feeling and anti-Semitic pressures from all sides, Philip IV (r. 1285-1306) decreed the expulsion of the Jews from France in 1306.<sup>346</sup> While the Jews were brought back only a few years later in 1315 by Louis X, after the Capetians expelled the Jews in 1306 the Jewish presence in France only declined.<sup>347</sup> In fact, by the 1500s only “tiny Jewish enclaves” remained with the largest community comprised of only 300 persons.<sup>348</sup>

While there were certainly economic advantages to the anti-Jewish policies and sentiments that significantly contributed to the treatment of medieval Jews in northern France, there appears also to be a definite and ever-present religiosity; an element that is lacking in medieval England. In fact, by combating the practice of usury that had been legalized and regulated by Philip Augustus, it seems that Louis IX “went against the economic realities of the early thirteenth century,” suggesting his motivations consisted of more “purely religious considerations.”<sup>349</sup> This evidence combined with the highly religious tenor of other medieval literature from northern France, suggests that any economic or social motivations for the treatment of Jews were dominated by religious influences particularly during the reign of Saint Louis. Consequently, this

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<sup>346</sup> Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 146.

<sup>347</sup> Benbassa, *The Jews of France: A History From Antiquity to the Present*, 20-21.

<sup>348</sup> Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 79, 151.

<sup>349</sup> Benbassa, *The Jews of France: A History From Antiquity to the Present*, 17.

domination of religious anti-Semitism, or preoccupation with the spiritual threat of Jews, is seen reflected *Le Bestiaire*'s treatment of Jewish representations.

Overall, while many of the same social, economic, and political factors apply to both medieval Anglo-Norman England and northern France, the regional contexts demonstrate marked differences in the tenor of each area's corresponding anti-Semitism. An analysis of the historical context leading up to the expulsion of the Jews from Anglo-Norman England suggests the exploitation and abuse of the medieval Jews in England up to and including the time of their expulsion were mainly fueled by social hostility and overwhelming economic motives. On the other hand, an analysis of the historical context leading up to expulsion of the medieval Jews from France demonstrates motivations dominated by religious considerations that even overlay any secondary social and economic motivations.<sup>350</sup> Therefore, while there were many similarities in the situations and treatment of medieval Jews in both Anglo-Norman England and northern France, the predominant motivations behind anti-Semitic sentiments in each area do differ significantly.

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<sup>350</sup> Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 146.



Conclusion: Regional Influences on the Anti-Semitic Representations of Medieval Jews in *The Aberdeen Bestiary* and *Le Bestiaire*

“In short, Christian portraits of Jews tell us next to nothing about medieval Jews, but they reveal a great deal about medieval Christians.”<sup>351</sup>

-Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*

Having established the differences in regional treatment of medieval Jews between Anglo-Norman England and northern France makes possible a comparative analysis of the differences between *The Aberdeen Bestiary* and *Le Bestiaire*. As two thirteenth-century, Northern European, Second-family bestiaries, both works do present a number of similar themes and representations.<sup>352</sup> However, the most pervasive and powerful themes in each bestiary vary significantly. Consequently, it is logical to examine the remaining variable of regional differences in anti-Semitism as the cause for this thematic variation between the two bestiaries.

As established in the second chapter, the themes most dominant in *The Aberdeen Bestiary* are those of the Jews as evil usurers and the Jews as sexualized and cunning monsters who prey upon Christians.<sup>353</sup> In particular, *The Aberdeen Bestiary* conveys images of medieval Jews as corrupting usurers, desecrating devils, cunningly deceptive, and the enemies of Christendom. By understanding medieval images as a source of additional allegorical and symbolic meaning, certain of the bestiary’s entries and descriptions become expressions of these particular anti-Semitic themes. As previously discussed, a prime example of this

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<sup>351</sup> Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews* (Princeton: Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 96.

<sup>352</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, “The Aberdeen Bestiary Project,” <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/>; Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, x-xi.

<sup>353</sup> See Chapter 2.

relationship appears in the image of the snake, where instead of depicting just the snake, the accompanying image is of the snake strangling an elephant.<sup>354</sup> As the bestiary elephant can be understood as a representation of good Christians, the snake is then understood as preying upon and strangling Christians.<sup>355</sup> Adding this imagery to a previous understanding of the bestiary snake as a depiction of medieval Jews, this imagery conveys a message of Jews as malicious predators of Christians. Through similar applications to a number of other entries in *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, a distinct anti-Semitic tone emerges focusing upon Jews as wicked usurers and predators upon Christian society. In fact, almost every entry analyzed in this thesis carries a varying level of condemnation for these two ideas, particularly the idea of Jews as financially greedy and depraved.

