

The Siege of Jerusalem: Liquidating Assets

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In the last quarter of the fourteenth century a poem was written in a modest monastic establishment, Bolton Priory, in a remote and infertile area of the West Riding of Yorkshire.¹ The scope of the poem, however, is neither modest nor provincial; it essays nothing less than the genesis of a Christian empire channeling the energies of both church and state into a unified, indomitable force. The alliterative *Siege of Jerusalem* tells the tale of the conquest of Jerusalem by recently converted provincial Roman leaders who decide to launch a crusade to avenge Christ's death.² Throughout its narrative, the poem reworks the ideas of Jerusalem, the Jews, and the Orient, transforming them from possible equals and rivals of the new Christian Roman Empire into pure, moveable wealth. On its political level, the poem's action translates provincial rivalries into imperial consolidations, reconfiguring the historical preoccupations of late medieval Augustinian clergy in a period of economic depression and playing them out on an international field.³ In so doing, the poem interrogates and seeks to assuage some of the deepest national, religious, and economic anxieties of its late-fourteenth-century English milieu, concerns about the Crusades, the bullion shortage, and the continuity, unity, and identity of Christendom. This essay uses the poem as a lens to focus the political and social anxieties of a provincial, religious consciousness at a particularly uncomfortable historic juncture.

The Siege of Jerusalem negotiates what seems at first glance to be an essential contradiction between destroying the Jews and exploiting them. It strategically overcomes this contradiction by killing or enslaving them and figuratively transforming their bodies into gold. Even when the poem seems most to indulge in genocidal fantasies, it stresses the desirability of continued and profitable attachments between the Christians and the Jews—that is, attachments that are profitable to the Christians. In the poem, the Chris-

tians are bound to the Jews by three needs: (1) the need for a holy war to draw together the scattered energies of the nascent Christian Roman Empire and cure their physical and spiritual malaise; (2) the need to efface the Jews as Christian predecessors, to destroy at one blow both Jewish control of the Holy Land and the Jew's potential power over the newly appropriated "Christian" tradition—a power which comes from the Jews' command of their own history, religious texts, and scholarship; and (3) the Christian imperial need for profit. As it constructs a relationship that increasingly enriches the Christians and desolates the Jews, the poem indulges the fantasy of a revenge that for the Christian Romans is socially productive in every sense: morally justified, militarily successful, both spiritually and physically salutary, and extremely lucrative. Most significant of all, the Christians gain a communal identity. By defining, confining, and destroying the Jewish enemy, these newly converted provincial Romans are able to heal their bodily and body-political maladies and consolidate their own disparate forces into a powerful and unified Christian empire.

Muscular Christianity

To set this process in motion, *The Siege of Jerusalem* must first define the work of Christianity in a very particular way, appropriating it for imperial chivalry and wedding it to war. In the process, Christianity literally changes hands, passing from the disparate, sorrowing, but devoted ownership of its private practitioners, Nathan and Veronica and the still unrecognized pope, Peter, to the restless, relentless hands of the provincial Roman military leaders, Titus and Vespasian. The poem makes this transference crucial to its trajectory, literalizing the scriptural dictum that Christ comes not to bring peace but a sword. The very first passage of the poem suspends Christ's sword, Damocles-like, over the heads of the Jews, and the rest of the poem is measured by its reiterated blows:

For al þe harme þat he hadde hasted he noȝt,
 On hem þe vyleny to venge, þat his veynys brosten,
 Bot ay taried ouer þe tyme, ȝif þey tourne wolde,
 Ȝaf hem space þat hym spilide, þey hit spedde lyte,
 XL wynter, as y fynde, & no fewer ȝyrys,
 Or princes presed in hem. þat hym to pyne wroȝt. (19–24)⁴

[Despite all the injury he had undergone, Christ did not hurry to avenge the villainy on those that had torn his veins, but he waited

to see if they would be converted over time, gave a little time to those that had killed him, but they did not avail themselves of it. Forty winters, I find, and no fewer years passed, before princes assailed those who tortured Christ.]⁵

Christ grants the Jews a limited grace period, a strategy that places a severely limited Christian mercy in a context of impending vengeance.

This version of muscular Christianity is upheld in the poem's next passages relating the transference of Christian power from private to public domains as well as from provincial to international fronts: the conversions and miraculous healings of the Roman provincial kings, Titus, king of Bourdeaux, and his father Vespasian, king of Galatia. Titus, afflicted by a malady, is converted by Nathan, a merchant emissary sent from Jerusalem to bring news of the Jewish refusal to pay their tribute to Rome. Nathan describes Christ's death and tells Titus of the Vernicle, the veil which has a likeness of Christ imprinted upon it and is reputed to have healing powers. Titus is filled with anger by the tale of Christ's death, is immediately healed (as much by his anger, it appears, as by miraculous intervention) and prays to Christ to allow him to avenge his death. He and Nathan set out for Rome to tell his father, Vespasian. Vespasian is inspired by Titus's tale, meets Pope Peter (whose status is unknown except to his fellow Christians), and sends for both Veronica and her veil to come to Rome. Veronica comes and transfers the veil to Peter. The veil accomplishes two miracles in Rome: the destruction of the Roman gods in the temple and the cure of Vespasian. Vespasian immediately begins preparations for a campaign to Jerusalem along with his son. The poem pauses to address the doomed Jews in Jerusalem, reveling in the forecast of destruction to come:

Suree, Cesaris londe, þou may seken euer,
Ful mychel wo mon be wro3te in þy wlonk tounes,
Cytees vnder Syon, now is 3our sorow uppe:
Þe deþ of þe dereworþ Crist der schal be 3olden.
Now is, Bethleem, þy bost y-bro3t to an ende. . . . (293–97)

[Syria, Caesar's province, you will sigh forever over your fate. Much woe will be wrought in your proud towns. Cities under Zion, your sorrow is just beginning. The death of the noble Christ will be very dearly bought. Now Bethlehem, your boasting is brought to an end!]

From the outset, then, Christian initiative is directed away from private contemplation, prayer, and submission and toward imperial, military prowess. Furthermore, as this incident links processes of righteous destruction and miraculous cure, it prefigures Vespasian's subsequent trajectory. His invasion of Jerusalem is providential and historically inevitable, fulfilling Christ's prophecy of the obliteration of Jerusalem in Matthew 24:2, but the poem insists as well upon his act's salutary and recuperative consequences. It defines a particular vector for Christian action—one that is valuable and energizing because it inspires its proponents with a purgatory anger.

When the poem translates such religious energy into immediate political and military action, it is, in fact, imagining a consummation devoutly to be wished for its late-fourteenth-century English provincial milieu. If the poem dramatizes a crusading impulse, as Mary Hamel argues, it is doing so in an era when royal subsidies of crusade were dwindling.⁶ This is not to say that crusading was irrelevant to fourteenth-century English society; quite the contrary. The early part of the century has been called the "real age of propaganda for the Crusade," signaling a widespread and disturbing consciousness of the political and ideological necessity of crusade, despite the increasingly incontrovertible recognition that it had become economically and militarily disastrous.⁷ This dilemma was intensified by three historic developments that necessitated a redefinition of relations between European interests and the countries of the East: the loss of the last crusader stronghold at Acre in 1291, the ascendancy of the Mamluk sultanate in Egypt and Syria and its stranglehold on eastern trade routes, and most threateningly of all, the late-century incursions of Ottoman armies into eastern Europe.⁸ In response to these developments, throughout the century crusade propagandists such as Thaddeo of Naples, Pierre Dubois of France, Marino Sanudo, Pierre de Lusignan of Cyprus, Philippe de Mézières, and Manuel II Paleologus of Byzantium traversed Europe, presenting treatises to kings and pontiffs, arguing for the urgency of the eastern threat and the need for military unity among European monarchs. Many attempted to negotiate peace between warring kings to that end, proposing strategic military alliances with the Tartars, with Byzantium, with the Genoese and Venetian communes, and generating a crusade literature "bewildering in its dimensions."⁹

However, throughout most of the century English monarchs were reluctant to commit themselves or their resources to crusade; however prudently they displayed their general approval of it, allowed their subjects to finance it privately, and even engaged in negotiations for it where it suited

their purposes—for example, when early in the century such activities gave them access to church monies dedicated to crusade.¹⁰ Edward III was the first king since Stephen not to declare himself a *crucesignatus*, prioritizing instead local wars against Scotland and then France.¹¹ His support for the crusade remained impersonal, despite the hopeful treatise offered to him in the first decade of his reign by crusade propagandist Roger of Stanegrave. He left it to his subjects' private initiative to launch their own campaigns, which they did with great enthusiasm but, often, indifferent success.¹² Richard II also professed great interest in crusade in the 1390s, as J. J. N. Palmer has convincingly argued, but his support seems to have been motivated more by the need to exalt his image as a monarch than to devote actual monies or militia to the effort.¹³ Despite the lack of royal subsidies in the later part of the century in England, there was incessant interest in crusade among the English nobility, although no ventures were launched directly against the Holy Land, and very few yielded results that were either militarily, morally, or financially admirable.¹⁴

