II

TWELFTH-CENTURY GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

The major efforts expended during the First Crusade did not slow the rapid development of northern French civilization; in many ways the pace was in fact accelerated. During the twelfth century, population further increased, cities continued to expand, and trade and industry progressed. The strong principalities of the eleventh century grew larger and more powerful. The Angevin count turned king of England was considered by many the most formidable secular figure in western Christendom. Still obscured by some of their vassals, Louis VI and Louis VII quietly laid the foundation for the potent thirteenth-century Capetian monarchy. The burgeoning resources and confidence of the period are well-expressed in its religious and intellectual achievements. This age saw the birth of a majestic new architecture, intense monastic reform, and the intellectual vitality of the Parisian schools.¹

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In this dynamic setting French Jewish life kept stride. The commercial needs of the vigorous urban centers made the Jews increasingly useful. Unshaken by the First-Crusade crisis that had disrupted German Jewish life, French Jewry still prospered. Its political and commercial alliance with the feudal barony deepened. The acknowledged genius of Rashi notwithstanding, the creative figures of the twelfth century, such as R. Samuel b. Meir, R. Jacob Tam, his brother, and R. Isaac of Dampierre, their nephew, were held in the highest esteem by their contemporaries and by succeeding generations.²

Evidence for Jewish life during this period remains vexingly sparse. Documentary sources do appear for the first time, helpfully augmenting the literary materials, both Jewish and Christian. Meagerness of data, however, does not imply a primitive state of development. The occasional glimpses available into twelfth-century Jewish life reveal ever more sophisticated political and economic ties between the Jews and the ruling authorities, deepening resentment in key sectors of Christian society, and increasingly advanced forms of Jewish self-government. The complexities of the early years of the reign of Philip Augustus can only be grasped against the background of the sparsely-documented preceding decades.

The paucity of documentary materials for this period renders impossible reconstruction of precise patterns of Jewish settlement. Many additional locales of Jewish residence are attested, however, including Bourges, Bray, Corbeil, Dampierre, Épernay, Étampes, Janville, Joigny, Loches, Melun, Montmorency, Pontoise, Ramerupt, Saint-Denis, Tonnerre, and Vitry. This list is clearly far from complete.³

An important document drawn up in the mid twelfth century affords insight into the major centers of this expanding Jewry.


³The evidence includes information on Jewish scholarly figures (Dampierre, Melun, Ramerupt, Vitry), details of the Blois incident of 1171 (Épernay, Janville, Loches, Pontoise), and random documentary materials (Bourges, Corbeil, Étampes, Montmorency, Saint-Denis, Tonnerre). The fragmentary state of the data makes it obvious that Jewish settlement was far wider.
Therefore have we taken counsel together: the elders of Troyes and its sages and those in its surrounding environs; the sages of Dijon and its environs; the leaders of Auxerre and Sens and its adjacent communities; the elders of Orléans and surrounding territories; our brethren the inhabitants of Châlons; the sages of the area of Reims; our masters in Paris and their neighbors; the scholars of Melun and Étampes. . . .

The intense Jewish political activity in the wake of the Blois catastrophe of 1171 indicates that the Jewish communities of Paris and Troyes, each located in the capital city of a major principality, were, naturally enough, the two most important centers of Jewish political influence.

Little evidence concerning the size of medieval northern French Jewish communities has survived, and few of these meager data antedate the thirteenth century. The only contemporary demographic estimate is the suggestion of Ephraim of Bonn that the Jewish community of Blois, prior to its decimation, consisted of four quorums of Jews. This could mean forty adult males, giving a total population of approximately two hundred men, women, and children; it might indicate simply a settlement of forty or so Jews. There were probably a number of Jewish communities larger than that of Blois, for example, Paris, Troyes, Provins; there were also many settlements much smaller. Rabbinic sources of the twelfth century deal with a number of problems resulting from the minuscule size of many Jewish enclaves. One of the queries addressed to R. Jacob Tam concerned litigants who were forced to seek a court outside their own community, which was so small that almost every member was related and hence disqualified as a judge. R. Isaac of Dampierre, a late-twelfth-century leader, even mentions Jews living alone in the midst of a completely non-Jewish town.