Conversely, the themes most dominant in the *Le Bestiaire* are those of the Jews as “lost” Christians and the need for Jewish conversion.<sup>356</sup> In particular, *Le Bestiaire* conveys themes of medieval Jews as servants of avarice, sexual devils, desecrators of Christianity, and “lost” or “stray” Christians. However, the encouragement or demand for the conversion of Jews to Christianity is clearly prevalent. As analyzed in the third chapter, this preoccupation is best summed up by *Le Bestiaire*’s entry on the eagle that states,

Jews, and even pagans, pay attention to this...Whoever is baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and turns the eyes of his heart toward God who is the real sun of justice, he will be renewed like the eagle and will see clearly again... but he [God] rejects and

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<sup>354</sup> See Figure 11; *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 10v.

<sup>355</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 10v.

<sup>356</sup> See Chapter 3.

repudiates those who turn their eyes away from the rays of the sun.<sup>357</sup>

In this passage *Le Bestiaire* clearly addresses the Jews in the opening sentence and urges them to convert to the Church through baptism. But more than that, this passage declares that if they fail to convert that they will be rejected and repudiated by God, thereby condemning the Jews to hell. As this is but one example among many, this entry demonstrates *Le Bestiaire*'s predominantly religious tone in its condemnations of the Jews who refuse to convert to Christianity, rather than focusing upon the Jews as economically or socially evil; *Le Bestiaire* conveys the idea that the greatest danger posed by the Jews is a spiritual one.

As *The Aberdeen Bestiary* and *Le Bestiaire* are comparable in both date and format, the original question remains: why do these two bestiaries vary so significantly with regard to the focus in their anti-Semitic representations? A possible answer lies in an examination of the historical context of the two different areas that produced each bestiary. While both *The Aberdeen Bestiary* and *Le Bestiaire* originate in northwest Europe shortly before the period of mass Jewish expulsion, the particular regions of medieval Anglo-Norman England and northern France from which they originated differed significantly in political, economic, and societal environments.<sup>358</sup> The earlier analysis of the historical context leading up to the expulsion of the Jews from Anglo-Norman England

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<sup>357</sup> Ibid, 45-46.

<sup>358</sup> Raphael Langham, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology* (Houndsmill: Basingstoke: Hampshire: New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 8-9, 22-23; Robert Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500* (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 146.

suggests the declining fortunes of the medieval Jews in England up to and including the time of their expulsion seem to have been predominantly fueled by social hostility and overwhelming economic motives on the part of the ruling class. In contrast, the analysis of the expulsion of the medieval Jews from France in 1306 shows motivations dominated by religious considerations despite any social and economic motivations.<sup>359</sup> Consequently, while there were many similarities in the resulting treatment of and issues concerning the medieval Jews in both Anglo-Norman England and northern France, the predominant concerns in each area do differ significantly.

Therefore, as medieval Anglo-Norman England's anti-Semitism was dominated by economic and social hostilities as a response to their perception of Jews as overbearingly avaricious outsiders, *The Aberdeen Bestiary's* anti-Semitic representations are dominated by concerns about the perceived economic and social threats posed by medieval Jews. Similarly, as medieval France's anti-Semitism was dominated by religious hostilities as a response to the perception of Jews as physically and spiritually threatening, *Le Bestiaire's* anti-Semitic representations are dominated by concerns about the Jews' lack of Christian faith and the need to convert them. Because these regional differences between Anglo-Norman England and northern France so clearly manifest in their respective thirteenth-century bestiaries, it is only logical to conclude that these bestiaries were influenced by the regional contexts that produced them. Debra Strickland proposes that, "In short, Christian portraits of Jews tell us next to nothing about

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<sup>359</sup> Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 146.

medieval Jews, but they reveal a great deal about medieval Christians.”<sup>360</sup>

Similarly, medieval bestiaries provide societal, economic, and political reflections and reactions to regional variations.

More importantly, however, this analysis then suggests that medieval literature and image in general are likely also affected by regional differences. This understanding is significant because of the power it gives medieval text and image for revealing insights concerning more specific regional cultures. As *The Aberdeen Bestiary* and *Le Bestiaire* provide valuable insights into the cultures that produced them, other examples of medieval text and image can be understood to function in the same way. Thus, while medieval text and image cannot be relied upon to provide historically accurate accounts, they are extremely useful in providing reflections of medieval life and revealing a myriad of complex influences and realities about medieval mindsets.

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<sup>360</sup> Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 96.



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## Appendix



Figure 1: "Initial I" from *Moralia in Iob*<sup>361</sup>

<sup>361</sup> "Initial I" in book 21, *Moralia in Iob*, scriptorium de l'abbaye de Cîteaux 1111, Bibliothèque Municipale de Dijon, MS 173, fol. 41.



