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The Fourteenth-Century *Tring Tiles*: A Fresh Look at Their Origin and the Hebraic Aspects of the Child Jesus' Actions

By Mary F. Casey

Images of the Christ Child rarely puzzle or astonish their viewers, as they routinely follow a canonically scripted format. As such, these traditional images of the Child Jesus stand in sharp contrast to the provocative images taken from the early apocrypha and laid down, sometime in the first quarter of the fourteenth century, on an over-sized set of ten rectangular, red clay tiles, known as the *Tring Tiles*.¹ (**fig. 1**) These extraordinary images yield a most unusual perspective on the childhood of Jesus as they portray stories derived from the second-century Apocryphal Infancy of Christ Gospels which purport to tell events from Jesus' life, from ages 5 – 12.² In these stories Jesus kills other boys and a Jewish teacher who offend him, and then returns them to life. Even though Jesus also performs traditional Christian miracles, such as planting a single grain of wheat to immediately produce an entire crop for the poor to harvest, and healing the lame and the injured, the Infancy stories were so startling that Church Fathers condemned them as unsuitable for inclusion in the canon.³

¹ This article is an expanded version of the presentation I made in 2005 at the International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

² J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993): ix-xv; 46-107; Ronald F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas*. (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 1995); Montague Rhodes James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953):38-84; Oscar Cullman, "Infancy Gospels: in *New Testament Apocrypha*, (ed.) Wilhelm Schneemelcher (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963) 363-417. For a collation and discussion of the Infancy Gospels see Mary Christine Dzon, *The Image of the Wanton Christ-Child in the Apocryphal Infancy Legends of Late Medieval England*, (U. of Toronto, Ph.D diss., 2004) 288-298.

³ Cullman: 368, 405; Jerome condemned the Infancy material under three popes. The Infancy Gospels are also believed to have been included in the fifth century decree, incorrectly attributed to Gelasius I, which contained a list of stories to be avoided by Christians. Ayers Bagley, "Jesus at School" in *The Journal of Psychohistory*, Vol. 13 – 1:



Tring Tile: *Fig. 1A, Jesus building pools; dead boy. Fig. 1B, Mary, Jesus reviving dead boy. First quarter, 14th century, England. Courtesy of the British Museum.*

While the sweet face of the Child Jesus as drawn on the *Tring Tiles* may belie the strangeness of his actions, it clearly reflects the resurgence in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries of Christianity's focus on the humanity of Christ and the desire on the part of the Christian faithful to know more about his childhood years. In addition, the stories, sometimes not so subtly, reflect the conflicts that existed between Jews and Christians in the early years of the

1985: Irenaeus, in "*Against Heresies*" condemned as "false and wicked" the school episode in which Jesus refused to say Beta until the teacher explained Alpha to his satisfaction, discussed below.

new faith when both groups proclaimed the predominance and superiority of their beliefs, while competing over converts. The stereotypical depiction of the Jewish figures in the stories on the Tring Tiles reminds us that these conflicts still existed in the minds of the fourteenth century English, even though King Edward I had expelled all Jews from England in 1290.

Written by an anonymous Christian author, the Infancy Gospels are generally presumed to contain more fiction than fact. Therefore, the framing of these presumably fictional stories within the Christian question: “Is this what (the child) Jesus would have done?” has provided centuries of readers and viewers a plethora of indignant curiosity and pronouncements. If the author’s intent was to humanize the Christ Child, he went to such an extreme that centuries of Popes, Church Fathers, theologians and scholars have dismissed the stories as incorrect and exaggerated, declaring the child Jesus to be rude, vindictive, unruly, and “non-Christian.”⁴ In spite of its official rejection of the Infancy gospels, the Church maintained a lenient policy towards their existence, while among the lay Christian populace the stories grew in scope and popularity throughout the centuries.

It is important to remember when experiencing the Infancy Gospels that they were written by early Christians who, while attempting to relate their version of what Jesus’ childhood might have been like, constructed the stories around their own experiences in the formation of Christianity. Scholars have attempted to associate these unlikely stories with the marginalized, heretical variants of early Christianity such as the Gnostics who believed that Jesus was

⁴ Elliott, 69; Hock, 86. See James, 39 and Elliott, 85, for discussion of Jerome and the Church’s rejection of the Infancy stories because of reference in Pseudo-Matthew to Joseph’s other sons, indicating his previous marriage.

omnipotent and omniscient from birth.⁵ Conversely, certain aspects of the stories appear to have been drawn from the canonical portrayal of Jesus' life.

The events in the Infancy Gospels exist as self-contained stories that have been combined in constantly-mutating forms since their creation. This structural style suggests that from their beginning the Infancy Gospels existed in oral culture and were passed through the centuries in this form.⁶ The composition of the *Tring Tiles*, when seen as individual entities, reflects this oral form. However, when the stories are experienced as a series in the written compilations of the Infancy stories, several cohesive narrative themes emerge. Primary to the genre is the Gospel of Thomas, believed to have been written as early as the second century.⁷ In the eighth or ninth centuries, the Gospel of Thomas was combined with the Proto-evangelium of James, which contains the Apocrypha of the Virgin Mary, to form the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew. Beginning in the late twelfth century, intensified interest in the humanity of the Christ Child sparked the production of a large number of manuscripts based mainly on Pseudo-Matthew, many of which were composed in vernacular languages. It was from this extensive compilation of the Infancy

⁵ Elliott, 74, stories have 'Gnostic character'; see also Cullmann, 367-8. The Gnostics were especially interested in, and collected, Infancy stories in order to find details of Jesus' life which supported their speculations about Christ, Cullman, 401-2: cites the Docetics, however their belief in the totally spiritual aspect of the Child Jesus' being conflicts with the needs of late medieval Christians to know more about Jesus' human qualities. Also, James, 15: Irenaeus (i.13.1); the Marcossian sect knew of the Infancy stories, including Jesus' lecture to the teachers over Alpha and Beta.

⁶ Evelyn Birge Vitz, "The Apocryphal & the Biblical, The Oral & the Written, in Medieval Legends of Christ's Childhood: The Old French *Evangile de l'Enfance*" in *Satura. Studies in Medieval Literature in Honor of Robert R. Rymo* (eds.) Nancy M. Reales & Ruth C. Sternglantz. (Shaun Tyas Donington, 2001): 124-149. Vitz suggests that beyond the oral, storytelling tradition, the stories belong in a narrative performance tradition, which helps to explain Jesus' seemingly-outrageous actions.

⁷ Cullmann, 391; Hock, 3;

stories that the now-lost model for the *Tring Tiles* was drawn, as well as the rescensionally-related Anglo-Norman manuscript, *Les Enfaunces de Jesu Crist* which was combined with an Apocalypse manuscript to comprise the Bodleian MS. *Selden Supra 38*.⁸ Written in octosyllabic quatrains and dated to *c.* 1325, this manuscript is the earliest, most complete illuminated gathering of the Infancy Gospel stories extant. In spite of this recessional relationship, the style of the animated, caricatured images on the *Tring Tiles* varies markedly from the small, simple figures in *Selden Supra 38*.

The themes that emerge when the stories are seen or read in a sequence center around the child Jesus' miracles that result from his omniscience and omnipotence, as he attempts to play with other children. These episodes usually end in disaster and lead to confrontational episodes with the parents, children and teachers. A major thread that runs through the ancient stories, the anti-Judaic aspect of Christianity, is one that had expanded enormously by the thirteenth century. In this article I will discuss specific features in the stories that reflect medieval Christian antisemitism as seen on the *Tring Tiles*, and that are copiously detailed in the text of *Selden Supra 38*. At the same time, these stories serve to associate Jesus and his earthly family with the Judaic culture and the community of their ancestors. These narrative episodes that reflect the intermeshing of Jewish and Christian cultures in the early centuries of Christianity also function as the source for Christian image construction in the later Middle Ages.

⁸ Maureen Boulton (ed.), *Les Enfaunces de Jesu Crist* (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1985): 28, dates the Infancy Gospel contained in Bodleian Ms. *Selden Supra 38* to *c.* 1325. I will use the manuscript's Bodleian shelf name, *Selden Supra 38*, in this discussion. See also the closely related old French manuscript by Maureen Boulton (ed.), *Evangile de L'Enfance* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984).

Needless to say, the oversized *Tring Tiles* (13” x 6½”) offer a format distinctly different from the manuscripts for the telling of the apocryphal stories. As opposed to the manuscripts, these large tiles with their actively gesturing, cartoon-like figures are the only extant major version of the Infancy Gospels that may have been intended for public viewing, possibly for a lay popular-culture audience, including children.⁹ The *Tring Tiles* contain no text, but their format suggests a didactic intent. Since the Infancy stories circulated in oral culture from the time of their inception, the details of the tile images may have been known to their viewers. They could also have been interpreted by persons familiar with the stories, such as literate medieval clergy, using the text of one of the numerous copies of the Infancy of Christ Gospel manuscripts then in existence. The available manuscripts might have included the now-lost illuminated manuscript that served as the model for the tile images. Similarly, I will borrow from the text of the *Selden Supra 38* to explain the textless images of the *Tring Tiles*.