During the twelfth century the Jewish population of northern France was in all probability, like the general population, increasing. As hamlets grew into substantial towns and new urban centers were founded, new Jewish settlements also developed. An echo of this spread is perhaps to be found in the charge leveled by Geoffroy of Courlon against King Louis VII: "Deceived by avarice and against the integrity of faith,

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8 *Tosafot Eruvin*, 62b, s.v. R. Yohanan.
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he [that is, Louis] gave the Jews certain privileges, e.g., leprosaria, new synagogues, and cemeteries."  
These facilities probably reflect the establishment of new Jewish communities. Jewish population pressures are also revealed in the ongoing debate over the herem ha-yishuv, the power of any Jewish settlement to restrict the number of newcomers. Many of the major twelfth-century religious authorities felt it necessary to take a stand on the herem ha-yishuv. This concern indicates an expanding Jewish population likely to outgrow old habitats and to found new ones.

The strong thrust towards establishment of new communities was a direct corollary of an increasing specialization in Jewish economic life. The more limited Jewish economic outlets became, the fewer Jews any urban agglomeration could absorb. The combination of population growth and economic specialization led inevitably to a steady proliferation of Jewish settlements.

While evidence for Jewish agricultural activity continues and stray references to such professions as medicine can be found, the growing impression is one of preponderant Jewish involvement in commerce, especially in moneylending. Bernard of Clairvaux, in mid century, could already use the expression "iudaizare" as synonymous for usurious activities. The context of Bernard's comment was not an attack on the Jews or on Jewish moneylending. The observation was made in his letter stressing protection for the Jews during the Second Crusade. In a revealing digression, Bernard castigates Christian usurers: "I will not mention those Christian moneylenders, if they can be called Christian, who, where there are no Jews, act, I grieve to say, in a manner worse than any Jew." It is only the automatic association of Jew and moneylender that makes possible this totally irrelevant aside. A more sympathetic contemporary of Bernard makes precisely the same observation, albeit in a far friendlier tone. In his Dialogus inter Philosophum, Judaeum et Christianum, Abelard has the Jew claim,

We can possess neither fields nor vines nor any land, since nothing can guarantee them against covert or overt attack. Therefore our sole resort is usury. It is only by practicing usury with non-Jews that we

10 See, for example, the discussion by Albeck, "Rabbenu Tam's Attitude," pp. 133–34.
11 A good summary of the relation of demographic spread and limited economy can be found in ibid., pp. 104–5.
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can maintain our miserable livelihood. Yet through this we provoke bitter hatred on the part of those who consider themselves gravely burdened.\textsuperscript{13}

Finally, a Jewish observer of the same period reinforces the impression. Ephraim of Bonn, the author of a Hebrew account of the Second Crusade, begins his description of the fate of French Jewry with reports on the death of one major French Jewish leader, R. Peter, and of the near-tragic assault on R. Jacob Tam, the outstanding scholar and communal leader of the period. He then observes:

In the remaining communities of France, we have not heard that a single Jew was killed or forcibly converted. But they did lose much of their wealth. For the king of France commanded: “Anyone who has volunteered to journey to Jerusalem shall have his debt annulled if he be indebted to the Jews.” Most of the loans extended by the Jews of France are by charter; hence they lost their money.\textsuperscript{14}

The significance of financial losses stemming from the annulment of Crusader debts reflects the overwhelming importance of moneylending in Jewish economic life.

As noted earlier, the most rudimentary form of moneylending was the safeguarding of investments through deposit of a pledge. By its very nature, this type of lending leaves few records. Ephraim of Bonn does indicate that not all Jewish loans in mid-twelfth-century France were by charter; some, at least, were still issued against pawns. Whether such arrangements actually were in the minority is debatable.