That the English clergy, as well as the English nobility, remained greatly invested in crusade is evidenced by the high proportion of contributions cited by papal collectors from every ecclesiastical level.¹⁵ The chief problem facing a united crusading effort, however, was the lack of consonance between monarchical, aristocratic, clerical, and popular political interests. Here, the late-century propagandizing of Philippe de Mézières is particularly enlightening. His massive 1389 treatise *Songe du Vieil Pelerin* decries the English for continuing the Hundred Years War rather than uniting with their Christian brethren and engaging their military energies for a more worthy cause; and his 1395 *Epistre* to Richard II is more amiable but still urgent in its suit for peace as a necessary first step to a more fundamental settlement of European political dissensions under the banner of a united Christian chivalry. He represents the recent Ottoman incursions as striking a mortal wound to the body of Christian chivalry. As a cure, he proposes a new military order which would forge the military and religious strengths of its proponents into "une nouvelle génération de combattants qui posséderait ces quatre vertus morales" [a new generation of fighters who possess the four moral virtues].¹⁶ Once this unification is achieved, the Christian sovereigns of Europe can be certain

que par la divine bonté et naturelle débonnaireté du souverain
chevetaine de l'ost de la crestienté, leurs morteles plaies seront
sanée; la gloire de la foy horriblement blecie, et les royales

magestés du glaive des Turs ennemies de la foy férues et deshonnourées: seront relevés et en Dieu essaucies et très-honnourées: laquelle chose Dieu nous veuille ottroier!¹⁷

[by divine mercy and the natural nobility of the high sovereigns of the hosts of Christianity, their mortal wounds will be cured; the glory of the faith so horribly wounded and the kingly powers struck down and destroyed by the lances of the Turks, enemies of the faith, will be restored and in God exalted and honored greatly: an outcome with which God desires to bless us!]

This passage resonates with urgencies similar to those animating *The Siege of Jerusalem*, not only because it also connects the language of righteous vengeance with that of miraculous cure, but also because of its overwrought certainty that divine support is only waiting (impatiently) for a divided chivalry to consolidate itself in a Christian cause. Its extremism responds to the felt gravity of the situation: the disorder and disease begotten among the chivalry, monarchy, and clergy of Christendom by a century of crusading failure. When *The Siege of Jerusalem* opens by instantly forging such political, chivalric, and religious interests into one militant Christian force, it is responding to a similar and widespread misgiving that it is the divergencies between European national, chivalric, and religious interests that will bring about the disintegration of Christendom.

Turning the tables

In imagining the genesis of a new Christian empire, then, *The Siege of Jerusalem* must figuratively turn the tides of its contemporary milieu. By returning to an originary moment—the first militarization of Christianity—it sidesteps four centuries of the internal bureaucratic, economic, and administrative accretions and entanglements produced by the long history of the crusade and its social machinery. It gestures at the contemporary sense of internal national and international Christian disintegration by beginning with a depiction of the Roman Empire as a corrupt and divided bureaucracy slowly losing control of its own dissident provinces. Its narrative action cuts through this diagetic complexity, polarizing its world into two realms: the Christians and the faithless, Occident and Orient, conqueror and victim. At the beginning, Christianity is particulate, its proponents scattered and isolated. By the end of the poem, Titus has gathered an enormous army that

unites both Roman and provincial troops in a solid Christian military alliance against a crushed and disintegrating Eastern culture. Meanwhile, back in Rome, the old emperors have self-destructed in a flurry of savage, mutual assassinations, and Vespasian holds the imperial seat, the first Christian emperor.

To accomplish this transformation, the poem uses strategies of destructive inversion, a literalization of the revenge trope. Because the Jews threaten to withhold their tribute to Rome, their very bodies are converted into tribute; because Judas betrayed Christ for thirty pennies, the Jews are sold into slavery, thirty for a penny. As the poem progresses, the Jewish culture is isolated, encompassed, and the paradigms historically constructed for it are turned against it. The representations that signify cultural unity to Jerusalem are co-opted and rewritten to signify those cultures' disintegration. By working such inversions upon its victims, the poem accomplishes its revenges in a particularly vicious and elegant manner.

One instance of this process occurs on the first day of the battle against Jerusalem, when the Jewish armies meet the three Roman battalions under Titus and Vespasian in open battle before the city. Before the battle begins, Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest, inspires his troops by recounting a historic moment in the foundation of Jewish independence: the parting of the Red Sea by Moses and the drowning of all Pharoah's soldiers—the moment when the enslaved Jewish kingdom finally broke with their overlords to establish a culture and freely practiced religion of their own.¹⁸ Yet in the course of the battle, this story becomes prophetic not of Jewish victory but of the Jewish defeat. As the battle goes on, the Jews are crushed with incalculable slaughter. When the sun sets that day,

So was þe bent ouer-brad, bloody by-runne,
With ded bodies aboute all the brod vale.
Myȝt no stede doun stap bot on stele wede,
Or on burne, oþer on beste, or on bryȝt scheldes. (599–602)

[The field was so overflowing with blood, and with dead bodies strewn all about the broad valley, that no horse could take a single step without tripping on steel armor, or on man or beast or on bright shields.]

Moses's victory over Pharoah has been claimed by the Christians and inverted. The next day, the Romans plunder the bodies and glean enormous riches. Then they pile the bodies into heaps and make "wide weyes" (642)

through them. Although the poem refrains from underlining the link between Caiaphas's lesson and the battle's outcome, the message is clear: The Red Sea has been parted anew—as a sea of Jewish blood.

The cruel irony of such inversions seems to delight the poet; he indulges in them repeatedly, and whenever there is the possibility of incorporating one from a source, he uses and expands upon it. To take an even more grisly instance, he recounts the tale of Mary, “a myld wyf” (1077) and an obvious antitype of Christ's mother. Caught within Jerusalem as Titus is starving out the inhabitants, she is driven by hunger to eat her own child:

Hir owen barn þat 3o bar, 3o brad on þe gledis,
Rostyþ rigge & rib with rewful wordes,
Sayþ: “Sone, vpon eche side our sorow is a-lofte,
Batail a-boute þe borwe, our bodies to quelle,
Withyn hunger so hote, þat ne3 our herte brestyþ;
Perfor 3eld þat I þe 3af & a3en tourne,
& entr þer þou cam out!” & etyþ a schoulder. (1078–84)

[Her own child that she had borne, she cooked on the coals,
roasted his back and his ribs with lamentable words. She said,
“Son, our troubles are coming from all sides: a battle outside the
city to slay our bodies, and inside the city is hunger so fierce that
it almost bursts our hearts. Therefore, give back to me the life that
I gave you! Turn about and enter the body you came out from!”
And she ate a shoulder.]

In this extraordinary passage, the devastating reversals that the poem visits upon its victims—both mother and child—become somatic. Mary the nurturer becomes Mary the devourer, enacting a cannibalistic eucharist that ends in death. Such projections of religious retribution into a destructive economy of bodies fascinate the narrative; it gruesomely concretizes the traditional letter/spirit hierarchy as a description of the relationship between Jews and Christians. Christians consolidate a newly energized and invulnerable spirituality by inventively reducing Jews to passive and vulnerable bodies. The text recounts tortures of the Jews that (1) take the skin from the body (Caiaphas); (2) force the blood from inside to outside (all the Jews); (3) force the body to eat its own flesh and blood (Mary and the Jews in the city whose water is flavored by the ashes of their burnt dead, and whose air

is tainted by the corpses piled in their streets); and (4) spill internal organs into the light of day (Caiaphas, the Jewish man whose brains are hurled a mile from his head, and the Jewish woman whose unborn child is knocked out of her body and over the city walls by a catapult stone). Even in a genre where battle eviscerations are more or less *de rigueur*, *The Siege of Jerusalem* has the dubious distinction of being the most gratuitously and imaginatively vicious poem of the Alliterative Revival.¹⁹

Dismembering the East to remember the West

Why is *The Siege of Jerusalem* invested in torturing these particular victims in these particular ways? If it had an undeniable appeal to late-fourteenth- and early-fifteenth-century audiences (and the eight existing manuscripts and many subsequent reworkings of the same story would seem to indicate this), what was the substance of that appeal? Why were the Jews, in particular, such desirable enemies? There had been no Jews settled in England since their expulsion in 1290, almost a century before this poem was completed. Why such personal and corrosive hatred?