These ten *Tring Tiles* are the only major extant English tile work of this period on which images were produced by the complex, time-consuming technique, termed *sgraffito*. In this painstaking method, the tiles are covered with white slip, and the details of the figures etched through the slip. The background areas are then scraped away, leaving the finely drawn figures raised slightly above the tile surface, rendering a subtle three-dimensional effect that enhanced the expressive quality of the active figures. In firing, the white figures turn yellow, the result of the

⁹ C.M. Kauffmann, discusses the *Tring Tiles* as the art of popular culture in “Art in Popular Culture: New Themes in the Holkham Bible Picture Book” in *Studies in Medieval Art and Architecture Presented to Peter Lasko* (eds.) David Buckton and T.A. Heslop. (London: Alan Sutton, 1994): 46-69. See also, *Biblical Imagery in Medieval England, 700-1550* (London: Harvey Miller, 2003): 213-242.

interaction between the white slip, the lead glaze and the iron-red clay. As the *Tring Tiles* show no surface damage, it is presumed that they were not used as floor tiles. Therefore, these artfully crafted, ten solitary *sgraffitoed* tiles, stand in contrast to the thousands of decorative floor tiles manufactured in medieval England by the common die-stamped, slip-filled method.¹⁰

The exact origin of the *Tring Tiles* is not known. The extant ten tiles and three sherds are all that remain from a presumably longer series. Eight of the tiles were purchased in a “curiosity shop” at Tring, Hertfordshire, sometime in the mid-nineteenth century, and are currently housed in the British Museum.¹¹ Two of the tiles are in the Victoria and Albert Museum, obtained from a woman in Exeter who stated that her husband had purchased them in 1881-1882, and was told that they had come from a church at Tring during renovations there. The two V&A sherds were found in rubble in Tring, one in an old wall and the other in a garden path. The sherd at the British Museum was found in excavations near Luton. The fourth sherd, and the only one to have been located near the church, was found before 1849 during digging for a vestry at the parish church of St. Peter and St. Paul, in Tring, Hertfordshire. Unfortunately, this piece was lost, but a drawing of it survives at the British library. The tiles were probably commissioned for a site in the Tring area, but the scarcity of evidence available to pin-point a specific location is vexing. Almost by default, the Tring Parish Church has been named as the original site for the tiles. Wherever their originally site, the tiles’ didactic quality suggests that they would have been displayed at a location

¹⁰ Elizabeth S. Eames, *Catalogue of Mediaeval Lead Glazed Tiles in the Department of Mediaeval and Later Antiquities of the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1980) Vol. I & 2. Eames discusses the Tring Tiles in Vol. I, 56 – 61.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 56.

appropriate for viewing. Although it has been proposed that they were mounted on a wall, there is no documentation to support this theory nor has there been definitive scientific testing to verify such a placement. The question also remains as to why these unusual, in some ways offensive, stories would have been mounted on the walls of a small town parish church.

In contrast, I believe that there is sufficient circumstantial evidence to name another nearby site as the source of the tiles. Only 3 ½ miles east of Tring once stood Ashridge College, a medieval monastery, scriptorium and pilgrimage site, founded in 1283 by Edmund, Earl of Cornwall, the wealthy nephew of Henry III. Edmund established the monastery for an order called the Bonhommes, nominally associated with the Augustinian order, but as it only existed in England, it was probably Edmund's singular creation, and is considered to have been a "royal foundation."¹² The Bonhommes were created for the express purpose of revering and protecting a phial of Christ's blood, obtained by Edmund in Germany in 1257. With Christ's blood as a focus, the monastery may have wanted to extend to its pilgrims the opportunity to witness other aspects of his life and humanity, such as the display of the visually engaging *Tring Tiles* to elucidate the mysterious missing years of Christ's early life. While the tiles would teach the dual nature of Christ's childhood, as handed down from the second century, they would also send a message pertinent to contemporary fourteenth-century viewers. That message, embodied in the tiles' stereotyped images of the Jews, fed the on-going antisemitism that continued to permeate a

¹² H.J. Todd, *The History of the College of Bonhommes at Ashridge* (London: R. Gilbert, 1823). The historical information on Ashridge, in all sources, is taken primarily from Rev. Todd's volume. For discussion of the Bonhommes also see David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948) vol. II, 23-24. A second Bonhommes monastery was established at Edington, Wiltshire in 1352 by the Edward, the Black Prince who took an interest in Ashridge and provided for the college in his will.

country that had seen few Jews since their expulsion from England in 1290. The *Selden Supra 38* manuscript (**fig. 12**) had especially pandered to this bias as its text is considerably more antisemitic than the ancient manuscripts from which it was derived, specifically the Gospels of Thomas and Pseudo-Matthew.¹³ As *Selden Supra 38* magnifies the rhetoric praising Christ, it also amplifies the virulent pronouncements which curse and damn the Jews. Such harsh dialogue provides a shadowy explanation for the caricatured, exaggerated faces of the Jews with whom Jesus clashes in the *Tring Tiles*.¹⁴



Fig. 12. Selden Supra 38, fol.8v. Jesus and Frondise with his followers. c. 1325, England. Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

¹³ Dzon, 293-299, discusses other infancy manuscripts from this period and later ones in Middle English that continue to include venomous anti-Semitic language.

¹⁴ In spite of the anti-Semitic tone of the text, the images in *Selden Supra 38* do not overtly reflect stereotypical depiction.

The persistent antisemitism that was endemic in medieval Christianity and culture was fueled from a variety of sources. The friars, more than the clergy, were a major influence as, in the 1220's, they brought heightened spirituality and the preaching of antisemitic rhetoric aimed at the conversion of the Jews.¹⁵ As we examine the intensified persecution of the Jews in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it is interesting to include Anthony Bale's assertion that a major motivation behind the ritual murder accusations lay in the desire to "craft a devotional Christian polity," even more than the drive to persecute the Jews. This goal was fueled by devotion to the martyrs' bodies, antisemitic images, sermons and poems, all of which played a role in bolstering a national Christian identity.¹⁶ Certainly, Henry III and his son Edward I held aspirations for a purely Christian England, a goal that could only be achieved through the conversion and assimilation, or the expulsion of the Anglo-Judaic population. They both financially exploited the Jews and concurrently exerted the pressure for conversion, including Henry's establishment in 1232 of a house in London for converted, impoverished Jews, the *Domus Conversorum*.¹⁷ Henry's brother, Richard of Cornwall, while manipulating the Jews' situation to increase his own immense wealth, acted as a major protector of Jewish individuals and communities. However, he could not contain his eldest son, Henry of Almain, and Prince Edward in their attempts to alter the financial and social position of the Anglo-Jewry. These two cousins, who held a strong hostility towards the

¹⁵ Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982) 13-85.

¹⁶ Anthony Bale, "Fictions of Judaism in England before 1290" in *Jews in Medieval Britain* (ed.) Patricia Skinner (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003), 129, 132-133.

¹⁷ Robert C. Stacey, "The Conversion of Jews to Christianity in Thirteenth-century England," *Speculum*, 67 (1992): 267. Henry III devoted more effort towards converting the Jews than did his son, Edward I.

Jews, facilitated the damaging Statute of 1269 and the *Provisio Judaismi* of 1271.¹⁸ Then, as king, Edward enacted the Statutes of Jewry of 1275, which forbade usury, and in its place permitted the Jews to work as merchants and laborers, as well as to own homes and land.¹⁹ The Statutes imposed crippling taxation, some of which was directed for the upkeep of the *Domus Conversorum*. It also included a number of stigmatizing, humiliating social restrictions, including the enforced wearing of the yellow *tabula*.²⁰ These impoverishments paved the way toward the expulsion of 1290. Robert Stacey has defined the bargain that the financially indebted Edward struck with parliament in 1290, gaining from his Christian subjects the largest grant of taxes in English history, in return for the expulsion of the Jewish population from England.²¹ Other factors that led into the expulsion included the frustration of the king's court over both the failure to convert the Jews as well as the apostasy of Jews who had previously been converted.²² Certainly, the relief from debt economics served to weaken opposition from the rebellious barons and from the Christian population, as it furthered Edward's aims for building an untainted, cohesive English

¹⁸ Robin R. Mundill, *England's Jewish Solution* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 61.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 62; 291-293.

²⁰ R.C. Stacey, (1992), 282-283. See also "The English Jews under Henry III" in *Jews in Medieval Britain* 54. There had been previous attempts to force Jews to wear an identifying badge, (including Henry III's 1253 Statute of Jewry) but they were not entirely successful.

²¹ *Ibid.* (1992): 282-283. See also Stacey (2003), 53-54.

²² *Ibid.* (1992): 280-283.

Christian identity, using the specter of the absent Jews to enhance his, and England's, stature and power.²³

The attitude that Edmund, Earl of Cornwall held towards Jews is unknown, so we must consider his position as the creator of the Christian house of the Bonhommes, as well as the anti-Jewish actions of his now-deceased brother, his close relationships with his cousin, Edward I, and his friend Thomas de Cantilupe, Bishop of Winchester, who voiced his strong disapproval of Christians being subject to the "perfidious" Jews, even one who was a Christian convert and had Henry's support.²⁴ Edmund's most positive influence may have been that of his father, Richard of Cornwall, in his consistent acts as patron and protector of the Jews, even though he gained much wealth from them, including funds to finance his crusade. The presence of the *Tring Tiles* in this monastery would have signaled not only Edmund's devotion to the blood and life of Christ, but possibly presented his, and the monastery's, position towards the Jews.

The *Tring Tile* images begin with just such a construction of medieval Christian concepts, where Jesus, like any child of five years, has gone with friends to play on the banks of a river, and

²³ Mundill (1998) 14, cites Sophia Menache, "Faith, myth and politics –the Stereotype of the Jews and Their Expulsions from England and France," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 75: 351-74, as seeing "the expulsion of the Jews as a step forward in the growth of a national identity and as a political action designed to weaken internal opposition."

²⁴ Henry Almain was killed at Viterbo by his cousins, Simone de Montefort's sons, who claimed that Henry had played a part in their father's death. Henry's murder left Edmond as Richard's only legal heir. For the description of Thomas de Cantilupe's reaction to the situation involving a converted Jew, even one whom Henry III had knighted, see Stacey (1992) 277-278.

