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Miriamne Ara Krummel · Tison Pugh
Editors

Jews in Medieval England

Teaching Representations of the Other

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The New Middle Ages

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*Dedicated to our parents:
Bill and Rifka Krummel
and
Camilla Rachal Pugh
and in memory of Gordon Alexander Pugh*

FOREWORD

We scholars of the Middle Ages spend much of our lives investigating an elusive past that demands competency in a bewildering array of languages while surrounded by a culture mostly indifferent to our efforts. A quick search of the internet using the query “Why study medieval history?” produces a dizzying number of responses, many of which concern university-level humanities’ disciplines justifying their existence as they have increasingly become the whipping boy for cost-cutting legislators, business apologists, and politicians—those who believe that tax and tuition revenues should only support higher-education STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) programs in business-relevant disciplines (e.g., engineering or chemistry rather than medieval French). “Medieval” has become a term of reproach, even while the fictionalized pseudo-medieval culture in *Game of Thrones* and *Lord of the Rings* has captured the imagination of millions of television and film viewers. Understandably, medievalists cringed when Carly Fiorina, while still a candidate for the 2016 GOP presidential nomination, incoherently defended her undergraduate degree in medieval history and philosophy as appropriate preparation for the fight against ISIS, claiming that “my degree in medieval history and philosophy has come in handy, because what ISIS wants to do is drive us back to the Middle Ages, literally.”¹ While Fiorina’s degree hardly prepares her for the fight against ISIS, a

¹David M. Perry, “No, Carly Fiorina, a Degree in Medieval History Doesn’t Qualify You to Fight ISIS,” *The Guardian* 6 Oct. 2015; theguardian.com.

little more background in medieval history—and, in particular, medieval Jewish history in England—might have benefitted Sarah Palin and billionaire Charles Koch: both have alleged that they are the victims of a “blood libel,” implying that they have been falsely accused in the media for political purposes.² Palin in early 2011 insisted that she had become the victim of a “blood libel” following accusations in the media that her web site, which had graphically targeted Representative Gabrielle Giffords and other Democrats with a bull’s-eye, had helped to create the culture of violence that led to Jared Lee Loughner’s deadly attack on Giffords and her supporters. The Palin brouhaha (Palin meant to suggest that she too had been falsely accused with a charge fabricated for political purposes) drew attention anew to the medieval English origins of the “blood libel,” namely, the medieval fantasy that Jews regularly murdered Christian children for diverse (and poorly understood) ritual purposes. Ripped from its historical root, this modern, sanitized understanding of the “blood libel” has become an early casualty of the assault on the study of the humanities. It remains for medievalists, however, to draw attention anew to the medieval English origin of the term “blood libel,” as well as to the pernicious effects of its modern-day recycling as a watered-down rhetorical ploy.

It is perhaps unsurprising that medievalists should seek to avoid bombast and politically motivated controversy to focus on what matters most to them: a rediscovery of the past. But this attention to research is twinned with a related concern: how to communicate the results of contemporary research to a new generation of students and, in particular, to a generation for whom the internet is a constantly available resource. While the internet has undoubtedly proved itself a valuable tool for the researcher (who may, for example, unexpectedly but happily stumble upon a recently digitized medieval manuscript), it also provides abundant shortcuts for students who prefer quickly scanning a quotation to a careful reading of source materials. The worldwide web may even transform our own published work into something unrecognizable, as bloggers carelessly select a statement ripped from its original context. It was with a sense of acute discomfiture that I found my own recent work, *Marks of Distinction: Christian Perceptions of Jews in the High Middle Ages*, as well

²See Karen Tumulty, “Sarah Palin’s ‘Blood Libel’ Comment Overshadows a Calibrated Message,” *Washington Post* 12 Jan. 2011, washingtonpost.com; and Martin Pengelly, “Charles Koch Says Rumours He Will Support Hillary Clinton Are ‘Blood Libel,’” *The Guardian* 31 Jul. 2016, theguardian.com.

as the work of Hannah Johnson, a contributor to this volume, quoted approvingly on an anti-Semitic white supremacist blog.³ It is no exaggeration to suggest that students need a trustworthy guide to their travels through this Dantean virtual universe. Their instructors, equally, need assistance as they chart a path through this world and construct a university course.