Figure 2: A copy of the Ebstorf Map<sup>362</sup>

<sup>362</sup> Ebstorf Map cited in Mateo, "The Romanesque World."



Figure 3: Detail of Jews as depicted in the Ebstorf Map<sup>363</sup>

<sup>363</sup> Highlighted section of the Ebstorf Map cited in Mateo, “The Romanesque World.”



Figure 4: Giant and Sciopod from the Westminster Abbey Bestiary<sup>364</sup>

<sup>364</sup> Giant, Sciopod, Bragmanni, Westminster Abbey Bestiary, York (?), c. 1270-1290. London, Westminster Abbey Library, MS 22, fol. 3 cited in Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 134.



Figure 5: Manticore from the Salisbury Bestiary.<sup>365</sup>

<sup>365</sup> Manticore. Bestiary. Salisbury (?), c. 1240-50. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 764, fol. 25 (detail); Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 11.





**Figure 6: The owl**<sup>366</sup>



**Figure 7: The hyena**<sup>367</sup>



**Figure 8: The beaver**<sup>368</sup>

<sup>366</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, Early thirteenth century, “The Aberdeen Bestiary Project,” <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/>, fol. 50r.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid*, fol. 11v.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid*, fol. 11r.



**Figure 9: The fox**<sup>369</sup>



**Figure 10: The weasel**<sup>370</sup>



**Figure 11: The snake**<sup>371</sup>

<sup>369</sup> Ibid, fol. 16r.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid, fol. 23v.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid, fol. 65v.



Figure 12: The salamander<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Ibid, fol. 70r.



**Figure 13: The Virgin and child in heaven; Jew in hell<sup>373</sup>**

<sup>373</sup> The Virgin and child in heaven; Jew in hell. Psalter. Northern France, late 13<sup>th</sup> century. British Library, London, Add. MS 17868, fol. 31, cited in Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews* (Princeton: Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 125.



**Figure 14: Crucifixion with sponge-bearer<sup>374</sup>**

<sup>374</sup> Crucifixion with sponge-bearer. *Madame Marie's Book of Images*. Hainaut, c. 1300. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, MS nouv. Acq. Fr. 16251, fol 38 cited in Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 25.



Figure 15: Map of Medieval France in 1328<sup>375</sup>

<sup>375</sup> William R. Shepherd, *Historical Atlas* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1929), 76.

### Summary of Capstone Project

This thesis endeavors to explain or better understand the variations in representations of anti-Semitism between medieval bestiaries. Medieval bestiaries, compilations of animals and their ascribed characteristics, was a type of medieval literature commonly produced throughout Western Europe.<sup>376</sup> This fantastical genre of literature was often illustrated with elaborate representations of the accompanying text, and flourished in northwestern Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>377</sup> However, in order to make a more detailed and in-depth analysis I have narrowed my research focus; I have chosen two representative bestiaries pertaining to two different and distinct geographical and social areas rather than examining an expansive number of medieval bestiaries. Consequently, this study focuses on two particular medieval bestiaries comparable in both date and style – *The Aberdeen Bestiary* from England and *Le Bestiaire* from northern France.

Both *The Aberdeen Bestiary* and *Le Bestiaire* date from the early thirteenth-century and are classified as Second-family moralizing bestiaries. The classification as Second-family bestiaries indicates that they both essentially derive from the Latin text *Physiologus*, meaning that they fall into the same category for basic format and content.<sup>378</sup> The classification as moralizing bestiaries denotes that both these bestiaries focus their content and style on a moralized explanation of each animal's behavior as a way of teaching medieval

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<sup>376</sup> Willene B. Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: The Second-family Bestiary* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), 10, 14.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid*, 10, 14.

Christian values.<sup>379</sup> This contrasts significantly in both tone and content with the later bestiaries of love that began appearing during the thirteenth century.<sup>380</sup>

Therefore, both *The Aberdeen Bestiary* and *Le Bestiaire* arise from the same traditions of content and style and, consequently, provide an acceptable basis for comparative analysis.

The comparative analysis of these two bestiaries focuses specifically on how they reflect medieval stereotypes of Jews and anti-Semitic themes. However, in order to determine the variations between the two, both bestiaries must be first individually examined for and understood as presenting images of medieval anti-Semitism.

*The Aberdeen Bestiary* concentrates on the medieval perception of Jews as potentially dangerous and terrifying “others,” who allegedly preyed upon Christians. In particular, this bestiary conveys images of medieval Jews as corrupting usurers, Jews as desecrating devils, Jews as cunningly deceptive, and Jews as the enemies of Christendom. However, in order to understand particular entries of *The Aberdeen Bestiary* as representations of anti-Semitic ideas, it is necessary to also analyze its accompanying illustrations. Medieval illustrations themselves function as a sort of text by offering information that reinforces or adds to the message of the corresponding written passages.<sup>381</sup> Therefore, medieval images can be seen as more than simply aesthetic contributions, but as a source

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>380</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, Translated by Guy R. Mermier (Lewiston: Queenston: Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), iii.