“in his nature,” he purifies the water.²⁵ Although most of the manuscript versions mention his going to a “river”, Pseudo-Matthew specifies the Jordan River, the site of Jesus’ future baptism.²⁶ In the first *Tring Tile* scene, Jesus has built three water pools on the bank of the river, (**fig. 1A**) differing from *Selden Supra 38* and all other apocryphal texts which specify seven pools.²⁷ In the *Tring Tile* scene, Jesus does not use a stick or wand, his traditional tool for performing miracles, but a compass. This instrument is not a child’s play toy, and although it may be the tool of his earthly father, Joseph the Carpenter, here it references the attribute of God as “Architect of Heaven” in his act of Creation. Among the Infancy Gospel illustrations that depict this act, the compass detail appears only in the *Tring Tile* and the *Selden Supra* images. Maureen Boulton has suggested that the insertion of a compass in this scene is a curious misinterpretation by the artist of the Anglo-Norman verb *compassoit*, meaning to “arrange or construct.”²⁸ It also suggests that the artist was familiar with the images of God, the “Divine Architect” produced by this time.²⁹ The

²⁵ This *Tring Tile* image of Jesus building pools is the first in the extant series and coincides with the first episode in the Gospel of Thomas, as opposed to *Selden Supra 38* and Pseudo-Matthew, both of which include the Nativity of Christ and the Flight to Egypt, before the family’s return “to Galilee” and the episode of the pools. However, the existence of the sherd at the V&A depicting two of the three Magi suggests that the tile sequence may have contained some episodes from the Nativity and the Flight into Egypt.

²⁶ The Infancy Gospel manuscripts differ as to Jesus’ location at this point. The Latin Thomas and *Selden Supra 38* do not name a location; the Greek Thomas mss. A and B, and the Arabic gospels name Nazareth; Pseudo-Matthew states that Jesus is four years old, in Galilee by the Jordan River.

²⁷ The depiction of seven pools, as a symbolic a reference to creation, would have been more appropriate for Jesus’ action here. Therefore we must presume that the artist has reduced the number of pools to three to fit the image into the tile frame, although it also references the Trinity and Jesus’ role in that context.

²⁸ Boulton, 97-98, line 409.

²⁹ The *Tring Tiles* appear to contain the first depiction of the compass outside manuscript production and designed for public viewing, in contrast to W.O.Hassell (ed.), *Holkham Bible Picture Book*, *British Museum Add. 47682, fol.2, c.1320-30* (London: Dropmore, 1954.) who states that the image of God holding the compass does not appear in

artist also must have expected his fourteenth-century audience to have been aware of this association and by extension, the divine aspect of Jesus' persona, operating in a human boy's body.

There are three types of boys in these stories: Jesus, the generic children who are his playmates, and the Bad Boys who annoy and attack him. In this image one such Bad Boy, described as Jewish, breaks open a pool with a willow branch. Jesus responds in anger, curses the boy, gesturing with his left hand to damn and strike him dead. The boy hangs upside-down, a position which can denote not just death, but evil death.³⁰ **(fig. 1A)** Among the Infancy Gospel manuscripts, this depiction of the up-side down, dead boys, like the compass detail, appears only in the *Tring Tiles* and the earlier *Selden Supra 38*. Quite possibly the artist for a model manuscript drew his inspiration for the falling, evil-death position from the depiction of the pagan idols during the Holy Family's Flight to Egypt, seen in *Selden Supra 38* just two images prior to the story of the pools. In that image, an idol tumbles head-first from the temple, an iconographic concept derived from the depictions of the fall of the evil Rebel Angels.³¹

English church art until 1500. For compass iconography see J.B. Friedman, "The Architect's Compass in Creation Miniatures of the Later Middle Ages" *Traditio* 30 (1974): 419-429, who notes that 'God as Architect' who does not just draw but creates, appears first in the *Bible Moralisée* Ms., Vienna, ONB, 1179, fol.1, c. 1212/15-1225 and Bodleian Library 270b, fol. 1, c.1235-45. English manuscripts that depict God with the compass include the *Hugh Psalter*, British Museum Add. 38116, fol. 8v, c.1280 and the *Queen Mary Psalter*, British Library, Royal 2.B.VII, fol. Iv, c. 1310-20.

³⁰ Mary Frances Casey, *The Apocryphal Infancy of Christ as Depicted on the Fourteenth Century Tring Tiles*, M.A Thesis, (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1995): 59-7. Iconographic origin for this concept goes back to the fall of the rebel angels.

³¹ Boulton (1985), 4, 44, 46, 48, contain the lines in *Selden Supra 38* describing the falling demon and then 3 falling boys. Boulton 118: The Old French verb *trebucher* "to fall head over heels," is used to describe the demon's fall (l. 358 with image on fol. 8r). It does not appear in the story of the Bad Boy and the pools (l. 396-420, fol.9r), but is used in two incidents in which Bad Boys attack Jesus (l. 496-7, fol. 10v and l. 508-9, fol. 11r). The last image, of the

The dead boy's parents, in compliance with medieval Judaic custom, complain to Joseph, the man whom they presume to be Jesus' father. In light of their family structure, Joseph then asks Mary to talk with Jesus, although, in another episode Jesus lectures Joseph for scolding him. In the second scene on the first *Tring Tile*, (**fig. 1B**) Mary's appearance reflects the evolution of the Cult of the Virgin by the early fourteenth century as she is portrayed in elegant Gothic dress wearing the crown of the Queen of Heaven, as opposed to her depiction in *Selden Supra 38*, where she is seated, holding a book, with a shawl over her head.³² Responding as both an intercessor for the dead boy and his parents, and as a human mother, Mary admonishes Jesus for killing the boy who broke open his water pools. Jesus, complaining bitterly and cursing the Jewish boy, reminds her that human restrictions do not apply to him, yet states that, for her sake, he will revive the boy. In the text of *Selden Supra 38*, Jesus and Mary exchange several statements of affection, thus emphasizing the human emotional bond between them and highlighting this concept from early Christianity that had become a central Christian theme by the thirteenth century. In the *Tring Tile* image, Mary, with her hand on Jesus' back, encourages him to rejuvenate the dead boy.

Jesus revives the boy with a life-giving kick, and the boy walks off, now holding not the branch of the first image, but a club, symbol of the betrayal of Christ.³³ Jesus carries a book - the Book of Knowledge and in this context, the sign of a teacher. With these acts of bringing death

boy on Jesus' back, is depicted on *Tring Tile*, **fig. 2A**. *Trebucher* is commonly used to indicate a machine that catapults rocks during a siege.

³² *Selden Supra 38*, fol.21v, above.

³³ George Ferguson, *Signs and symbols in Christian Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 172.

and revival, the child Jesus has exhibited his super-human power, defending himself from a Bad Boy who would harm him and his creation.

Missing from the extant *Tring Tiles* is a popular story which appears at this point in the apocryphal narrative, that of Jesus, still at the river, molding twelve sparrows out of clay. When the Jews scold Jesus for performing this act on the Sabbath, he lets the now-alive sparrows fly away. As one of the most frequently depicted of the Infancy stories, it is probable that this episode once formed part of the *Tring Tile* series. Also absent from the series is the story of another Jewish boy, the son of Annas the scribe, who is killed by “withering” when he strikes Jesus in anger. This method of killing is believed to be a reference to Matthew 21:19-21, in which the adult Jesus kills a fig tree for not producing fruit when he is hungry, and the tree withers, a metaphorical reference to Jews who do not recognize and accept Jesus.

The conflict between Jesus and the Bad Boys continues on the second Tring Tile, where the two scenes (**figs. 2A & 2B**) present a conflation and reversal of the narrative order. The first event in the textual order describes the scene on the right side of **figure 2A**, in which an angry boy jumps on Jesus’ shoulders. Jesus kills him and he is shown having fallen “head over heels” into a crumpled upside-down position behind Jesus. At this point, the parents, seen arguing with Joseph on the right side of the tile, (**fig. 2B**) are so angry and frightened that they threaten Mary and Joseph, demanding that if they cannot teach Jesus to bless and not to curse, they should take him and leave the village. It is at this point that the Jews’ tirade against Jesus reaches a high pitch,

including such insults as “child-killer” and “wanton.”³⁴ It is important to remember that it was a Christian author who put these words into the Jews’ mouths, an action which, in Christian minds, reflects negatively on the part of the Jews, more than on Jesus.



Tring Tile: Fig. 2A, *Zacharias, boy and Jesus; dead boy.* Fig. 2B, *Joseph and parents; Jesus reviving boy.*

First quarter 14th century, England. Courtesy of the British Museum.

³⁴ Roger R. Fowler (ed.), *The Southern Version of Cursor Mundi*, Vol. II: Lines 9229-12712 (Ottawa): 2000, line 11954, where the angry parents describe Jesus as “wanton and wild.” Dzon: 52-59, focuses the arguments in her dissertation on medieval scholarly assessments of Jesus as a “wanton child” or *lascivus*, interpreting these perceptions as leaning more towards his being mischievous than cruel. In contrast, the angry Jewish parents in this and other episodes consider Jesus to be out of control and dangerous, who with his cursing, had slain their child. Fowler, p. 133, also suggests that episodes such as this one provide evidence that the Jewish slanders provided an important polemical reason for the composition of the apocryphal Infancy Gospels.



Tring Tile: *Fig. 3A, Levi slaps Jesus; Jesus scolding. Fig. 3B, Teachers, Jesus; lame persons.* First quarter, 14th century, England. Courtesy of the British Museum.

In this image, Joseph's hat relates a puzzling message, as do Jewish men's hats in general, because they do not convey consistent meanings. In both Christian and Hebrew art, the headgear most frequently employed to depict medieval Jewish men was the pointed hat, termed the "upside-down funnel," seen with a variety of pointed, conical or rounded crowns. In addition, Joseph and other Jewish men are shown wearing various forms of the biretta and the coif.³⁵ Thus viewers must consider the context of the image in order to differentiate between the enemies of Christ and the respected Old Testament Patriarchs, whom Christians considered to be typological precursors

³⁵ Ruth Mellinkoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages*, Vol. I (Berkeley: University of California Press: Berkeley, 1993), 79-94.

and witnesses to their faith. In Christian art, Joseph's wearing of the "upside down funnel" identifies him as a precursor to the New Order. Yet, in this *Tring Tile* image Joseph's hat has a flat-top. It has been suggested that the point of his hat has been cut off to indicate his rejection of Judaism. However, this flat style of headdress is similar to those depicted in late medieval German-Hebrew manuscripts, except that they include a spike with a ball tip, representing the "Jewish Hat" of the fourteenth century.³⁶ It also closely resembles the straw hat worn by English peasants, field workers or shepherds in this period, which would speak to the humble laborer-carpenter role assigned to Joseph by the Church.³⁷ Iconography aside, Joseph's hat design could also simply be the artist's solution to the problem of fitting Joseph's figure into the crowded tile frame, although in this symbolic-laden context, that solution is questionable.