Precisely for these reasons, this volume, edited by Miriamne Ara Krummel and Tison Pugh—*Jews in Medieval England: Teaching Representations of the Other*—should prove invaluable. Its pedagogical lessons for best classroom practice, provided by a group of accomplished scholars and researchers, will be especially beneficial. Both of the editors and very nearly all of the contributors to the volume were, at one time, scholar-participants in a National Endowment for the Humanities summer research institute for college and university faculty that I directed in 2003, 2006, 2010, and 2014 under the title, “Representations of the Other: Jews in Medieval England.”⁴ The series of five-week NEH institutes convened in near-idyllic surroundings at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, located a few miles north of Oxford, England, in the village of Yarnton. Yarnton Manor and its surrounding estate were home to the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies until its sale in 2014, at which time the Centre relocated to the Oxford city centre. Yarnton Manor was constructed in the early seventeenth century on a medieval foundation while nearby St. Bartholomew Church clearly displays its medieval character and history. Medievalists could hardly hope for a more appropriate setting—as Lisa Lampert-Weissig eloquently describes in her essay in this collection. As the summer institute evolved, moreover, the city of Oxford itself increasingly became a “text” for the institute: scholars Robert C. Stacey and Pam Manix guided us on foot through medieval Jewish Oxford to provide a material context for the study of Jews in medieval England. Regrettably such programs are no longer possible: the National Endowment for the Humanities announced a new (and extremely shortsighted) policy in 2014 that it would cease thereafter to

³Andrew Joyce, “On History, Religion, and Anti-Semitism: The Disgraceful Legacy of Gavin Langmuir,” *Occidental Observer: White Identity, Interests, and Culture* 31 Mar. 2015; Web.

⁴For a description of the institute, its course of study, and its participants (including archived materials from 2003, 2006, and 2010), see www.utc.edu/philosophy-religion/national-endowment-humanities-summer-institute/index.php.

support programs outside the United States, thereby bringing to an end the brief history of this summer institute.

Pursuant to NEH guidelines, the focus for the summer institute, moreover, had been from the outset research and not pedagogy. A largely stable group of university researchers sought to introduce almost 100 NEH summer scholars to issues arising from contemporary research into the Jewish experience in medieval Europe and, more particularly, medieval England, in order to stimulate further investigations. This group included university professors Jeremy Cohen, Daniel Lasker, Sara Lipton, Robert C. Stacey, Denise L. Despres, Miri Rubin, Anthony Bale, and Sheila Delany. In promoting research related to its theme, the summer institute was remarkably successful: its participants organized panels at scholarly conferences (e.g., the International Medieval Congress in Leeds, U.K., and the International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan) to present the results of their work. These conference efforts contributed, ultimately, to the publication of a collection of essays edited by two of the institute's participants, Kristine T. Utterback and Merrall Lewelyn Price's *Jews in Medieval Christendom: "Slay Them Not."* I would like to think that the institute also positively influenced some of the published work of its participants, including—among others—Lisa Lampert-Weissig's *Gender and Jewish Difference from Paul to Shakespeare*, Miriamne Ara Krummel's *Crafting Jewishness in Medieval England: Legally Absent, Virtually Present*, and Pamela A. Patton's *Art of Estrangement: Redefining Jews in Reconquest Spain*. Given the research focus of the institute, then, it is therefore all the more important, and all the more necessary, that Miriamne Ara Krummel and Tison Pugh have compiled this volume as an essential companion for teaching representations of the Other. They have been joined in this effort both by scholars from the NEH summer institute and also by other distinguished medievalists: Adrienne Williams Boyarin, Charlotte Newman Goldy, Kathy Lavezzo, and Alfred Thomas.

Why should humanities' instructors devote time to the Jews' historical experience in medieval England, in particular when its Jewish community constituted at best a very small minority (perhaps 0.25%) and maintained a presence there for only a little more than 200 years? These English Jews, regardless of their brief stay, should be studied precisely because medieval England was a period from which there emerged a number of powerful myths that have dogged Jews to the present day. As the eminent historian Robert S. Wistrich remarked in *A Lethal Obsession:*

Antisemitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad, Great Britain has often been a European pioneer—even in the creation of anti-Semitism.⁵ Despite a theological tradition dating back to St. Augustine in the fifth century that identified Jews as uniquely necessary to a Christian society and that established both a legal and theological basis for their toleration, in 1290 England's King Edward I became the first (but not the last) European monarch to expel en masse the entire Jewish community, creating, at least in principle, an England without Jews for almost 400 years. This was not the only instance in which medieval England was a pioneer. It was just after the middle of the twelfth century in England that the Benedictine monk Thomas of Monmouth first introduced to European consciousness the accusation that Jews—in this case, the Jews of Norwich, whom he had accused of the murder of the adolescent William of Norwich—perform a ritualized and routine annual expression of their contempt for the Passion of Jesus by murdering an innocent Christian child. In this account, which Denise L. Despres and Eric Alexander G. Binnie treat in this volume, the monk Thomas alleged that the location for the murder rotates each year among Jewish communities and that its location is determined by a rabbinical council, which assigns by lots the Jewish community that must perform the deed. Such a council met in Narbonne, he averred, and selected Norwich as the site for child sacrifice in 1144, the year of William's death. This claim of an *international* Jewish conspiracy encouraged the geographical diffusion of the ritual murder accusation, to which later there was added the additional charge that Jews harvested the blood of the Christian child for use in various religious observances—e.g., to be mixed into the Passover wine or matzah—for use as an aphrodisiac, or for a number of different “cures.” This “blood libel” became a constant and enduring source of hostility toward Jews. Once untethered from the case in Norwich, blood libel accusations proliferated, despite the efforts of medieval popes and lay rulers to refute them.⁶ Hardly a single European Jewish

⁵Robert S. Wistrich, *A Lethal Obsession: Antisemitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad* (New York: Random House, 2010).

⁶In 1247, partly in response to an attack upon Jews in Valreás under the pretext that they had slain and harvested blood from a Christian child, Pope Innocent IV forbade any Christian to accuse Jews of using human blood in their religious rites, since this is forbidden to them in the Old Testament (for the text, see Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century* [New York: Hermon Press, 1966], 118, 274–75). Later Pope Gregory X (d. 1276) dismissed such charges as sometimes contrived by Christians themselves in order to extort money from endangered Jewish communities.

community would escape a blood libel charge, which spread across medieval and modern Europe, was carried from there to the Middle East and to Islamic culture,⁷ and also made its appearance in the United States.⁸ Despite countless efforts of scholars and legal authorities to lay the blood libel charge to rest once and for all, it enjoys a kind of immortality in the virtual world, where it is mindlessly reiterated on the internet as if it were a well-established fact simply because it has been repeated so often. Those who seek to preserve it for their own advantage point to the cross-cultural diffusion of the blood libel accusation as proof of its historical veracity: whether the geographical context is Europe, the Middle East, or the Far East, the one constant element in reports of violent attacks upon children is, we are told, the Jews. What better proof of their hatred for the rest of the human race?

Teaching the roots of hatred is not an easy matter. Nor should teachers complacently assume that our students recognize it for what it is. It was with profound consternation that I sought to confront the conclusion of one of my own students, who contended that the foundation for the blood libel—as well as for other medieval anti-Semitic fears of a Jewish presence—is well-established in the Bible. The New Testament, she assured me, proclaims that Jews will forevermore persecute the Christian disciples of Jesus. Therefore, medieval reports that Jews murder Christian children clearly represent the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. This student proved incapable of considering the possibility of Othering: i.e., that medieval Christians had fashioned the blood libel by projecting onto Jews a hatred for Christians in a constructed theological image, namely, the “hermeneutical” Jew.

⁷For the blood libel’s influence upon the Islamic world, see *The Matzah of Zion*, a book written in 1983 by Syria’s Defense Minister, Mustafa Tlass. See also Raphael Israeli, *Blood Libel and Its Derivatives: The Scourge of Anti-Semitism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2012).

⁸In 1928, the Jewish community in Massena, New York, was accused of having ritually sacrificed a four-year-old Christian girl, Barbara Griffiths, as part of Yom Kippur observances. Barbara Griffiths later reappeared, unharmed. For discussion, see Samuel J. Jacobs, “The Blood Libel Case at Massena: A Reminiscence and Review,” *Judaism* 28.4 (1979): 465–74. For other cases from early twentieth-century America, see Abraham G. Duker, “Twentieth-Century Blood Libels in the United States,” *The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 233–60.