There are many answers, but I will focus on those according with an authorial connection to an Augustinian priory. First there is the logic of spiritual retribution that drives the poem's reversals. The poem repeatedly stresses that the Jews were the personal enemies of Christ, an insistence that emerges very clearly in the chronicle of William of Newburgh, thirteenth-century Augustinian chronicler. His account of the massacre at York balances between a recognition of Christian acquisitiveness and a vicious condemnation of Jewish error. Elisa Narin Van Court notes the undercurrent of sympathy for the Jews that works through and problematizes the anti-Judaism of William of Newburgh's surprisingly evenhanded narrative. At least as powerful, however, is William's resentful sense of Christian social victimization.²⁰ He justifies the massacre in terms of providential history:

the Jews in England under Heny II were by an absurd arrangement happy and renowned far more than the Christians, and swelling very impudently against Christ, owing to their great good fortune did much injury to the Christians, wherefore in the days of the new King the lives which they possessed by Christ's clemency were put in danger by his just judgment, though by the beautiful arrangement of his justice those have no excuse who brought slaughter on them by a secret rising.²¹

This passage mobilizes a logic similar to that of the *Siege*-poet, when it imbues accidental with providential history, transforms a recognition of Jewish political and financial power into a condemnation of their arrogant rebellion against Christ, threatens the end of Christ's clemency, and, most significantly, relishes aesthetically the retributive elegance of Christ in using one group of sinners to slaughter another, an act which is at once wholly inexcusable and beautifully fitting.

In addition to this clerical tradition of Christian vengeance, for two centuries a number of religious, judicial, and political mechanisms specifically directed against Jews had been gradually put into play all over Europe, a process that defined them as enemies, forced them into certain undesirable social functions, and then more and more systematically worked to destroy their power in society. The general evolution of these mechanisms has been traced by R. I. Moore, who describes their cumulative effect as a fundamental transformation of medieval European society into a persecuting society.²² Within this larger movement of the formation of intolerance, there were of course incessant local eddies, reversals, and strategic alliances. One alliance in particular has interesting ramifications for the foundation of monastic estates. There is extensive evidence that Jews and Augustinian canons had been partners in capitalism during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. When landowners could not extricate themselves from their debts to wealthy Jewish moneylenders, monasteries often paid off the debts in return for the estate. This seems to have been a mutually beneficial arrangement, liberating land for the market, enabling the expansion of monastic holdings, and serving as a kind of security for the Jewish moneylender.²³ Many prominent Augustinian and Cistercian foundations were able to secure their financial vitality through these indirect transactions with Jews, though the ideological ramifications were clearly disturbing to many, especially to those clerical estate owners who borrowed directly from Jewish moneylenders and incurred debts that they could not pay off. The uneasy symmetry between the Christians' scriptural and financial debts to the Jews must have engendered doubt about the strength of the Christian foundational enterprise and impelled the preemptive appropriations continually exercised in both areas. According to William of Newburgh, at least one of the most violent rioters at York in 1290 was a Premonstratensian canon whose excesses William decries (apparently he immolated a bloodied host each morning before appearing in a white robe to urge the warriors to crush the enemies of Christ).²⁴ And apparently many of the riot leaders most eager to erase their debts by destroying the Jews and their financial records were connected with north-

ern abbeys.²⁵ Clearly, the poem can make Jews a very logical enemy simply because the religious, social, and historical categories for condemnation and economic exploitation of Jews were already present.

Yet although these categories are certainly operative throughout the poem and undoubtedly added to its popular appeal, they are not completely explanatory. The Jews in this poem do not behave like the Jews of popular medieval folklore, the host desecraters, sorcerers, and nefarious advisers to gullible kings; they are not quite like the internally contentious Jews in Josephus. Their violence against Christ is not unduly dwelt upon or graphically depicted, and although they end by eating children, it is their own children, not Christian children they devour, an act emphatically not of inhuman wickedness but human desperation to which they have been driven by the Christians. The poem is absolutely clear that the Christians are the ones responsible for visiting upon the Jews every crime that the Jews had ever been accused of practicing upon Christians, from the eating of babies to the poisoning of wells.²⁶

Even more interestingly, at the start of the poem the Jews are not individually or culturally distinguishable from the Roman Christians. This becomes clear on the first day of the battle. The arrayed armies seem equally matched, two strong provincial states equally interested in divesting themselves of the tyranny of Rome. The very battle devices of the two armies mirror one another in their richness and ferocity and speak mutually comprehensible heraldic languages. The Romans erect a belfry as a battle standard, bristling with weapons. On top of the belfry, they set a dragon:

Wyde gapande, of gold, gomes to swelwe,
With arwes armed in þe mouþe, & also he hadde
A fauchoun vnder his feet, with four kene bladdys,
Þer of þe poyntes wer piȝt in partyis four
Of þis wlonfulle worlde, þer þei werr fondyn. (390–94)

[With wide gaping jaws of gold, ready to gulp men down, armed with arrows in its mouth, and it also had a sword under its feet with four keen blades, of which the points pierced the four corners of this proud world where they were set.]

This dragon/tower/belfry combination serves many extremely useful purposes. It displays the Roman general's wealth, his world-conquering ambition, and his ferocity. It also provides a landmark and rallying point where Roman soldiers who are weaponless or confused can go to get aid. Finally, it

looks over the city so that Vespasian can spy out enemy musters and movements. The Jewish battle towers do exactly the same thing, with one added advantage—mobility:

Fyf & twenti olyfauntes, defensable bestes,
With brode castels on bak out of burwe come;
& on eche olyfaunte armed men manye. (445–47)

[Twenty five elephants, animals able to fight, with broad castles
on their backs came out of the city, and on each elephant many
armed men.]

One elephant carries a whole castle containing a richly adorned tabernacle within. Comparison of these passages reveals many similarities between the battle languages of the two armies; both blend practicality with self-advertisement. There are some differences; the Roman dragon with its world-piercing swords bespeaks the Christian Romans' imperial ambitions, while the Jewish tabernacle gestures at a more religious investment. The most striking difference between the armies has little to do with the Jewish religion and more to do with their exotic location. But while such differences are important, it is also interesting to note the essential reflexivity between the two armies. Where the Romans place a fabulous "defensable beste" (445) on top of a weapon-bristling tower, the Jews place weapon-bristling towers on top of fabulous defensible beasts.

The exotic strength of the untried Jewish army provides an important clue to the Jews' role as enemy and target for the Romans. It links them not to the stereotypical Jew of the English cycle dramas, but to the stereotypical Saracen, the invading Muslim, and the marauding Turk who haunt crusade narratives, the thirteenth-century French romances, and *chansons de geste* such as the *Chanson de Roland*.²⁷ While I do not wish to suggest that the Jews of the poem are not Jews at all but merely Saracens in disguise, I would like to stress that in many of the most influential narratives of the period, persistent association between the two is not at all unusual. The specter of collaboration between Muslim and Jew haunts the long and well-documented history of recurrent European anxiety that the Jews of Europe were actually in league with the Muslims abroad and plotting the demise of Christendom.²⁸ In eleventh-century France this conviction led to the legend that Jewish traitors had fatally betrayed Toulouse to the Islamic armies a century before (a legend that involved a certain stubborn rewriting of history, because Toulouse, in fact, never fell to the Islamic armies). This legend, how-

ever erroneous, persisted and led to the inauguration of a custom designed to humiliate ceremonially the Jews each year on Easter, when a representative was ritually struck in the face before the Basilica of St. Stephen.²⁹

Throughout the ensuing period, any arousal of crusader sentiment against the Saracens usually spelled trouble for the Jews as well, despite efforts to differentiate their situations by such august authorities as Pope Alexander II.³⁰ Every large crusade from the first to the fourth is associated with pogroms, wherein armed pilgrims would enliven their passage to the Holy Land by pillaging and massacring Jewish communities along the way.³¹ Yet by a perverse logic this expanding European persecution and expulsion of the Jews was engendering the very association between Jew and Arab that it feared. Increasingly the Jews were expelled eastward at the same time that the Muslim emirates from Turkey to Cairo were pushing westward. Jewish colonies had settled in central and eastern Europe because many of the countries of western Europe had already expelled them. Often throughout the period the Jews chose to live under Muslim rule rather than in Christian countries, because Muslims generally tolerated the practice of their religion. By the late fourteenth century, they may have been even more easily associated with the Muslim Turks encroaching on Hungary and central Europe, simply because they were already living under their rule, having been expelled from England, France, and Spain.