To calm the irate parents, Joseph follows the suggestion of the teacher Zacharias, seen on the left side of the tile, (**fig.2A**) and takes Jesus to school, ostensibly to correct his behavior and teach him to respect his forefathers, his fathers and his peers, and to learn his letters. The boy who is jumping on Jesus' back appears to be included in the same time frame as the teacher, even though in the Infancy texts this boy's story occurs before Jesus' visit to Zacharias. Thus, in the narrative, Jesus meets with the teacher by himself, not accompanied by the Bad Boy. This compression of the images, with Jesus and the jumping boy standing on the right, before the

³⁶ Thérèse and Mendel Metzger, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages: Illuminated Hebrew Manuscripts of the Thirteenth to the Sixteenth Centuries* (New York: Alpine Fine Arts, 1982), 145-6.

³⁷ C. Willitt and Phillis Cunnington, *Handbook of English Mediaeval Costume* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952) 4.

teacher, on the left, also appears in *Selden Supra* 38. The compositional placement of the teacher seated on the left and Jesus standing on the right appears several times in the manuscript images.

In the *Tring Tile* image, Zacharias is hieratically seated on an elevated bench, holding a book or a tablet, his head capped with a stalked beret, a style seen frequently on Jewish scholars. He looks beyond Jesus to exchange gestures and glances with the Bad Boy, implying a possible collusion between the teacher and the boy, and reminding viewers of the Christian assertion that the Jews were blind to Christ. The exaggerated, yet comical, antisemitic caricature of Zacharias' visage does not suggest a man of wisdom.

Before Zacharias can begin Jesus' instruction, Jesus starts lecturing him, pointing out the teacher's ignorance, in contrast to Jesus' superior knowledge. To emphasize his divine, eternal identity, Jesus states that "before Abraham, I was." Then, in a reversal of traditional roles, Zacharias voices shame, embarrassment, and self doubt at being bettered by this unusual child. Thus, Jesus further establishes his divine identity as the Word of God.

Following an interlude of two *Tring Tile* stories, Jesus appears with a second teacher, a bearded Levi, seated on a bench with his legs crossed. This teacher also attempts to instruct Jesus, but Jesus rejects the teacher's instructions, exhibiting his knowledge of the alphabet and then angrily states that no one recognizes him nor understands the extent of his wisdom. In statements criticizing the teacher for his ignorance, Jesus displays his own omniscience, as he launches into abstract, allegorical, yet condescending rhetoric, stating that the teacher does not know the

meaning of *aleph* and therefore cannot teach *beth*. Jesus also upbraids him for not understanding the meaning of the structure of the letter *A*, a symbolic reference to the Trinity.³⁸ (**fig. 3A**)

The apocryphal texts are inconsistent at this point. In spite of their utilizing the Hebrew letter names in the teaching exercise, Jesus' description of the letter *A* more closely resembles the Western *A* than the Hebrew *aleph*.³⁹ In addition, in the original Greek text of the Gospel of Thomas and in its translations, the Greek letter names *alpha* and *omega* are used. Probably not coincidentally these letters coincide more closely with Jesus' assertion in Revelation 1:8 that he is Alpha and Omega. Also, in the Latin Thomas, the teacher states that he will teach Jesus Greek and then Hebrew, a detail not included in later manuscripts. It is with this episode, when Jesus expounds with christologically mystical statements, that contemporary scholars have attempted to associate the Infancy Gospels with the Gnostics, particularly regarding the concept that Jesus possessed complete knowledge, wisdom and power from birth, and as such was a Gnostic revealer.⁴⁰

Finally, as Jesus continues in his unyieldingly superior manner, the teacher scolds him for his insolence, and slaps him. (**fig. 3A**) The second figure of Jesus shows him responding to the teacher, as he in turn, scolds the Hebrew master.⁴¹ A third teacher, who appears in *Selden Supra*

³⁸ J.C.J. Metford, *Dictionary of Christian Lore and Legend* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1983).

³⁹ The Gospels of Thomas and Pseudo-Matthew and the *Selden Supra 38* ms. all differ in their placement of the details in the teacher stories. Therefore, to be consistent with the primary use of the *Selden Supra 38* version, I have placed Jesus' allegorical statements about the alphabet with the second teacher in **fig. 3A**.

⁴⁰ Elliott 69-70 and Cullman 390-392.

⁴¹ The right side of the tile (**fig. 3B**) shows Jesus talking with two teachers. Behind him are two lame persons whom Jesus, but not the teachers, can heal.

38 and other apocryphal texts, but is not represented in the extant *Tring Tile* sequence, repeats this teaching tactic, slaps Jesus, but falls dead when Jesus curses him.

Even as Jesus battles with these Jewish Masters and appears to be breaking away from the Old Faith to establish his identity as the foundation of the New Faith, these visits to the teachers serve to link Jesus with his human Jewish heritage. Ivan Marcus, in *Ritual of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe*, discusses two illustrations contained in the Hebrew manuscript, the *Leipzig Mahzor*, dated to 1300, which depict a richly complex Jewish educational ritual.⁴² The ritual involves Jewish fathers taking their 5 or 6 year old boys to school to study the Torah, and is timed by the Ashkenazi Jews to coincide with Shavuot, “The Festival of Weeks.” This springtime celebration commemorates Moses receiving the Tablets of the Law from God and presenting them to the people of Israel. The *Leipzig Mahzor* illustrations show the three steps in the ritual: in the center of **fig. 4A**, the father is taking the child to the teacher; on the left, boys are at school with the teacher; and right, the teacher is guiding the boys to the River Jordan to preserve their memory of the Torah.⁴³ On the second page, (**fig. 4B**) Moses gives the Torah to the Israelites, thus associating this crucial event with the symbolic ritual. Segments of this ritual date back to the

⁴² Ivan G. Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) 71-101. Information for the following discussion of the educational ritual is taken primarily from Marcus’ description of this complex, multi-faceted ritual, from which I have taken only the basic details pertaining to the child going to school for the first time. I would like to thank Robert C. Stacey for alerting me to Ivan Marcus’ book and its relationship to medieval Jewish children. The images are from the Leipzig Mahzor, Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, Hebrew Ms. Vollers 1102, Vol. I, fols. 131A & 130B. Also see Belalel Narkiss, *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts* (Jerusalem: Encyclopaedia Judaica Jerusalem, Macmillan, 1969) 33, 106-109.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 79. This three-part ritual symbolically recapitulates the Jewish spring festival trilogy of Passover, the Counting of the Omer (*sefirah*) and Shavuot.

Classical period, but by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it had evolved into the form practiced by Ashkenazi Jews. The ritual's existence at this time was partially in response to the recently established Christian practice of confirmation of six-year old children, but was also in rebuttal to the Christian belief and practice of the sacrifice of the Christ Child in the Eucharist.⁴⁴



*Fig.4A. Leipzig Mahzor, father with boy; teacher with boys
Leipzig. Universitätsbibliothek, Hebrew Ms. Vollers 1102, vol. I. fol. 131A*

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 101.



Fig. 4B. Leipzig Mahzor, Moses handing down the tablets
Leipzig. Universitätsbibliothek, Hebrew Ms. Vollers 1102, vol. I. fol. 130B

Examination of this ritual clarifies the encounters between Jesus and the teachers in the apocryphal Infancy Gospels and on the *Tring Tiles*. Comparison between the description of the Jewish ritual and the episode in the apocryphal texts reveals that the *Tring Tile* teachers are not merely attempting to instruct Jesus in the A B C's, but are introducing him to this historic Jewish ritual designed to teach the boy to love the study of the Torah. In addition, the ritual represented the child's rite-of-passage into the male, adult world of his culture. The teaching exercises also used verses and rhymes to enhance the child's memory and to incorporate instruction in moral behavior.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Hock, 102.

To begin the ritual the boy is wrapped in a cloak or a *tallit* to protect his purity and memory from the evil eye, in the form of Gentiles, dogs, and other contaminants. He is carried by his father, or a surrogate, through the town to the teacher, as depicted in the central image in the *Leipzig Mahzor*. The boy inhabits a liminal state of transfer which, in this multivalent ritual, represents the death of the boy's childhood as well as the journey of the Jewish people through Sinai.

Thus, in the *Tring Tile* image Joseph, like a good Jewish father, has taken his five-year-old son to school to begin his introduction into the Torah, mostly in response to the angry parents' threats, and at the suggestion of Zacharias, who witnessed Joseph's plight. The identification of this ritual as a traditional cultural structure which existed for the education of five-year old Jewish boys presents a major incentive for Joseph's decision to take Jesus to school. This motivation refutes some Infancy scholars' assertions that the trip to the teacher proved that Joseph was illiterate and had neglected his fatherly obligations by not teaching Jesus to read.⁴⁶ Although Joseph's level of literacy is not dealt with in the canon or apocryphal stories, his humility and poverty was important to the image of the Holy Family promulgated by the Church. However, in Pseudo-Matthew he states to Mary that he will leave to "build my buildings," and in six months, "returned from his building," suggesting that he may have possessed a higher level of literacy than that of a carpenter.⁴⁷ Furthermore, in Christian lore Joseph's literacy is not an issue, as emphasis

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 113, fn 6.2; Hone, William, *The Apocryphal Books of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1901).