How can instructors help students to contemplate such possibilities? This volume suggests a number of useful strategies for a lay audience. As Krummel and Pugh point out, “*Jews in Medieval England*, a multidisciplinary effort, provides readers with ideas for educating students about a people who were held hostage to myths about their violent nature—particularly in reference to the centuries-old libel of ‘Christ killers.’”⁹ For Abbot Peter the Venerable of Cluny (d. 1156), the Jews’ alleged crimes against God cast into question their very humanity, and their lies and deceptions, he insisted, surpassed even those of Satan, the father of lies.¹⁰ Abbot Peter contended that from the Jews’ deceptions there arose a number of other Others to include both medieval Christian heretics and Saracens (i.e., Muslims) informed by the teachings of the Prophet Mohammad.¹¹ Unable to hear the *authentic* voice of medieval Jews, Abbot Peter claimed nonetheless to hear its echo in every threat to Christendom. Even after Jews had been expelled from England and large parts of Europe, their threat persisted as a virtual presence both in collective memory and in the fear produced by these and other Others (e.g., witches). The lessons derived from a study of medieval Jews, therefore, are relevant to understand the process of Othering, both historical and modern. Indeed, again posing the question why one should study the medieval Jewish community of England, Krummel and Pugh ask, “Why should students care about medieval English Jews? Why should we, the teachers, care? The medieval Jews are early outcasts in Western Christendom, and Jews, and in particular medieval Jews, serve as

⁹Miriamne Ara Krummel and Tison Pugh, “Jews in Medieval England: A Temporal and Pedagogical Vision,” 8.

¹⁰Peter the Venerable, *Against the Inveterate Obduracy of the Jews* 5, trans. Irven M. Resnick, *Fathers of the Church, Mediaeval Continuation 14* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 211.

¹¹See Peter the Venerable, *Writings against the Saracens*, trans. Irven M. Resnick, *Fathers of the Church, Mediaeval Continuation 16* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2016), *passim*. See also my “Peter the Venerable on the Talmud, the Jews, and Islam,” *Medieval Encounters* (forthcoming).

harbingers for the full-scale process of Othering played out and replaying in our modern world.”¹² Even when we are unable to arrest or eliminate this process of Othering, our students will benefit from identifying its influence. From NEH summer scholars participating in “Representations of the Other: Jews in Medieval England,” I heard again and again (sometimes with a sense of astonishment) that their students—whether Native American students in Albuquerque, African-American students in New York, or Latino students in west L.A.—identified with the history of medieval English Jews. They learned something from the past of other Others, if you will, and they saw themselves a little less darkly in the mirror of the Jewish experience.

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¹²Miriamne Ara Krummel and Tison Pugh, “Jews in Medieval England,” 9.

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Miriamne wishes to thank the Frankel Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan for a delightful year that offered her time to work on this volume and provided her with two research assistants, Sharon Alvandi and Mayan Herman. These industrious women helped with keying in changes and communicating with contributors. Andy Slade, the chair of the Department of English at the University of Dayton, underwrote the cost of reproducing the images of the Norwich Tallage Roll (from the National Archives) and the marginal doodle of the badged Jew (from the British Library). Miriamne dedicates the volume to her parents, Bill and Rifke Krummel, who have been repeatedly amazed by what they do not know and the lacuna in their education. A student of Margaret Schlauch's at New York University in the 1950s, Rifke Krummel (née Pomeranz) was startled to learn of the presence—whether spectrally conceived or ontologically real—of Jews whose stories and representations were absent from the narratives and texts that Professor Schlauch shared with her students. Forever a student, Bill Krummel planned a remarkable adventure through England and France where he, his wife, and his daughter could tread on the ground of these now-long-lost Jews. Tison likewise thanks his parents for their support during the long journey of his education, and thanks as well the institutional backing of the College of Arts and Humanities of the University of Central Florida, which has long recognized the value of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL).

Together and greatest are the thanks that we owe to Irven M. Resnick, who ran several National Endowment for the Humanities Institutes at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies (OCHJS), which was then housed in Yarnton, Oxfordshire, and has now been relocated to Oxford proper. Miriamne was accepted into the first iteration in 2003. In 2010, Miriamne returned to OCHJS to do research into medieval manuscripts at the Bodleian and discovered that Tison was one of the NEH Fellows that year. At a pub in Yarnton, England, away from the bustle of Oxford, this volume was initially conceived. At a New Chaucer Society Congress in Iceland in 2014, we committed to develop this volume. We also thank Irv for writing the Foreword to the volume, and we thank as well each of the essayists who shared their insights with us. Deep thanks are also due to the indefatigable Bonnie Wheeler for supporting our book proposal to Palgrave Macmillan and enabling this pedagogical volume to join so many fine texts in The New Middle Ages series.

Miriamne Ara Krummel
Tison Pugh

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