Given this association between Jews, Muslims, and the Holy Land, a certain aspect of *The Siege of Jerusalem's* focus of vengeance becomes clearer—its obsession not only with Jewish bodies, but with Jewish gold. This feature strikingly melds anti-Judaic mythology with crusader fantasy. Jews from the ninth century on had been associated with trade in small, value-intensive commodities; for centuries the Radanite corporations trafficked in gold, jewels, pearls, silks, and rugs.³² By the late fourteenth century, Europe, including England, had come to depend upon the luxury items traded from markets of India, Persia, Ceylon: the spices, artifacts, and the exotic silks and fabrics in which *The Siege of Jerusalem* so delights to deck its armies. At the same time, for complicated reasons the different trade routes previously accessible to European merchants had narrowed to a single practical access point, and that had come under a monopoly formed by the association of the Venetian merchant mariners and the Mamluks in Egypt. The Mamluks controlled the single most profitable trade route to the rich ports of India and China at this time: the passage to the Red Sea. The Mamluks gave access privileges to the Genoese and later only to the Venetians, because these Italian communes provided them with slaves and war materials with

which to buttress their unique social and military hegemony.³³ Even this singular tradeline was very strictly regulated. Not only those allowed to trade but even the mechanisms of trading contact fell under Mamluk control, often to the fury of the merchants involved.³⁴

This regulation of trade put European traders in a firmly subsidiary position and, I have argued, contributed to the pressures that give *The Siege of Jerusalem* such an obsession with the exotic wealth of Jerusalem. European merchants were forced to compete fiercely among themselves even for what little access they were offered. Especially in the early part of the century, England found itself exporting raw materials such as unprocessed wool to Continental manufacturers in Bruges, while it continually imported and paid dearly for the rich dyes, spices, and silks that only the Venetian (and for some time, the Genoan) merchants could provide.

In addition, in the later fourteenth century there was a decided drain of gold and silver bullion south and east, intensifying after 1350.³⁵ This process led to a widespread concern for what J. L. Bolton calls "bullionism," the desire to strengthen a nation's economy by amassing more gold and silver bullion.³⁶ In England throughout the century, both kings and commons pursued legislation to control the outflow of cash from England; there is a rich record of royal ordinance and petitions to Parliament, including monarchical and parliamentary attempts to control the import of labor-intensive and expensive luxuries, prohibit the papal collection of Peter's pence, and require the payment of international debts in English goods only.³⁷ In 1363, Edward III passed sumptuary legislation to discourage the seemingly insatiable market for expensive southern and eastern textiles, and in about 1436, the jingoistic "Libelle of Englyshe Polycye," decried the parasitical greed of Italian exporters (who seem to have replaced the Jews as capitalist nightmares for English traders) and the gullibility of the English for shipping out their good wool in return for such frivolities.³⁸ All these developments bespeak a widespread English fear that unless trade regulation could be imposed and maintained both at home and abroad, "gold and silver would be sucked from the country."³⁹ These concerns would have been of particular interest to members of the provincial canonry at Bolton and in Yorkshire generally, where a period of relative prosperity in the earlier part of the century seems to have led to an extended period of slowly sinking financial stagnation.⁴⁰

This widespread sense of monetary depletion contributed to a growing recognition that the costs of war and chivalric careerism were outweighing their benefits. War became a particularly fraught focus of anxiety,

inciting both further determined campaigning and a slowly spreading movement of social criticism of chivalric practice. The later fourteenth century is not famous for its successful English military campaigns, from the increasingly unprofitable Hundred Years War and the frustrated Castilian meddlings of John of Gaunt to the prohibitively costly crusading venture of the Despensers in Flanders, which was such a failure that Henry Despenser, bishop of Norwich, was actually impeached in Parliament for his mismanagement.

The Siege of Jerusalem responds to these contemporary developments when it defines its most distinctive victimizing impulse, one that underlines the sense that the holy war conducted by Titus and Vespasian has certainly proven worth its outlay. The Jews in the poem have two very desirable characteristics: they are extremely rich, and they are extremely malleable militarily, monetarily, and physically; in fact, the more the poem mauls them, the more gold they seem to produce. Gold plasters their city and apparel—they exude surplus value. The intimate association the poem constructs between the Jews and their gold emerges most clearly at a point in the siege when large numbers of starving Jews are desperate to surrender. Titus grants them safe-conduct from the city, with disastrous consequences. It is discovered that they have eaten their gold to preserve it from pillaging, and the Roman warriors take prompt and (in this poem) predictable action:

Wipouten leue of þat lord, ledes hem slowen,
Goren euereche a gome, & þe gold taken;
Ffaynere of þe floreyns þan of þe frekes alle. (1166–68)

[Without asking leave of their lord (Titus), men slew them, goring every one of them to extract the gold, more delighted with the money than with all of the men themselves.]

Here the poem literally extracts gold from Jewish bodies. While this scene literalizes the conventional trope of money-hungry Jews, it also makes clear that it is the desires of the besieging Christians that are being served by this translation of a living culture into dead flesh and gold. The Jews at the beginning of the poem are like the Romans; they use their wealth and culture to communicate their power and status. By the end of the poem, they have been forced to internalize and transform themselves into the dead tokens of power and status which they formerly controlled. They are translated bodily into a fungible and appropriable form of wealth.

At every point the poem imaginatively reconfigures this transfor-

mation. It changes living Jews into dead bodies which can then be pillaged for their glittering armor. It transforms their food into gold, so it can be torn from their bodies. At the end when the siege has been victorious, this terrible alchemy culminates as the Jews are literally converted into money and sold as moveable goods:

[Titus] made in myddel of þe ost a market to crye,
 Alle þat cheffare wolde chepe chepis to haue,
 Ay for a peny of pris, who-so pay wolde,
 Prytty Jewes in a þrom, þrongen in ropis.
 So wer þey bargayned & bouȝt & broȝt out of londe. . . .
 (1313–17)

[Titus declared a market in the middle of the army, in which anyone who wanted to have a bargain could haggle. All for the price of a penny anyone who wanted to pay could get a crowd of thirty Jews, squeezed together in ropes. Thus were they bargained for and bought and taken out of their land.]

Here the poet indulges in another of his stinging inversions. The Christ-sellers are sold, with the additional, scornful fillip of bringing only a fraction of the price of Christ. But while the living bodies of the Jews themselves are not allowed to yield much profit, their community's civic body, Jerusalem, is a different story. The sack of the city is an extended, gleeful rummage through a town-sized treasure chest:

Þer was plente in þe place of precious stonys,
 Grete gaddes of gold, who-so grype lyste
 Platis, pecis of peys, pulsched vessel,
 Bassynes of brend gold & oþer bryȝt ger,
 Pelours, masly made of metals fele,
 In copre craftly cast & in elene seluere,
 Peynted with pur gold, alle the place was ouer;
 Þe Romainys renten hem down & to Rome ledyn.
 Whan þey þe cyte han souȝt vpon þe same wyse,
 Telle couþe no tonge þe tresours þat þei þer founden,
 Jewels for joly men, jemewes riche,
 Ffloreyns of fyne gold no freke wanted,
 Riche pelour & pane, princes to wer,
 Besantes, bies of gold, broches & rynges,

Clene cloþes of selke many carte-fulle,
Wele wanteþ no wye, bot waleþ what hym lykeþ. (1261–76)

[In that place, there were enormous quantities of precious stones, huge bars of gold for whoever wanted to grab them, plates, pieces of great weight, polished vessels, basins of burnished gold, and other bright gear; and all over the place were pillars, massively made of many different metals, cunningly cast in copper and in bright silver and painted with pure gold. The Romans tore them down and bore them off to Rome. When they had searched the city in the same manner, no tongue can tell how many treasures they found there: jewels for gay-spirited men, rich double rings; no man lacked many coins of bright gold, furs, and cloth that were rich enough for princes to wear, gold coins, gold bracelets, brooches, and rings, many cartfuls of bright silk cloth; no man lacked for wealth but chose what he liked.]

At this scene, the poem reaches its desired end. It has not merely retaliated against the Jews; it has liquidated them. All the gold, the silks, and the cunning artifacts of the East are free for the taking. The crusade that began by boasting only to avenge Christ's death has along the way reaped a considerable profit.

Economy and extortion

What matters in this struggle is relatedness. The struggle must be prolonged in every way so this profitable conflict and contact can be maintained. To do this, *The Siege of Jerusalem* makes both sides strategically uncooperative: when Romans offer peace, the Jews are moved to reject it; when the Jews plead for it, it is withheld. They are imbued with exactly enough pride and high-handedness to keep the conflict justifiable and therefore prolonged. Whenever idiotic stubbornness is needed, it occurs, even when it flies in the face of the progressive annihilation that the poem is underscoring. However, the Jews are never allowed seriously to threaten the Roman armies.⁴¹ The poem does not revel in the give-and-take of chivalrous enemies, but rather delights in an enemy who is malleable, an enemy that retreats, throws up walls, and stratagems, flimsy barriers that by slow, insistent pressure can be overcome.⁴² Even the final, pathetic surrender of the Jews can be marked by treachery and justified by profit.