⁴⁷ Proto-evangelium of James 9:2 and 13:1; and Cullmann 379-38.

is put on Mary's ability to read. She is often depicted following the type established by her mother Anne, as she holds a book and teaches her child to read. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Mary is increasingly given a role in Jesus' education and is even shown taking him to school.⁴⁸ However, following the Infancy Gospels, the question of who would have taught Jesus to read is a moot point, as he is presented as omniscient and therefore did not need to be taught, a concept that presents a divergence from Luke 2:52, that describes that Jesus, after his visit to the Doctors in Jerusalem, increased in wisdom.

The educational ritual also brings into question conjectures by Infancy scholars that the original author was a non-Jewish Christian, as his sense of geography of the Holy Land was askew and he seemed generally unfamiliar with Jewish culture.⁴⁹ It seems clear that the inclusion of this ritual and its centrality to the narrative of these stories would suggest that the author, even if not Jewish, had an understanding of this central aspect of Jewish culture.

After their trip through the village, the Jewish father presents the boy to the teacher, symbolizing the child's transfer from his natural mother to his new spiritual mother, the teacher, who in turn represents Moses, the nurturing mother of the Hebrew people. Through these steps, the boy bonds with other Jews in his community. In addition, he is a symbol for the collectivity of Israel, the Jewish people as well as representing a re-born individual who serves as a sacrifice for

⁴⁸ Bagley 17.

⁴⁹ Cullmann 372; Vitz, 132-133: rejects the possibility that the *Evangile* (the old French manuscript almost identical to Selden Supra 38/*Les Enfaunces de Jesu Crist*) could have been influenced by parallel stories of the life of Jesus based on Talmudic sources and apocryphal legends as the work is so generally ignorant of rudimentary aspects of Judaism.

the atonement of the Jewish community.⁵⁰ The child as sacrifice developed in the late twelfth to early thirteenth centuries, in opposition to contemporary Christian motif of the Christ Child as Eucharistic sacrifice.⁵¹ In these symbolic themes of death, rebirth, and sacrifice, parallels to the Christian Jesus are clearly apparent, and suggestive of the exchange of rituals and patterns between Jews and Christians which occurred during the formative years of Christianity.⁵²

Unlike the rebellious Jesus who has rejected the teachers, the boy depicted in the *Leipzig Mahzor* image is seated on the teacher's lap, holding a sweet honey cake and an egg, given to him in celebration of his initiation.⁵³ The cake symbolizes the sweetness of the Torah that the teacher has provided to enhance the boy's learning and love of the Torah.⁵⁴ The ceremony involves many food metaphors, including honey, milk, nuts, oil, eggs and flour (bread and cake). Wheat and bread play a central role, as bread is equated with the Torah.⁵⁵ Another enticement includes the writing of Hebrew letters, in honey, symbolizing the name of God, which the boy is encouraged to lick off the slate. In the *Mahzor* images, both the slate that the teacher holds and the tablets that Moses is

⁵⁰ Marcus 15.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 99.

⁵² Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb* (Berkeley: University of California, 2006): xvii – xviii.

⁵³ Narkiss 33.

⁵⁴ There is evidence that the enticement of honey did not always work with the young boys, as noted in the *Mahzor Vitry*, “MS Reggie” (New York, Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. MS Mic.8092, f.164b-165a), in which a teacher states “first we entice him and afterwards we use the strap.” This action is depicted in the *Coburg Pentateuch*, (British Museum, Add. 19776, fol.72v, dated 1395) which shows a teacher holding up a whip to coax a student, who is sitting in front of a book using a pointer.

⁵⁵ Wheat in this ritual draws attention to Tring Tile 9A where peasants are harvesting a field of wheat, miraculously grown from the one grain which Jesus has planted. In Pseudo-Matthew and Selden Supra 38 the grain is barley.

handing to the Israelites (**fig. 4B**) are gilded, thus linking the alphabet slate with the tablets of the Ten Commandments given on Mt Sinai.⁵⁶ Hebrew letters are also written on the cakes and eggs, and thus, the boy's eating of these foodstuffs symbolizes the ingesting the Torah, as well as the Word of God. The honey cake also symbolically represents the bread as manna provided by God to his people in their Exodus. This emphasis on ingesting bread also presents a comparison with the Christian rite in which the faithful partake of the Eucharistic Host.

Even though there are six known Hebrew manuscript texts, datable from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, that describe this ritual, there are no precedents for images of the teacher in *Leipzig Mahzor*.⁵⁷ It is thus presumed that this and another figure in these two folios have been borrowed from Christian sources for Hebrew manuscript depiction, a process reflecting a tendency in Jewish manuscript production to take images from the dominant culture that surrounded them, in this case, Christianity.⁵⁸ The Jewish artists transformed the Christian content by adapting and absorbing the figures into Jewish cultural language.

Evelyn Cohen has associated the iconographic concept for this respected Jewish teacher with the Christian Romanesque statue of the Madonna, seen in Majesty, as she is seated frontally on her cathedra, the Child Jesus on her lap.⁵⁹ (**fig. 5**) As such, the seated Virgin embodies the

⁵⁶ Marcus 58.

⁵⁷ Evelyn M. Cohen, "The Teacher, The Father and the Virgin Mary in the *Leipzig Mahzor*" in *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, August, 1989, Division D, Vol. II, 72-76): of the six known texts which describe this ritual three are German, three are French, but none survive from England.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 75; also Bezalel Narkiss 30.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 73-74; Ilene H. Forsyth, *The Throne of Wisdom: Wood Sculptures of the Madonna in Romanesque France*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).

Sedes Sapientiae, the Throne of Wisdom, as she, herself, through the incarnation becomes a throne presenting the Christ Child as the Word of God, and as a sacrificial gift to the world, symbolized through the Eucharist.



Fig. 5. Virgin and Child / Sedes Sapientiae. North French, Meuse Valley, ca. 1210-1220. Oak with traces of polychrome, 48 ½ x 20 ¼ x 19 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Bequest of George Blumenthal, 1941 (41.190.283) Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

This image of Virgin and Child has been symbolically associated with that of Solomon, seated on his Throne of Wisdom.⁶⁰ Therefore, this linkage between the images of the *Sedes Sapientiae* and Solomon in Judgment extends to include that of the *Leipzig Mahzor* teacher, seated on the Throne of Solomon. In addition to this conflation, the teacher, through the educational ritual, is bonded with Moses and therefore can be seen, also, as sitting on the chair of Moses.⁶¹ The earliest known statue of this Virgin and Child appears from about 946 and such images were produced throughout the eleventh century.⁶² The images of the Virgin as the Throne of Wisdom would become ubiquitous in the Middle Ages, in cathedrals dedicated specifically to her and at a multitude of other sites and in many manuscripts. Prime among her sculptural depictions is her visage situated on the west façade of Notre Dame de Chartres Cathedral (1145-47) where she embodies the symbolism of the stoic Romanesque *Sedes Sapientiae*, and through the Incarnation, emphasizes the human side of Christ's nature, the concept which assumed prominence during the following decades.⁶³ Evelyn Cohen utilized the sculptures at Amiens for explication of the evolution from this image (1210) to that of the *Mater Amabilis* (1260), discussed below.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Forsyth 24-26.

⁶¹ Jacobus De Voragine, *The Golden Legend* (eds.) Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1941) 168, names three kinds of chairs: the chair of regal dignity, for kings, those of presbyterial dignity for bishops, and stools, the chair of the teacher Moses.

⁶² Forsyth 67.

⁶³ Jane Welch Williams, *Bread, Wine and Money: the Windows of the Trades at Chartres Cathedral* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); 56-57, points out that the Virgin at Chartres was drawn from an older wooden cult statue situated in the crypt of the cathedral.

⁶⁴ Cohen 73, At Amiens Cathedral the Virgin in Wisdom is on the west facade and the trumeau figure of the *Mater Amabilis* on the north portal.

Particularly relevant to the iconographic puzzle on the *Tring Tiles* is an image of King Solomon in Judgment, as depicted in the Hebrew manuscript, the *Tripartite Mahzor* (1320).⁶⁵ (**fig. 6**) There is a striking similarity between the depiction of the teachers on the *Tring Tiles*, in *Selden Supra 38*, in the *Leipzig Mahzor*, and of Solomon in Judgment in the *Tripartite Mahzor*.⁶⁶ Sitting in formal uprightness, these figures extend their arms in speaking gestures, except for Levi who uses his extended arm to strike Jesus. Zacharias holds a book in his left hand, but the second arms of the other figures are placed in a similar awkwardly bent position. Furthermore, the image of Solomon appears to be a model reversal of the *Tring Tile* Levi, particularly when we look at the crossed-leg position of these two men. This detail also appears in the depiction of the *Leipzig Mahzor* teacher and in one teacher in *Selden Supra 38*. In manuscript production, this crossed leg position is commonly seen in the regal images of Solomon, and of David playing his harp.⁶⁷ The borrowing of this and the other details from the older manuscript images of these ancient kings conveys the Wisdom of Solomon and of David to the Jewish teachers. In contrast, however, Jesus' treatment of the teachers in the apocryphal Infancy Gospels negates this transfer of sagacity from the kings' images to the teachers, showing instead a declaration of sacred supremacy on the part of Jesus.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 74; *Tripartite Mahzor* 3 Vols., Budapest, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Ms. A384. The image of Solomon is in Vol.I, fol.183V.

⁶⁶ In addition, a third *Tring Tiles* image, (**fig. 3B**) depicts two teachers sitting in similar positions, facing Jesus, and can be added to this group.

⁶⁷ Of the numerous examples of these kings depicted with crossed legs and arms in similarly twisted positions, see Solomon in Judgment, fol.1 in British Museum Ms. Yates Thompson 9, and of David playing the Harp, fol.117v, British Museum Ms.Add. 11639. In addition, in *Selden Supra 38*, the model of the crossed legs is used for the bad king, Herod: fol. 2v where he points at the Three Magi; and fol. 4r in a scene of the Massacre of the Innocents.