<sup>381</sup> Debra Hassig, "Beauty in the Beasts: A Study of Medieval Aesthetics," *Anthropology and Aesthetics* 19/20 (1990/1991): 137-161, 141.



that provides allegorical or symbolic messages as well. So by combining an analysis of the image with that of the text, *The Aberdeen Bestiary* can be understood as containing anti-Semitic messages. For example, the hyena is described as an animal who “inhabits the tombs of the dead and feeds on their bodies,” and represents “the sons of Israel.”<sup>382</sup> However, the accompanying image is blatantly sexual with its prominently displayed genitals and devilish “horns” and tail.<sup>383</sup> Interpreting all this information together then conveys that “the sons of Israel,” or medieval Jews, are sexual devils who “feed” or prey upon Christians.<sup>384</sup>

*Le Bestiaire* focuses on the perception of Jews as a religious threat in need of conversion.<sup>385</sup> In particular, this bestiary conveys themes of medieval Jews as servants of avarice, the Jews as sexual devils, the Jews as desecrators of Christianity, and the Jews as “lost” or “stray” Christians. But more pervasive than these themes is the encouragement or demand for the conversion of Jews to Christianity that runs throughout. Unlike *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, *Le Bestiaire* lacks illustrations to enhance the textual message. However, this absence is not detrimental to understanding *Le Bestiaire* as a representation of medieval French Jews and the accompanying feelings of anti-Semitism. For example, as part of its

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<sup>382</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, ““The Aberdeen Bestiary Project,”” <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/>, fol. 11v.

<sup>383</sup> See Figure 7; Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 11v; Debra Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 150; Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews* (Princeton: Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 153.

<sup>385</sup> Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: The Second-family Bestiary*, 10, 14; Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 95-96.

description of the hyena *Le Bestiaire* states, “know that avarice is the root of all evils according to the Apostle who says: ‘Those who serve avarice can be compared to this unclean beast.’”<sup>386</sup> As usurers, the Jews would be viewed as “those who serve avarice,” and therefore according to this text were comparable to unclean beasts that serve the devil rather than God. Therefore, this text tells the reader to equate the Jews to the hyena and consequently to interpret this entry as a representation of and commentary on medieval Jews. Furthermore, the phrase that “avarice is the root of all evils” then becomes a powerful condemnation of the Jews and implies that they, as perpetrators and representations of avarice, are in fact the greatest evil and the most fundamental problem.<sup>387</sup>

As these two bestiaries are comparable in both date and format, the question arises, why do they vary so significantly with regard to the focus in their anti-Semitic representations? While both *The Aberdeen Bestiary* and *Le Bestiaire* originate in northwest Europe shortly before the period of mass Jewish expulsion, the particular regions of medieval England and northern France from which they originated differed significantly in political, economic, and societal environments.<sup>388</sup> An analysis of the historical context leading up to the expulsion of the Jews from England suggests the declining fortunes of the medieval Jews in England up to and including the time of their expulsion seem to have been predominantly fueled by social hostility and overwhelming economic motives. In

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<sup>386</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire*, 101.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>388</sup> Raphael Langham, *The Jews in Britain: A Chronology* (Houndsmill: Basingstoke: Hampshire: New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 8-9, 22-23; Robert Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500* (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 146.

contrast, an analysis of the expulsion of the medieval Jews from France in 1306 shows motivations dominated by religious considerations despite any social and economic motivations.<sup>389</sup> Consequently, while there were many similarities in the resulting treatment of and issues concerning the medieval Jews in both England and northern France, the predominant considerations in each area do differ significantly.

Therefore, by analyzing the regional character of anti-Semitism in both medieval England and northern France the variations in the anti-Semitic representations appearing in *The Aberdeen Bestiary* and *Le Bestiaire* become comprehensible. *The Aberdeen Bestiary* focuses upon socially and economically driven anti-Semitic representations, while *Le Bestiaire* consistently promotes anti-Semitic representations with an overwhelming religious tone. Consequently, it can be concluded that there is a strong regional impact on medieval text and image, as understood through an analysis of representations of anti-Semitism in medieval bestiaries.

As a result, medieval bestiaries provide evidence of societal, economic, and political reflections and reactions to regional evolutions. More importantly, however, this analysis then suggests that medieval literature and image in general are likely also affected by regional differences. This is significant because of the power this gives medieval text and image for revealing insights concerning more specific regional cultures.

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<sup>389</sup> Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000-1500*, 146.