This conflict continually moves toward a culmination that is not only military but economic. The poem solicits an unequal if not usurious economic transaction, replacing a trade (an eye for an eye, a death for a death) with an extortion. If Christ's death bought all of humanity away from sin, then the reckoning for that death in the poem expands accordingly to encompass an entire nation, exacted in both blood and gold. The struggle is prolonged so that worse and crueler sufferings can be imposed and greater and better profits can be reaped. The economic metaphor here is a Christian seizure of a conventionally Jewish paradigm—payment with interest, a usury of violence at which the Romans become more adept and more successful as the poem proceeds. By the poem's end, the Jews and the Romans are caught up in the intimacy of blackmailers, situated in a fantasy of collaboration between victor and victim. The violence of the poem comes to a head at the bargaining table, where the Jews' value is calculated by Roman standards, and they are sold as slaves.

However, constant textual alertness is required to maintain this exploitative economy and keep the Romans on top. The poem must even rework the narrative expectations of its own genre, the alliterative battle poem. For example, in battle epics such as the *Chanson de Roland* and the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, the extremities of battle are high points. When the battle rages most fiercely, opposing combatants tend to approach each other and merge indistinguishably. Such a dissolution of boundaries climaxes chivalric struggles in both the *Chanson de Roland* and the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*. Both poems dwell on the moment when the battle suddenly transcends all earthly, bodily, and social limits and carries all the participants off in an ecstasy of rage whose extremity is both appalling and satisfying to an audience.⁴³ In *The Siege of Jerusalem*, such moments are dangerous because they conflict with the need to keep the Romans invulnerable and the Jews malleable.⁴⁴ This danger surfaces predictably at the moment that the walls of Jerusalem are breached. As the Romans swarm through the gap and are met with desperate resistance, the crucial separation between Jew and Roman vanishes and only the violence itself remains, feeding on itself. There

Was noȝt bot dyn & dyt as alle deye scholde,
So eche lyuande lyf layeþ on oþer. (1189–90)

[Each living life beset the other so fiercely there was nothing but
din and clamor as if everyone were going to die together.]

It is at this moment that the only one of the Roman captains to be killed, Sir Sabyn of Syria, meets his death.

This textual moment is dangerous to the poem's strategic differentiations, because it levels the participants to equals in struggle, body against body, each life against the other with no differentiation. It is this mutual reduction to body or indistinguishable "lyuande lyfe" that the energetically alliterative battle descriptions drive toward, but that this poem continually resists and deflects onto the Jews alone. As soon as the walls are breached, for instance, the poet moves abruptly out of the melee and begins retroactively recounting portents signifying Jewish defeat that had appeared *three years before* (and outside the poem's purview): visions of a great sword and a heavenly army hanging over the city. These afterthoughts of portents emphatically separate the invaders from the victims by retroactively constructing a vulturelike signifier of Jewish doom. The sword and the army appear in the sky as divine retributions, looming above and beyond the city but themselves inaccessible and aloof. By situating these ancient portents unsequentially at the moment the walls of the city are finally broken and Romans are pouring in, the poem resists the disintegratory culmination toward which the battle fervor tends. It extracts the Romans from the danger presented by the breach of Jewish walls—the boundary that separates them—and transforms the vulnerable Roman army into an invulnerable heavenly one.

This is a process that extends over the entire poem as the poem continually courts and then resists the breakdown of boundaries between the combatants. Such approach/avoidance tactics extend to the formation of sympathies and the emotional identification of the audience with both victims and victors. This poem, which appears to indulge all the variegated genocidal fantasies of late medieval clerical culture, never loses sight of the sufferings of the Jews.⁴⁵ In the scene where the Jewish woman Mary eats her own child, the poet draws attention not only to the monstrosity of the act but to the pitiable circumstances that drove her to it. Time and again the poet details the hideous sufferings of the Jews trapped within the city in a way that makes them appear human and sympathetic. He almost laments the fact that starvation has deprived the Jewish women of all their beauty. By continually soliciting sympathy for the victims, the poem underscores their humanity and threatens its initial paradigm, in which the Jews are perfidious Christ-killers and the Romans the sympathetic Christian heroes.⁴⁶

But simply because this suffering is so extreme the poet can in a mere twist of phrase make it monstrous. This is the emotional border the

poem continually smudges, as it changes modalities from sympathy to ridicule to sheer horror. The Jews in the poem are first humanized, weeping tears of pity and suffering, and then dehumanized—reduced to the levels of beasts or traitors in a way that justifies the inflictors of torture and spurs them to continue their efforts. The poem modulates its emotional registers from “Look at the poor wretches” to (more insidiously) “How ugly they are,” and, subtler yet, from “They’re monsters, they deserve it,” finally to “You thought it would stop here—no! The worst is yet to come!” Thus even pity and sympathy lead to more suffering for the Jews and more profit for the Romans.

However, the very artistry with which the poem dehumanizes the Jews points to the inevitable contrivance of that dehumanization, prohibits any comfortable naturalization of it, and generates the need for its active reinforcement. In this, I believe, the poem participates in a widespread medieval clerical production of the idea of the Jews as perpetually necessary and reiterable antitypes and enemies to Christians, a ritual reproduction of ideological hatred clearly visible in the clerically vetted cycle dramas produced at York, as well as in *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament*.⁴⁷

Consolidating the West

The Jews are not the only necessary enemy in *The Siege of Jerusalem*; its urge to disintegrate and exploit is directed not only against Jewish “pagans” but Roman ones as well. This becomes apparent in the description of the first Roman conversion to Christianity, that of Titus, Vespasian’s diseased son. When Titus is told of Christ’s torture and death, he does not condemn the Jews; his spleen fastens on another target, one much more highly placed: he blames Caesar, who appointed the unjust provost, Pilate, working himself into a fury as he does so. The moment Titus finishes fulminating, he is healed of his disease and regains his strength. At first glance, this immediate condemnation of Caesar is startling, given the simple revenge story with which the poem begins. However, as the poem progresses, it becomes clear that the poem is concerned with greater changes than the repayment of a violent debt. The poem’s Christianity leads beyond the Jewish war to imperial revolution, a two-pronged attack that realigns the face of the Roman Empire itself on both foreign and domestic fronts.

From the beginning, the poem pursues the distinction between old Rome and new Rome as vigorously as it does the distinction between Christian and Jew. Titus is constructed specifically as an enlightened Christian

king in opposition to Nero, the savage pagan emperor. In the poem, the Roman emperors are depicted as not only corrupt and bestial but fatally stupid, because they are not guided by the Christian faith that motivates the emerging Christian empire. They share with the Jews the blame for Christ's death because the condemnation of Christ constitutes a failure of their just administration, and, like the Jews, they fall prey to the poem's destructive inversions. Because Nero has shown poor judgment in appointing his provincial overseers, he is judged harshly indeed. He is pursued from his palace by a mob of his own citizens and only has time to snatch a stick of wood, which he gnaws to a point with his teeth and then stabs through his own heart. Titus, by contrast, instantiates a new kind of leadership as he is baptized to gain the divinely sanctioned and unhesitating authority of the crusader: "Forþ þey fetten a font . . . / Made hym cristen kyng, þat for Christ werred" (189–90).

It is no accident that the wars at home and abroad are simultaneous and mobilize the same dynamics; both the pagan Romans and the Jews in the poem serve as non-Christian adversaries, upon whose rejection the cohesion of this conception of Christian community directly depends. The poem underlines this in the most incontrovertible way possible—by showing the intimate bond between the deadly enmity against both enemies and the restoration of Roman Christian bodily, military, and cultural health.

The Siege of Jerusalem is filled with miraculous healings of the Roman captains: Vespasian is healed once and Titus twice. Titus's second illness and cure in particular illuminates the entire recuperative dynamic of the poem—the recreation of an invigorated Christian body by carefully administered hatred. When Vespasian succeeds in gaining the Roman throne only halfway through the poem and well before Jerusalem falls, Titus becomes so joyful that he falls ill:

& Titus for þe tydyng haþ take so mychel joye
 þat in his synwys soudeynly a syknesse is fallen.
 Þe freke for þe fayndom of þe fader blysse,
 With a cramp & a colde cauȝt was so hard
 þat þe fynGRES & feēt, fustes & joyntes
 Was lypy as a leke & lost han her strengþe.
 He croked aȝens kynde & as a crepel woxe,
 & whan þey sey hym so, many segge wepyþ. . . . (1023–30)

[Titus took so much joy from the tidings that a sudden sickness struck his sinews. He was so joyful at his father's happiness that he

was gripped by a cramp and a chill. It took him so strongly that his fingers and his feet, his fists and his joints were as limp as leeks and lost their strength. Against nature, he grew crooked and walked like a cripple, so that when many people saw him, they wept for pity.]