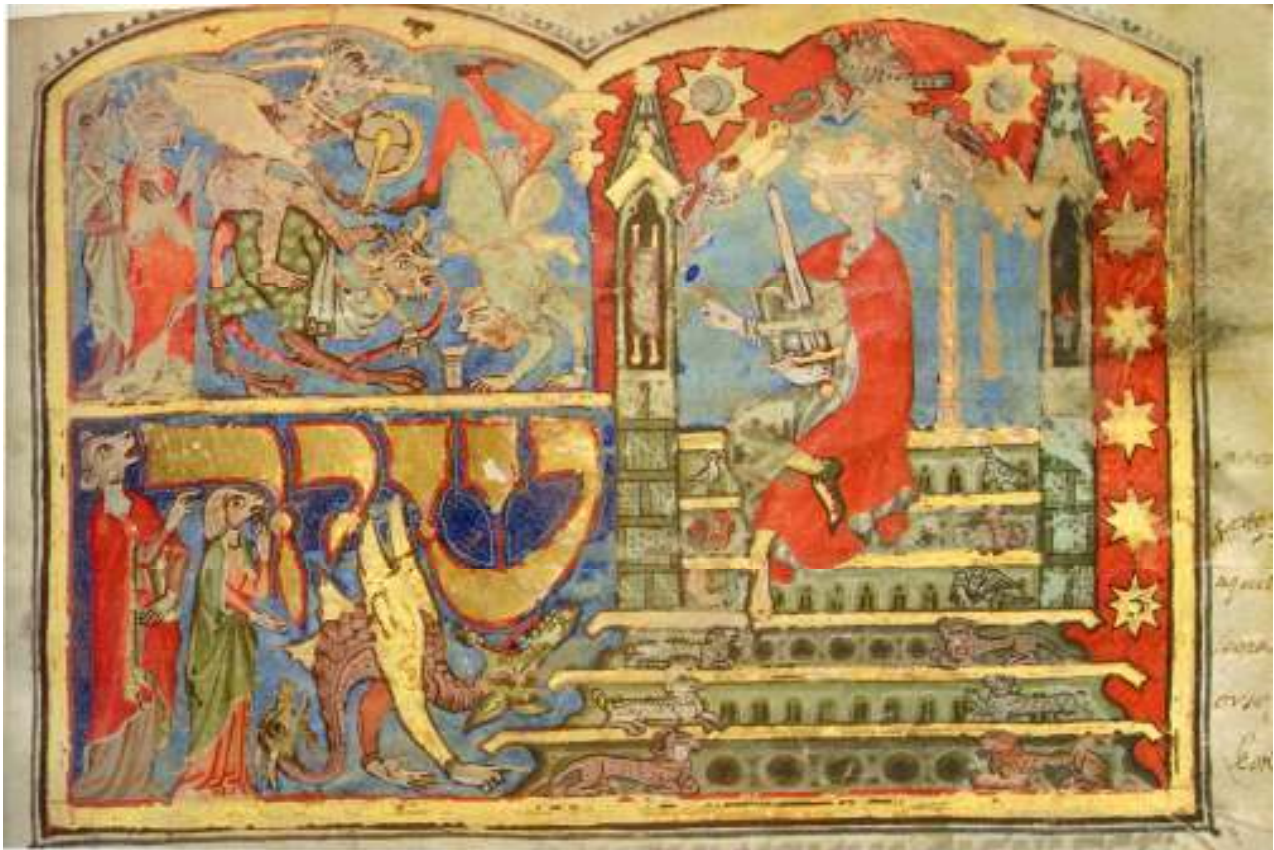


Fig. 6. Tripartite Mahzor, *Solomon in Judgment*
Ms. Kaufmann A384/I. fol. 182V. Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Evelyn Cohen has identified a second depiction of the Virgin and Child, the *Mater Amabilis*, the "Mother Deserving of Love," as the model for the Jewish father carrying his son to school, as they appear in the center of the Leipzig manuscript illustration.⁶⁸ (fig.7) In this compositional structure the Virgin and the Jewish father are standing, and the schoolboy, like Jesus, reaches his hand up to touch his parent's face, lending an affectionate interchange that contrasts with the more formal image of the teacher and child derived from the stiff *Sedes*

⁶⁸ Cohen 73.

Sapientiae. The orb that the Christ Child holds has become the golden sweet round honey cake in the hands of the schoolboy and his classmates. However, these cakes also have a marked resemblance to the Christian Eucharistic Host, which again, in the context of this complex Hebrew ritual and the Infancy Gospels, brings forth memories of the Christian accusations of Host desecration against the Jews.



Fig. 7. Madonna and Child as Mater Amabilis. The Virgin of Jeanne d'Evreux. 1324-1339, Paris. Gilt silver, enamels, gold, pearls, granats, blue glass. Statuette, h: 68cm. Inv.: MR 419. Photo: M.Beck-Coppola.

Cohen points out other details that distort a purely Jewish presentation of these images, but which may suggest a literal transference of the figures from the Christian to Jewish illustration. These details include the absence of letters on the children's cakes and eggs, as well the lack of the stripes on the *tallit*, which, instead, resembles the Virgin's shawl, or the cloak of the father.⁶⁹ Both Cohen and Marcus puzzle over why the father holding his son is positioned in the center of that image, as he represents the transfer of the boy through the village, an event which occurs before they meet with the teacher. Cohen suggests that this arrangement might reflect the Hebrew tradition of writing from right to left, or it was chosen simply to present a visually balanced scene. However, in comparing this composition of the teacher and the child with the corresponding configurations on the *Tring Tiles* and in *Selden Supra 38*, where the teachers sit on the left side of the image frame and Jesus stands, facing them, on the right, it appears that the Jewish father and son's placement may have also been the result of copying from Christian manuscript composition.

Given these similarities in the *Leipzig Mahzor* and the *Tring Tile* images, the contrast between the Hebrew manuscript image of the loving father with his compliant child, as they stand before the teacher, and the embattled Jesus in the tile images, where he is attacked by the boys and pitted against the teachers, polarizes the difference between the cultural norm that Jesus was expected to follow and the path he actually pursues, as he attempts to clarify his identity as the New Law, by defying the teachers who would teach the Old Law. In addition, the venerated image of the Virgin as the Throne of Wisdom, holding the Christ Child, exemplifies the choice made by

⁶⁹ Therese and Mendel Metzger, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* (New York: Alpine, 1982) 210, fig. 306, suggest the latter.

Jesus, as he refuses to follow the Hebrew ritual and sit on the teacher's lap. He fortifies that choice with statements of his omniscience as the Word of God, and simultaneously rebuffs the Jewish equivalent of the Holy Word, the Torah. He thus rejects this segment of his Jewish heritage, as he experiences his own right-of-passage. Indeed, he has rejected the faith of his ancestors with a determination equal to that with which the Jews have denied his existence as the Son of God.

In contrast to the borrowing of these symbolically laden images of the Virgin and Child and other Christian details, the *Leipzig Mahzor* illuminations also include one distinctly Hebrew manuscript feature, that of the distorted faces of the teachers and the boys who retain the round shape and bird beaks as seen in Ashkenazic manuscript illumination. These distortions reflect the influence from an ascetic movement of the twelfth century, in southern Germany, which forbade the representation of human faces.⁷⁰ Under the restrictions put forth by this movement, the heads of birds and animals were substituted for their human counterparts. Occasionally, the faces were featureless or the heads turned away from the viewer. This detail can be seen in the figures that are included with the Solomon in Judgment image in the *Tripartite Mahzor*, most of whom have animal or bird heads. The face of Solomon, himself, is affected by this proscription, as it is almost featureless.

Given the polemic that was exemplified by Jesus' actions, and in spite of the ability of the medieval Jewish manuscript artists to adapt Christian images to reflect Hebrew content, it is ironic

⁷⁰ Narkiss 29-32. In addition to the *Tripartite Mahzor*, two other manuscripts which reflect this Ashkenazi tradition include the *Birds' Head Haggadah* of 1300: (Jerusalem, Israel Museum, Ms 180/5); and the *Ambrosian Bible* of 1236-1238: (Milan, Ambrosian Library, Ms.B.32, INF and Ms.B.30-31).

that the artists would have chosen such highly symbolic sculptural figures, such as the *Sedes Sapientiae* and the *Mater Amabilis* as models for the figures in the *Leipzig Mahzor*. The transformation is certainly a tribute to the artist's ability to wash clean the content of symbolic images and adapt the appropriate qualities so that he can present the images to an audience who then is willing to view these images in a newly-altered light.

Over time, this Jewish educational ritual disappeared, partially due to its role as a counter to the contemporary Christian motif of the Christ Child as a Eucharistic sacrifice. Only traces of the educational ritual persisted, such as giving small school children a piece of honey cake or candy.⁷¹ Also, on a more practical level, both Jews and Christians developed a better understanding towards children and raised the age at which children should be initiated into their respective faiths.

Two *Tring Tile* stories continue the polemic between Christianity and Judaism. In the first story, a father with a huge key has locked his son in a tower, to protect him from the "accidents" which seemed to occur when children play with Jesus. **(fig. 8)** The *Selden Supra 38* text describes him as a cruel father, providing justification for Jesus' act of "saving" the child by pulling him through a slit in the wall. Only a hint of the father's caricatured facial features remain in the tile image.

⁷¹ Marcus 14, 17: the initiation was replaced in the 15th or 16th c. by the early stages of the bar mitzvah; 99.



Tring Tile: Fig. 8A, Father locks son in tower. Fig. 8B, Jesus pulls boy from tower. First quarter, 14th century, England. Courtesy of the British Museum.

The castle tower was an important feature of medieval Anglo-Jewish life.⁷² Unless they were given permission by the king to do otherwise, Jews were required to live in a town with a royal castle, where Jewish business affairs with Christians were managed and the document chests, the *archae*, were kept. The tower was also a place of refuge when Jews were threatened by angry, murderous Christians. Conversely, towers, especially the Tower of London, were used to imprison and execute the Jews. At times, Jews saved their lives by converting while they were imprisoned

⁷² V.D. Lipman, "Jews and castles in medieval England" in *The Jewish historical Society of England, Transactions, Sessions 1981-1982, Vol. XXVII* (The Jewish Historical Society of England, 1984) 1-17.

in the Tower.⁷³ Fourteenth-century English Christians viewing this image would have recognized the association between the now-absent Jews and the tower.

The source for this Infancy story is unknown, as it is not included in the Gospels of Thomas or Pseudo-Matthew, suggesting that it was a later addition to the apocryphal Infancy Gospel story series.⁷⁴ Regardless of the date of when it was written and first included in the apocryphal stories, this story is most pertinent to the period when the relationship between the Christian and the Anglo-Jewish communities was joined at the royal castles.

A second confrontational story depicted on the *Tring Tiles* portrays three fathers who hide their children in an oven to protect the boys from Jesus when he attempts to play with them. **(fig. 9)** When Jesus asks the fathers what is in the oven, they reply “pigs.” With a retort, Jesus changes the boys to pigs, which then leap from the oven when the door is opened. Missing from the extant *Tring Tiles* is the pig-children’s culminating escape from the oven, but this dramatic scene would undoubtedly have been part of the original tile series. In early apocryphal literature, this story occurs in the Arabic Infancy Gospel, where the boys are transformed into goats, not pigs. However, it is not found in the extant Greek and Latin texts of the gospels of Thomas and Pseudo-Matthew, although it may have originally been a part of one of the early versions of Thomas from which it was expunged for being too distasteful.⁷⁵ The story in which the boys become pigs does then appear in the later medieval Christian manuscripts, such as the extensive *Selden Supra 38* and,

⁷³ Stacey, (1992): 277.

⁷⁴ Boulton 13.

⁷⁵ James 80-82; Elliot 100-107; Cullmann 404-409.

obviously, the lost model for the *Tring Tiles*. Infancy scholars have suggested that the Gospels were originally written in Syriac and translated into Arabic before the fifth-sixth centuries, providing Muslims, including Muhammad, access to the stories, resulting in the Prophet's inclusion of some of the Infancy material in the Quran.⁷⁶ Conversely, another scholar suggests that the story originally took form in the seventh century Arabic gospels.⁷⁷



Tring Tile: *Fig. 9A, Harvesting Jesus' wheat. Fig. 9B, Fathers and Jesus at oven. First quarter, 14th century, England. Courtesy of the British Museum.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Claudine Fabre-Vassas, *The Singular Beast: Jews, Christians, & the Pig* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) 93.

The exchange of the pigs for goats has been attributed to a Christian statement of the Jewish aversion to pork, a restriction shared with Islam. However there is more to the appearance of Jewish children as pigs than just religious culinary limitation, namely the persistent historic antisemitic association of Jews with pigs. One additional statement of antisemitic stigmatizing and religious conflict can be seen in an historic Islamic concept, contained in the Quran and elaborated upon in Islamic literature, in which Jews, as well as Christians, were once punished by being transformed into pigs and apes.⁷⁸ This punishment was also later applied, in the afterlife, to Muslims who damaged the solidarity of Islam by following certain rejected beliefs of Jews and Christians. The discrepancies between the Arabic and Christian versions of the tale exemplify the historic fluidity of the Infancy gospels, a process that has muddled our understanding of the original version of the story. But what is clear in the stories about Jesus and the pigs is that it again emphasizes Jesus' break from Judaism, as early Christians strengthened their own identity by separating themselves from the old faith through rejection of the Jewish proscription against pigs and pork.⁷⁹

After Jesus revokes his punishment by changing the pigs back to boys, the story ends with a triumph for Jesus, as the adults, who are no longer angry, tell the children to always do whatever the marvelous Jesus commands them to do. This reversal in the parents' attitude is seen throughout

⁷⁸ Uri Rubin, "Apes, Pigs and the Islamic Identity" *Israel Oriental Studies XVI, Dhimmis and Others: Jews and Christians and the World of Classical Islam* (eds.) Uri Rubin, David J Wasserstein (Tel Aviv: Eisenbrauns, 1997) 89-105.

⁷⁹ Fabre-Vassas, 93. The Council of Antioch (third century) recommended to Christians the consumption of pork in rejection of the Jewish tradition. Fabre-Vassas also notes that another author has assembled over thirty popular culture versions of this Infancy story.

the Infancy narrative as the adults' anger and fear turns more to awe and wonder after Jesus performs the miracles of reviving the dead boys. However, this story of the fathers who attempted to hide their children provided Christians with additional evidence to accuse Jews of being liars, as well as being blind to Jesus' divine identity, a theme that runs throughout the *Selden Supra* 38 text. One example can be seen, when just before the Zacharias episode, Jesus calls a group of angry parents "blind," but when they marvel at Jesus' restoration of the dead boy, he states that they are no longer "blind in heart." From the Jewish perspective, the fathers in both the tower and the oven stories would have recognized the need to hide their children from Jesus, not just for their physical safety, but to protect them from the threat of medieval Christians who attempted to convert Jewish children to Christianity.

The two *Tring Tiles* at the Victoria and Albert Museum depict images that reflect such conversions.⁸⁰ (**figs. 10 & 11**) These tiles contain the only duplicate images in the *Tring Tile* series, showing Jesus with two groups of kneeling children. He revives and blesses his playmates, after they accidentally fall while attempting to follow him as he jumped from hill to hill and slid down a sunbeam.⁸¹ These images show docile, dutiful children, as Jesus' blessing gesture suggests that he is fulfilling his mission and converting the children. All the adults, who earlier were furious with Jesus over their children's deaths, (**fig. 11A**) now witness and marvel at his miraculous power and his ability to revive the dead children. These tile stories defined for medieval viewers, including

⁸⁰ Mary Casey, "Conversion as Depicted on the Fourteenth-Century Tring Tiles" *Christianizing Peoples and Converting Individuals* (Brepols, 2000), 339-352.

⁸¹ *Selden Supra* 38, fol.20v (fig. 13) contains one image of a boy kneeling before Jesus. He had died when another boy pushed him down the stairs of a house, but is revived by Jesus. Otherwise, in fol. 14r and fol. 24v the boys who have fallen from the hills and the sunbeam, are shown standing, not kneeling.

children, the importance of Jesus' life-saving power, even though following his lead can be difficult. The repetition of this image of kneeling children suggests a special emphasis on conversion, possibly of children. However, the tile images of the children brought back to life is also a reminder of the "convert or die" threat often faced by Jews, as they infer successful attempts by the Christian English to convert the Jews. In reality, the attempted conversion failed after a two-century effort which ended in the expulsion of 1290.



Tring Tile: *Fig. 10A, Jesus and kneeling boys. Fig. 10B, Jesus and boys at well*
First quarter, 14th century, England. Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum

Tring Tile: *Fig. 11A, Joseph and angry parents. Fig. 11B, Jesus and kneeling boys*
First quarter, 14th century, England. Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum

Images of figures kneeling in adoration are a common motif in Christian manuscript illustration. *Selden Supra* 38 includes three such episodes that were possibly taken from models similar to those of the kneeling children on the *Tring Tiles*. The first image occurs after the fall of the pagan idols, when Frondise, the King of Egypt, and his two followers, recognizing Jesus' power over their gods, kneel and adore Jesus. **(fig. 12)** The second image of kneeling, mentioned above, shows Jesus blessing the boy who was pushed down some stairs. **(fig. 13)** The parents witness Jesus blessing the child. The third episode of kneeling occurs near the end of the Infancy

Gospels, when two teachers kneel to adore Jesus. (fig. 14) In all these cases, the text reveals that blessing and conversion is taking place, indicating the triumph of Jesus and therefore Christianity.⁸²



Fig. 12. Selden Supra 38, fol.8v. Jesus and Frondise with his followers. c. 1325, England. Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

⁸² *Selden Supra* 38, fol. 8v: Frondise; fol. 20v: kneeling boy; fol.30r: two kneeling teachers.



Fig. 13. Selden Supra 38, fol. 20v, Jesus and kneeling boys; parents. C 1325, England. Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.



Fig. 14. Selden Supra 38, fol. 30r, Jesus and kneeling teachers; Joseph and teacher. c. 1325, England. Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

Pervious to this episode of the kneeling teachers, Jesus was taken to school three times to be instructed by Zacharias, by Levi, and by a third teacher who slapped Jesus, was struck dead, and then revived. Immediately following this last encounter, Jesus was sent to school for a fourth time. Upon entering he did not read from the book that the teacher handed him but “spoke of the Holy Spirit.” Here the manuscript image illustrates Jesus blessing the two kneeling teachers who are so overwhelmed by his power, wisdom, and learning that they convert. **(fig. 14)** The epiphany of the Jewish teachers concludes a hard-fought process for Jesus during which he has reversed the traditional relationship between the teachers and their students, and has become the teacher himself. The conversion of these Jewish teachers reflects the ambitions of the medieval Christian Church and the English kings, when in reality, the majority of the Anglo-Judaic population chose to endure enforced poverty and expulsion rather than convert to Christianity.

One additional episode of Jesus and the teachers described in the Infancy of Christ Gospel texts is not depicted on the *Tring Tiles*. The story, related in Luke 2:42-50, tells of when Jesus, at age twelve, goes to Jerusalem at Passover with his parents and disputes with the doctors in the Temple. The timing of this final visit to the doctors is relevant to the educational ritual, as Passover precedes the Festival of Shavout in the Hebrew spring festival trilogy.⁸³ Like the medieval Ashkenazi boys who made their journey through the village and visited the teachers to begin their ritualistic education during Shavout, Jesus, following Passover, made his theological journey, by himself, to remain the several days with the Hebrew doctors. When found by Mary and Joseph, Jesus said that he must be about his father’s business, once again emphasizing his unique identity

⁸³ Marcus 79.

and separating himself from the old faith of his earthly family.⁸⁴ Duplicating the resolution of Jesus' conflicts with the teachers in the Infancy Gospels, in Jerusalem he once again became the teacher, exhibiting his success at convincing the Jewish doctors of his divine status and omniscience.