Here, Vespasian's success in Rome threatens the poem's trajectory toward a new Christian empire by introducing a premature ending, a Christian-Roman empire that has not fully assimilated the profits from the destruction of *both* its predecessors. Titus's new and deformative illness signals the importance of the Jewish side of the equation and underlines the continued usefulness of the Jews, both as literal healers and as instigators of rehabilitative anger. Titus sends into Jerusalem, famed for its healing, for a physician. Josephus, the Jewish clerk, Roman citizen, historian, military strategist (and writer of one of the sources for the poem) willingly comes out to cure him:⁴⁸

Tille he haue complet his cure condit he askep
 For what burne of þe burwe þat he brynge wolde.
 Þe kyng was glad alle to graunte þat þe gome wylned,
 & he ferkip hym forth, fettes ful blyue
 A man to þe mody kyng þat he moste hated,
 & yn bryngeþ þe burne to his beddes syde.
 Whan Tytus saw þat segge sodeynly with eyen,
 His herte in an hote yre so hetterly riseþ,
 Þat þe blode bygan to brede abroad in þe vaynes,
 & þe synwes to resorte in her self kynde.
 Ffeet & alle þe fetoures as þey byfore wer
 Comyn in her owen kynd. . . . (1039–50)

[(Josephus) asked for free conduct from the city for any man he might choose that would last until Titus's cure. The king was happy to grant to him all that he wished, and Josephus went forth and fetched very quickly a man that the proud king hated the most on earth. He brought that man to the king's bedside. When Titus saw that man suddenly appearing there before his eyes, his heart rose up so fiercely in a hot rage that the blood began to race in his veins and his sinews were restored to their old strength. His feet and all his features were as they had been before, renewed in their natural state.]

In recounting this extraordinary cure, the poet expands considerably on his source. The *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine grudgingly includes this episode simply because it was there in his own source (and Jacobus is nothing if not inclusive), but he denegrates it as apocryphal and dubious. The *Siege*-poet, on the contrary, seizes upon it, altering it from an interesting diversion of uncertain worth to an episode that crystallizes the most central and disturbing aspects in the relationship between his adversaries: the need of the Christian Romans to *preserve* the Jews as desirable enemies, so that their own successes do not enfeeble them.

The adjustments are significant. First and most important, the hated man is not Titus's own slave as in Jacobus's account but a man from the city, a Jew whose safe passage out of the city, like Josephus's own, depends upon Titus's surety; otherwise he would be killed on sight. In addition, Titus is not constrained to acknowledge publicly his enemy as an honored guest at a banquet as Jacobus tells; he is only forced to face him within the confines of his own sick chamber, and as a result his powerful emotional response becomes more surprising. Finally, the poet omits Jacobus's account of Josephus's rationale for a cure: that contrary should cure contrary, a change that makes the mechanics of the cure more miraculous, intense, and essential. The cure springs directly from the hatred in Titus's heart without any intervening logical framework.

These changes knit the incident tightly into the poem's network of desires. The tale of Titus's cure by Josephus balances the seeming contradiction between the poem's need to destroy the Jews and the need for their continued existence as an available and accessible source of economic revenue. Hatred of them becomes not merely economically but physically salutary. The Jews are not simply an enemy whom the Romans by divine sanction can love to hate, but one energizing and healthy to hate, a truly desirable enemy.

In creating this economy of salutary hatred, the *Siege*-poet constructs an originary mythology for the historic exploitation of the Jews from the twelfth century onward by courts, nobles, and city governments throughout Europe. The Jews in England were supremely useful to thirteenth-century monarchs for the tallages that could be levied on them, some amounting to one-fifth of total monarchical income.⁴⁹ In addition to direct taxation, their services as moneylenders could be exploited not only by aristocratic and clerical landowners but by the kings themselves. All over Europe, rulers repeatedly captured the services of the Jews as moneylenders, only to expel or kill them when they were unable to meet their obligations for repayment or when the Jews had little left to give.⁵⁰

The Siege of Jerusalem acknowledges the usefulness of the Jews when it lays the foundations of its new empire with its own extortionist economies. Yet, in at least two ways, the poem reveals an anxiety about the effectiveness of its own strategies. First, the boundaries it constructs have to be obsessively policed; they are always in danger of collapsing as the sheer excess of the Roman violence threatens to reduce themselves to the bestial level of their Jewish victims—to transform them into tyrants as vicious as Nero. It is this danger, I believe, that impels the undercurrent of pity for their victims that both Titus and Vespasian at times express, differentiating them not only from their Jewish predecessors but their Roman ones. Second, the very extremity of the poem's obsessive need to master the denizens of the Holy Land in every possible way (torture, civic disintegration, mass slaughter, vengeful inversion, economic exploitation) seems uncalled for given the relative weakness of the Jews after their first day of battle. I would argue that the poem is so eager to turn the tables upon the Jews because at the time of the poem's composition the Mamluks in Egypt and the Holy Land and especially the Ottomans in Turkey were turning the tables on the monarchs of Christian Europe and putting the kibosh on the last eager hopes of a final, successful crusade.⁵¹

The Turks were in fact in the process of founding an empire that would not only rival in extent the Christian-Roman empire constructed in *The Siege of Jerusalem* but would also last much longer.⁵² And while Murad I was circumspect in his dealings with Christians, mandating religious tolerance among his new subjects and not forcing conversions, his successor was less diplomatic. The Ottoman expansion intensified under Murad's son, Bayezed, who declared himself the sword of Islam and boasted to envoys from Italy that "after conquering Hungary, he would ride to Rome and would feed his horse with oats on the altar of St. Peter's."⁵³ In 1391 he instigated the first Ottoman siege of Constantinople, the center of Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

These depredations did not go unnoticed in Europe. King Sigismund of Hungary began to agitate for a new crusade and was gratified by an enormous response from nobility of all ranks and countries, including a large contingent from England.

For the last time in history, the finest flower of European chivalry gathered together for a crusade as much secular as religious in impulse, whose objective was to check Bayezid's lightning advance and eject the Turks, once and for all, from the Balkans. Thus an "international" army, composed with Sigismund's own force and

the contingents of knights with their retinues and mercenary bands of some hundred thousand men, mustered at Buda in the early summer of 1396—the largest Christian force that had ever confronted the infidel.⁵⁴

In Froissart's account, this army was as confused about their enemy as it was hot for infidel blood. In their vision, they were confronting not only the Turks but the rallied forces of Alexandria and Damascus, the leadership of the Khalif of Baghdad, the King of Tartary, and an army of "Sarazyns and Panyms, of Perce, of Tartary, of Arabye, and Suryens."⁵⁵ To them, this was the greatest confrontation there had ever been: the combined forces of Christian Europe facing the immeasurable hordes of the East. Victory over Bayezid's army would lead not only to the salvation of Europe but final, all-vindicating victories in Syria, the Holy Land, and Jerusalem itself.⁵⁶

This European force was utterly defeated by Bayezid, largely through its own chivalric arrogance as even Froissart acknowledges.⁵⁷ In his account, Sigismund of Hungary with his superior knowledge and experience of their enemy advised his international allies to wait for his own reinforcements. Sir Philip of Artois became enraged, declaiming that "the kynge of Hungery wolde have the floure and chiefe honour of this journey; we have the vowe, he hath graunted it to us, and now he wolde take it fro us again: beleve hym who wyll, for I do nat!"⁵⁸ The French army accordingly attacked, but after penetrating the enticingly weak Ottoman vanguard they came face to face with the main bulk of Bayezid's army of sixty thousand and were decimated or taken prisoner. The following day, Bayezid massacred the prisoners in a scene that grimly echoes the ending of *The Siege of Jerusalem*, as the European warriors are roped together in groups, forced to kneel, and beheaded. Ten thousand people are said to have died that day.⁵⁹

I am not arguing for a direct relationship between this campaign and *The Siege of Jerusalem*, though a very late dating of the poem just before its terminus ad quem of about 1400 would allow for it. What is more important, however, is that the motivations and anxieties that impel this last immense gathering of the knighthood of Europe are also at the heart of the poem, spiced by a recognizably Augustinian historical tradition of anti-Judaism. By wreaking its revenge on the eastern Jews, the poem acts out these anxieties, with its unrestrained delight in the isolation, conquest, and torture of one Eastern culture that is not only vulnerable and encompassable but extremely rich. In its stress on the need to preserve the Jews for exploitation, the poem aligns itself with the Augustinian interpretation of the need

for Christian tolerance of the Jews. William of Newburgh crystallizes this logic:

Indeed with the same reason of Christian utility the perfidious Jew, the crucifier of our Lord Christ, is allowed to live among Christians as the form of the Lord's cross is painted in the Church of Christ, viz., for the continual and most helpful remembrance by all of the faithful of our Lord's Passion . . . and thus the Jews ought to live among Christians for our use, but serve us for their own iniquity.⁶⁰

The bland word *utility* (*pro utilitate*) illuminates the link between the nurturing of social memory, economic need, and the cultural reproduction of Christian community, and explains *The Siege of Jerusalem's* insistence on the justice of and need for its reiterative economy of exploitation. The Christendom it produces, the unities between chivalry and religion it asserts, and the economic transactions in which it revels are aesthetically and cruelly contrived. In its very elegance, the poem reveals its fictionality, its active and anxious cultivation of an ideal international and transhistorical community, which both responds to and ameliorates the seemingly irresolvable tensions of its own cultural provenance.