Although the four episodes in the Infancy Gospels that depict the encounters between Jesus and the teachers are clearly based on the Jewish educational ritual, Infancy scholars have interpreted these meetings as expansions on Luke's telling of Jesus' visit to the temple. Therefore it seems obvious that the apocryphal stories describing Jesus' trips to the teachers and the doctors exist as a conflation of the early Christian author's awareness of this Jewish educational ritual, as well as his dependence upon the stories that were to be included in the Christian bible.

The final *Tring Tile* image depicts a wedding scene drawn from the canonical Wedding at Cana, in which Jesus changes water to wine. **(fig. 15)** The tile's importance as a climactic statement is evident by its composition as the only single-scene story in the tile series. This episode of the wedding feast also appears in *Selden Supra* 38, but does not exist in the original texts, indicating that it has been added to complete this fourteenth-century Christian narrative. Derived from the canonical event which represents the adult Jesus' first miracle, the inclusion of this wedding feast fuses the centuries-old division between the Church's accepted events in Jesus' life and these officially rejected stories, lending an air of legitimacy to the marginalized apocryphal Infancy Gospels. Thus, the stories of Jesus' childhood on the *Tring Tiles* culminates in a

⁸⁴ Albrecht Koschorke, *The Holy Family and Its Legacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) 13-14, discusses how Jesus, through his miraculous conception, breaks from traditional Jewish patrilineal kinship order and rejects his earthly family in favor of those disciples who would leave all to follow him and his heavenly father.

miraculous episode which encapsulates the Christian symbolism associated with Christ's death, and particularly, his shedding of blood and the ritual of the Eucharist.



Tring Tile: *Fig. 15, Jesus changes water to wine at the wedding of Architeclin. First quarter, 14th century, England. Courtesy of the British Museum.*

While appropriate for any Christian site, this symbolically laden image exemplifies the major focus of Edmund of Cornwall in his founding of Ashridge College and its dedication to the life and blood of Christ. In 1257, when his father, Richard of Cornwall, was King of the Romans, Edmund accompanied him to Germany and obtained a phial of Christ's blood.⁸⁵ After his father's death in 1272, Edmund placed 1/3 of this blood in a shrine at Hailes Abbey, his father's monastic establishment, which became a major pilgrimage site, as the relic is reported to have wrought

⁸⁵ R. Holinshed, *Chronicle of England* (1577; 1807 ed., vol. 2, 472); Todd 276.

many miracles.⁸⁶ The remaining 2/3 of the blood from the phial was reserved for the chapel of St. Mary at Ashridge College. **(figs. 16 & 17)**



*Fig. 16. Ashridge College in early 18th century. Gough Maps II, fol. 62r.
Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.*



Fig. 17. Ashridge College in 1761. By kind permission of the National Trust.

⁸⁶ L. Margaret Midgley, *Ministers' Accounts of the Earldom of Cornwall, 1296 – 1297* (London: Royal Historical Society, series 3, vol. 66, 1945) x.

In addition to the Holy Blood, Ashridge College held the relic of the heart of Thomas de Cantilupe, Bishop of Hereford, now acclaimed as a saint. As Edmund's friend, Thomas held the position of first Bishop of Ashridge. His heart, placed in a repository described as an exquisite piece of art, was positioned on the north side of the choir of the Conventual Church, alongside the Relic of the Holy Blood.⁸⁷ Upon Edmund's death, his heart was in turn placed next to the saint's. Thus, Ashridge developed as a pilgrimage site, situated on the pilgrimage road between Dunstable Abbey and St. Albans Abbey. Traces of history suggest that pilgrims could have slept at a hospice in nearby Piccott's End, while the Bonhommes brethren at Ashridge provided them with "bodily refreshment and spiritual renewal."⁸⁸ Until the Dissolution, some of England's wealthiest families chose to be buried in the chapel of the College, in close proximity to these relics in order to receive the prayers of the brethren.⁸⁹ Edmund's position also established Ashridge as a place for royal and aristocratic gatherings. For example, Edward I spent much of December and January at Ashridge, following his queen Eleanor's death and Henry VIII made an offering to the Holy Blood at Ashridge during his visit to the College in 1530, just a few years before Ashridge was surrendered to the king, on November 6, 1539.⁹⁰

The Christ-centered focus of Ashridge is also evident in murals, of unknown date, painted on the walls of the cloister, depicting forty episodes from the life of Jesus. The second panel

⁸⁷ Todd 23, 23d.

⁸⁸ Douglas Coult, *A Prospect of Ashridge* (London: Phillimore, 1980) 24.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 49, quotes Todd 4, who includes a long list of benefactors, as recounted in the Ordinances and Martyrology.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 65.

portrayed the “Dispute in the Temple” along with the usual episodes from the miracle and passion stories of Christ’s life.⁹¹ Coult suggested that they may have been done by a member of the group of painters’ at St. Albans, who, following Matthew Paris in mid-thirteenth century, are known to have done work at churches and chapels in the area.⁹²

The founding charter of Ashridge states that the Bonhommes should devote their piety to the Precious Blood of Christ.⁹³ They were also dedicated to learning and scholarship. Extant manuscripts produced at Ashridge present evidence that a scriptorium existed at the monastery. The earliest remaining manuscript associated with the site is a copy of an *Historia Scolastica* of Petrus Comester, dated 1283-1300, made for Edmund of Cornwall, which he presented to the monastery.⁹⁴ The presence of a scriptorium at the foundation of a patron such as Edmund, who was dedicated to the blood of Christ, also suggests the possible presence of manuscripts that were dedicated to the life of Christ, and at least, the possibility of access to an Infancy of Christ Gospel manuscript. The scriptorium, too, introduces the possibility of an artist-scribe who could have drawn the expressive figures on the *Tring Tiles*, in the rare *sgraffito* technique.

In addition, Ashridge’s patron was no stranger to decorated ceramic tiles, as records show that Edmund purchased decorated floor tiles for the several religious houses to which he gave

⁹¹ Todd 58-59 contains a list of the images, which were described in 1794 as having damage to a few of the panels. See also Coult 31-32, 222.

⁹² Coult 53.

⁹³ Todd 276.

⁹⁴ London, British Library MS Royal 3, D.VI (Ashridge Petrus Comester). See H.C. Schulz, “The Monastic Library and Scriptorium at Ashridge” *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. I/1, October, 1937, (San Marino, CA, 1937) 305-311.

financial support.⁹⁵ He therefore would have had access to tilers who could have made and fired the tiles, either on site, or possibly at nearby Penn, a town known for its tile production.⁹⁶

Although the decoration on these floor tiles was produced by a different method than the *Tring Tiles*, an experienced tile artist could have worked in both techniques, possibly even using drawings made by an artist at the scriptorium. The presence of floor tiles at Ashridge, listed as “paving tyles,” is attested in an inventory document in 1575, when Elizabeth I sold Ashridge -- a gift from her father Henry VIII after the Dissolution. However, this listing does not indicate whether the tiles were decorated.⁹⁷

Yet, the historical record does mention the existence of decorated floor tiles, possibly transferred from Ashridge to the Church of John the Baptist in nearby Aldbury.⁹⁸ In 1575 or 1576, when Elizabeth I sold the manor and grounds of Ashridge to a private buyer, Sir Edmund Verney moved his family’s tomb and two carved stone walls to create a chapel at the parish church in Aldbury. Records include the medieval floor tiles that cover the floor around the tomb with the establishment of this chapel, but with the same disregard given most tiles of this period. They were laid in a different direction from all the other tiles in the church, indicating a different time of installation, and as such, present the possibility of being the only known intact floor tiles that had

⁹⁵ Eames 291. Hailes Abbey is the best documented site, where his father, Richard, and Edmund paid for their heraldic tiles which decorated the floors of the abbey. Other sites to which Edmund gave financial support and from which there are surviving medieval tiles include Rewley, Burkhamsted, and Wallingford.

⁹⁶ Christopher Hohler, “Medieval Pavingtiles in Buckinghamshire” in *The “Records of Buckshire”* vol. XIV, Parts 1 & 2 (1942); Miles Green, *Medieval Penn Floor Tiles* (Miles Green, 2003).

⁹⁷ Todd 32.

⁹⁸ Coult 50; This chapel was referred to by various names, including Harcourt, Pendley, Whittingham, and Verney.

been in place at Ashridge before the dissolution. The designs in the tiles indicate that they were made at Penn using the common die-stamped method.⁹⁹ Two tile fragments were found among others that were lining an old grave in Penn parish churchyard with decoration produced by the etching method similar to that of the *Tring Tiles*, except that the background had not been scraped away.¹⁰⁰ The figures on the tile display a similar linear liveliness to those on the *Tring Tiles*. It has been conjectured that this was an earlier method than the die-stamped process, but both types may have been made at the same time at Penn tile works.

Most of the monastery buildings were demolished between 1802 and 1804 and turned to rubble to make room for a neo-Gothic mansion for the seventh Earl of Bridgewater. By that time the contents of the old monastery had been auctioned, destroyed, stolen, or sold, possibly including the *Tring Tiles*. The demolition produced huge piles of rubble, which might have been the source of the *Tring Tile* sherds found later in Tring and Luton.

Such was the end of this unusual monastery, where pilgrims, including the families of the dead buried there, had come to revere the relic of the Precious Blood of Christ and the heart of a saint. In the rarified atmosphere of Ashridge and the Bonhommes, these lively, child-centered images would have augmented the attraction of the relics and provided, for all the Children of God, an amplified version of the missing years from Jesus' life. However, whether the *Tring Tiles* were located at Ashridge College or at Tring Parish Church, the apocryphal stories contained on

⁹⁹ My inspection of the tiles at Aldbury determined that their patterns match those attributed to the tileworks at Penn, **Buckinghamshire**, as shown in the publication on Penn tiles by Christopher Hohler.

¹⁰⁰ Green 39-40.

these rare clay tiles demonstrated for viewers the dangers of defying Jesus and the rewards of following his lead, as they utilized the specter of the absent Jews to assert the power and superiority of Christianity and to help format and solidify an English Christian message and identity.