Notes

1. *The Siege of Jerusalem* survives in eight manuscripts, which seems to indicate a popularity unusual among the poems of the northern Alliterative Revival: the sudden late-fourteenth-century emergence in England of a number of poems written mostly in nonsouthern dialects using alliterative meter. Most northern alliterative poems survive in single manuscripts; all are anonymous and virtually untraceable. It is by extraordinary diligence that Ralph Hanna III and David A. Lawton have persuasively traced the *The Siege of Jerusalem* to Bolton, a feat unequalled for most other late-fourteenth-century alliterative poems of unknown provenance. They are editing a forthcoming edition of the poem. For a foretaste see Hanna, "Contextualizing *The Siege of Jerusalem*," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 6 (1992): 109–21. I would like to offer thanks to both of them for generously sharing their expertise.
2. For a useful discussion of the poem's crusading impetus, see Mary Hamel, "The *Siege of Jerusalem* as a Crusading Poem," *Journeys Toward God: Pilgrimage and Crusade*, ed. Barbara N. Sargent-Baur (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), 177–94.

- 3 Elisa Narin Van Court effectively links the poem's descriptive dynamic to the thirteenth-century Augustinian chronicle tradition exemplified by William of Newburgh. See "The Siege of Jerusalem and Augustinian Historians: Writing about Jews in Fourteenth-Century England," *Chaucer Review* 29 (1995): 227–48.
- 4 All citations are taken from *The Siege of Jerusalem*, ed. E. Kölbing and Mabel Day, EETS o.s. 188 (London: Humphrey Milford, 1932).
- 5 Translations from *The Siege of Jerusalem* are my own.
- 6 Hamel, "Siege of Jerusalem as a Crusading Poem," 179–87.
- 7 Aziz S. Atiya, *Crusade, Commerce, and Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), 94.
- 8 These are only the most general listing; for more detailed accounts of such developments, the crusading endeavors which they helped to provoke, and their relevance to late-century English society, see Sheila Delany, *The Naked Text: Chaucer's "Legend of Good Women"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 165–73; Christopher Tyerman, *England and the Crusades, 1095–1588* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 259–301; and J. J. N. Palmer, *England, France, and Christendom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 180–210.
- 9 Atiya, *Crusade, Commerce, and Culture*, 95.
- 10 Christopher Tyerman discusses monarchical sequestration of papal taxes for crusading in 1283, 1294, 1314, and 1336. He is careful to point out that this in itself need not indicate monarchical disinterest in crusading. Rather it was a widespread practice at the time among secular monarchs, and the papacy itself tended to divert these funds to its own political ends while remaining fully invested in the ideological imperative of crusade. See *England and the Crusades*, 252–58.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 293.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 259–66.
- 13 Palmer, *England, France, and Christendom*, 242–44.
- 14 Atiya points out how "the fourteenth-century Crusaders appear to have pursued their quests by devious ways" (92), attacking other important targets as a prelude to seizing the Holy Land, which receded farther and farther as a possibility the longer the century progressed. See Atiya for the following accounts: Pierre de Lusignan's 1365 sack of Alexandria; Amedeo VI's 1366 seizure of Gallipoli; the 1390 crusade alliance of the Bourbon duke Louis II and the Genoese commune against Tunis (in which Sir John Clanvowe died, Lollard knight and acquaintance of Chaucer); and the disastrous 1396 siege of Nicopolis, which mobilized the largest international European army for centuries, was endorsed by both the Avignonese and Roman pontiffs, and included a thousand English knights under the leadership of John Beaufort, son of John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, as well as John Holland, earl of Huntingdon. Atiya, *Crusade, Commerce, and Culture*, 99–111. All of these crusades were ephemeral or calamitous, leading to no sustained followup and often crippling European military and economic interests even further.
- 15 Tyerman, *England and the Crusades*, 260.
- 16 Philippe de Mézières, "L'Épître Lamentable et Consolatoire," repr. in *Oeuvres de Froissart*, vol. 16, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove (Brussels, 1872), 467.
- 17 *Ibid.*

- 18 Elisa Narin Van Court shows beautifully how the subsequent description of Vespasian's inspirational speech to his own troops on Christ's Passion crystallizes the differences between Jewish and Christian foundational mythologies, and reenacts the Christian seizure and supersession of the Hebrew Scriptures as the Old Testament. See "The Siege of Jerusalem and Augustinian Historians," 230–31.
- 19 Ralph Hanna felicitously describes the poem as the "chocolate covered tarantula of the alliterative movement" ("Contextualizing *The Siege of Jerusalem*," 109). I tend to see more tarantula than chocolate, but that doesn't impair the metaphor. In fact all of the poem's few critics note with varying degrees of repulsion the inventiveness of the poem's inseparably brilliant and gruesome imaginary. For other revealing analyses, see Hamel, "The Siege of Jerusalem as a Crusading Poem," 179–87; Derek Pearsall, *Old and Middle English Poetry* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 169; and A. C. Spearing, *Readings in Medieval Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 165–72.
- 20 See Van Court, "Augustinian Historians," 239–41.
- 21 "Porro Judaei in Anglia sub rege Henrico secundo consistentes, ordine praepostero super Christianos felices et incliti fuerant, et ex multa felicitate impudentius tumendo contra Christum plurima Christianis gravamina irrogant: propterea diebus novi principis vitae, quam de Christi habebant clementia, justo ejus judicio periculum pertrulerunt, cujus tamen judicii ordine pulcherrimo nequaquam excusantur qui motu incondito cladem illis intulerunt." William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, vol. 1, ed. Richard Howlett, Rolls Series (London, 1884), 317. The translation is Joseph Jacobs's in *The Jews of Angevin England: Documents and Records* (London, 1893), 122–23.
- 22 See his useful study, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).
- 23 H. G. Richardson lists examples drawn mostly from Yorkshire: "We can find a good deal of evidence for dealings by houses of these two orders [Cistercian monks and Augustinian canons]. Waltham Abbey, for example, not only profited by the transaction between Le Brun and Henry II, but is found, not very long after, engaged in dealings on its own account. Other houses of Augustinian canons to acquire land in this fashion in the thirteenth century were Holy Trinity, Aldgate, and Healaugh Park" (98–99). See also *The English Jewry under Angevin Kings* (London: Methuen, 1960), 91–99; and Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 38.
- 24 *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, 317–18; Jacobs, *Jews of Angevin England*, 123–24.
- 25 Jacobs comments, "It was possible that even the leaders of the riot were combining business and religion in their attack on the Jews. They were all connected with various abbeys, and their names occur in the Abbey Cartularies. . . . The Fauconbridges were the great patrons of the Abbey of Welbeck, and Malebyse himself was afterwards the founder of Newbo, co. Lincoln." *Jews of Angevin England*, 390.
- 26 Van Court argues that the poem, despite its inventive brutality, nonetheless exhibits "a tenuous, but fully articulated sympathy toward the Jews"—surprising in a milieu of increasing intolerance—and even disregards some of the more demeaning details of their dehumanization in the poem's sources, the eating of filth, for instance. She

links this sympathy to trends in Augustinian historicism, exemplified by the thirteenth-century account of the massacre at York by William of Newburgh, which criticizes the mercenary motivations of the Christians and draws attention to the humanity of the Jews. See "The Siege of Jerusalem and Augustinian Historians," 227–48. While I take her point and am greatly indebted to her construction of Augustinian historicizing traditions, I offer a more sinister reading of the poem's acknowledgment of Christian brutality, placing it within the context of the revenge trope constructed at the poem's beginning, the poem's delight in cruel inversion, and its uncritical inventiveness in visiting eye-for-eye, tooth-for-tooth exactions upon its victims.

27. See Hamel, "Crusading Poem," for a useful discussion of the linkages between the poem and crusade narratives. For a famous linkage of Jew and Saracen, see the culmination of the *Chanson de Roland*, when Charles caps his victory by destroying not only the mosques of Sargossa but its synagogues. In Charles's eyes, all are pagans together.
28. This is a fear that both R. I. Moore and Lester K. Little attribute partly to guilty projection. See respectively *Formation of a Persecuting Society*, 30–31; and *Religious Economy and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 54–57.
29. One year the blow was fierce enough to knock a victim's eye out and kill him. Little discusses this custom and shows how it was not uncommon throughout the eleventh century in France. See *Religious Economy*, 46–48.
30. Little summarizes Alexander's arguments. He "distinguish[ed] the case of the Jews, who live peacefully among Christians and whom the mercy of God had predestined to be saved, from that of the Saracens who had persecuted the Christians and driven them out of their own cities and lands." *Religious Economy*, 447. In other words, the Jews were peaceful interminglers, where the Saracens were militant interlopers. Despite Alexander's efforts, this distinction was often forgotten by crusader, clergy, and townsfolk alike, particularly where destroying the Jews meant destroying old debts.
31. Moore usefully summarizes these incidents which, by the Third Crusade, had spread to England as well. The coronation of the avid crusader Richard I in 1189 was marked by the burning of the London ghetto, a precedent that helped prepare for the attacks in East Anglia and the final horrific chapter in York, where a whole Jewish community was besieged within Clifford's Tower, where on 17 March 1190 they committed mass suicide. From the beginning then, the Crusades undoubtedly stimulated hostility toward the Jews and provided the most appalling occasions of its expression." See *Formation of a Persecuting Society*, 31.
32. Atiya, *Crusade, Commerce, and Culture*, 195–97.
33. This trade in goods and slaves persisted despite the well-reasoned attempts of such statesmen as Marino Sanudo to show its disastrous economic and military consequences for European interests. Even after his 1309 treatise "Secreta Fidelium Crucis" had convinced Pope Clement V and King Charles IV of France to adopt a complete trade embargo and a military blockade (which would starve Egypt of military power) with the economic resources to maintain it, the embargo failed, partly because the

pope almost immediately started issuing lucrative dispensations to Venetian ships so that they could continue trading, and partly because the Genoese continued to make quite a profit smuggling slaves and weapons to the Mamluks, despite the papal blockade. See Ariya, *Crusade, Commerce, and Culture*, 98–99.

- 34 For the plea of one frustrated trader with perishable goods, see document no. 168 in *Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World*, ed. and trans. Robert S. Lopez and Irving W. Raymond (New York: Norton, n.d.), 335–36. See also Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System, A.D. 1250–1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 240.
- 35 Harry A. Miskimin outlines three principal causes for southern flow of bullion: the trade imbalances discussed above, papal taxation, and the ongoing, expensive fourteenth-century war and diplomacy costs. See *The Economy of Early Renaissance Europe, 1300–1460* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 136–50.
- 36 See J. L. Bolton, *The Medieval English Economy, 1150–1500* (London: Dent, 1980), 297.
- 37 Miskimin, *Economy*, 141–47.
- 38 See G. A. Holmes, “The ‘Libel of English Policy,’” *English Historical Review* 76 (1961): 193–216, for a geopolitical contextualization of the “Libelle.”
- 39 Bolton, *Medieval English Economy*, 330.
- 40 See Ian Kershaw, *Bolton Priory: The Economy of a Northern Monastery, 1286–1325* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 171–83.
- 41 This powerlessness is notable and can be usefully contrasted with the Islamic might depicted in the *Chanson de Roland*, or Darius’s military splendor in the *Wars of Alexander*. What is most important to the *Siege*-poet is not that his Jews prove the Romans worthy by putting up a good fight, but rather that they give the Romans a cursory run for their money.
- 42 The siege begins with a flurry of such stratagems inspired by Josephus, the canny Jewish clerk. When the Romans cut off the city’s water, he hangs wet wool on the city walls to make the Romans believe that the city has an inexhaustible water source. When they start destroying the stone of the city walls, he reinforces them with great sacks of chaff; he also manages to burn their siege engines with boiling oil. All of these stratagems are easily overcome by the Romans.
- 43 These are moments that explicitly delight in liminality, in the twilight balance between one world and another, the body’s interior and exterior, the embattled hero and the enemy. It is for this reason that epics like the *Chanson de Roland* and the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* spin out these moments to such amazing length. In the *Chanson de Roland*, for instance, the poem circles incessantly around the last extremities of Roland and his coterie, drawing out his death struggles for 683 lines.
- 44 Hanna describes another of the poem’s powerful metaphorizations of this separation between conqueror and victim, that of the huntsman who calmly holds the feet of the deer and directs its flaying. See “Contextualizing *The Siege of Jerusalem*,” 109–10.
- 45 See Van Court for an account of this which reaches a different conclusion: “Augustinian Historians,” 233–39.
- 46 See Van Court, “Augustinian Historians.”
- 47 For further explorations of the problem created by the cultural reproduction of anti-

Semitism, see Bernard Glassman, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes without Jews: Images of the Jews in England, 1290–1700* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975). Miri Rubin has also interestingly explored the continuous late medieval memorial nurturing of anti-Semitic mythologies in her recent work on host desecration accusations. I am indebted to her keynote address given at the Columbia Medieval Guild Conference on Ritual and Performance, October 1995. Her book *Gentile Tales* is forthcoming from Yale University Press.

- 48 I do not have time here to treat this fascinatingly equivocal character as both a source for and character within the poem.
- 49 P. Elman argues that the Jews were finally expelled from England because their resources had already been effectively depleted; they were no longer a good investment. See "The Economic Causes of the Expulsion of the Jews in 1290," *Economic History Review* 1st ser. 7 (1936–37): 145–54.
- 50 For a fuller account of the economic motivations behind the long exploitation and final expulsion of the Jews from Europe, see Moore, *Formation of a Persecuting Society*.
- 51 Lord Kinross underlines the sense of inversion: "Thanks initially to Murad, the West was now to fall to the East as the East had fallen to the West in the centuries of the Greeks and the Romans." See *The Ottoman Centuries: The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Empire* (New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1977), 43.
- 52 "Murad I was to be [the] first great Sultan [of the Ottoman Empire]. He reigned for a generation through the latter part of the fourteenth century. As a man of war, unflagging in his martial zeal and inspiring in his vigorous leadership, he extended Ottoman territories to the farthest limits of the Balkan peninsula, consolidating conquests that were to endure for five centuries. . . . Moreover, this age of Ottoman expansion into Eastern Europe coincided with an age of retraction in the West. No longer, with the final loss of Jerusalem in the mid-thirteenth century and the irruption of the Mongols into Asia Minor, could feudal Christendom thrust its frontiers eastward." Kinross, *Ottoman Centuries*, 45.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 66.
- 54 *Ibid.*
- 55 John Froissart, *Chronicle*, vol. 6, trans. Sir John Bouchier (London: David Nutt, 1903), 238.
- 56 See Froissart, *Chronicle*, 231: "this next sommer we shall wyne the realme of Armony, and passe the brase of saynt George, and so into Surrey, and wyne the portes of Japhes and Baruth, and conquere Jherusalem, and all the Holy Lande."
- 57 This is attested even by the partisan Froissart who laments, "Lo, beholde the great foly and outrage, for if they had taryed for the kynge of Hungery, who were threscore thousande men, they had been lykely to have doone a great acte; and by them and by their pride all was lost, and they receyved suche dommage, that sythe the batayle of Rounsevalx where as the xii. peres of Fraunce were slayne, Crystendome receyved nat so great a dommage." The parallel with Roland's battle is suggestive of the importance invested in this confrontation and of the narrator's need to ennoble, even narratively, this crushing defeat. See Froissart, *Chronicle*, 234.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 233.
- 59 Kinross, *Ottoman Centuries*, 69.

- 60 "Quippe eadem Christianæ utilitatis ratione perfidus Judæus, Domini Christi crucifixor, inter Christianos vivere sinitur, qua et forma crucis Dominicæ in Christi ecclesia pingitur, ad continuandam scilicet cunctis fidelibus saluberrimam Dominicæ passionis memoriam . . . itaque Judæi inter Christianos debent quidem pro utilitate nostra vivere, sed pro sua iniquitate servire." *Historia*, 316–17. See also Jacobs, *Jews of Angevin England*, 122.