According to Ephraim, Jewish moneylending by this time had proceeded to a more sophisticated level. Ephraim claims that “most of the loans extended by the Jews of France are by charter,” that is, by documents carefully drawn up and guaranteed by governmental agencies.\textsuperscript{15} Such procedures had numerous advantages for the Jewish creditors. Charters allowed greater flexibility, permitting the lender to move about unencumbered with profitless physical objects. They also made possible credit on a far larger scale. Loans could be extended against landed property, the most substantial wealth in medieval society. Properties worth significant sums could now serve as the collateral for large loans. Since such lands could not actually be controlled by the Jews, it was only through the promise of governmental support in case of de-

\textsuperscript{13} PL, vol. 178, p. 1618.
\textsuperscript{14} Neubauer and Stern, Hebräische Berichte, p. 64; Habermann, Sefer Gezerot, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
fault that such arrangements could be made. The use of landed property or of property rights as security not only increased the size of the loans; it also afforded the lender the possibility of a continuous flow of income. A previously-cited responsum of Rashi shows a very early instance of Jews drawing revenue from landed property.\textsuperscript{16} Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis supplies an early-twelfth-century instance of the same arrangement. In a description of the revenues of his abbey, Suger includes a portion of the taxes from the burg of Saint-Denis along with income from the village of Montlignon, both held for a time by a Jew of Montmorency as security for a loan.\textsuperscript{17}

While advantageous from many points of view, lending based on governmental support exhibited one major flaw. It put the Jew further at the mercy of his baronial protectors. Were his feudal lord willing to come to some kind of accommodation with the debtor, there was little choice for the Jew but to accept. This was the situation, for example, of the Jew of Montmorency cited above. When the abbey of Saint-Denis wished eventually to redeem its lost revenue by repaying the original loan, it utilized the good offices of the lord of Montmorency in securing for itself highly favorable terms. The most radical manifestation of this danger came in the wake of the papal bull \textit{Quantum praecedentes} issued by Pope Eugenius II on the eve of the Second Crusade. Armed with the papal annulment of interest, Louis VII, the staunchest secular backer of the Crusade, seems to have absolved Crusaders of much of their obligations to the Jews.\textsuperscript{18} Loss of governmental support left the Jews no recourse whatsoever.

By the end of the reign of Louis VII, bureaucratization in the major principalities had proceeded to the point where specific agents were empowered to afford Jewish lenders the promised protection. Although extensive documentation comes only in the final two decades of the century, a charter of privileges granted the burghers of Étampes in 1179 indicates that governmental officials were already functioning on behalf of Jewish business interests. In this charter, provision is made for free

\textsuperscript{16}See above, chapter 1.

\textsuperscript{17}Albert Lecoy de la Marche, ed., \textit{Oeuvres complètes de Suger} (Paris, 1867), p. 156.

\textsuperscript{18}The papal bull stipulated that "all they that are burdened by debt and have, with pure heart, undertaken so holy a journey need not pay the interest past due, and if they themselves or others for them have been bound by oath and pledge, by reason of such interest, by apostolic authority we absolve them" (Otto of Freising, \textit{The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa}, trans. Charles Mierow [New York, 1953], p. 73). According to Ephraim of Bonn, who may be inaccurate as to the precise details, Louis VII ordered that "anyone who volunteered to go to Jerusalem shall have his debt annulled if he is indebted to the Jews" (Neubauer and Stern, \textit{Hebraische Berichte}, p. 64; Habermann, \textit{Sefer Gezerot}, p. 121). If Ephraim is accurate, then Louis went beyond the papal provisions.
access to the town market, and notice is specifically given that the praepositus Judaeorum shall not have the right to arrest anyone going to or from the market for nonpayment of debt.\textsuperscript{19} The existence of a royally-appointed praepositus Judaeorum charged with responsibility for aiding the Jews in realizing the sums owed them indicates how advanced Jewish business techniques were and how deeply they depended on governmental support.

The political fortunes of twelfth-century French Jewry continued to rest primarily upon the feudal barony of northern France. The Jews looked to their overlords for protection and for business support; the price for such boons was, above all, significant contributions to the seigneurial treasuries. There were, at the same time, other elements on the political scene striving to assert their rights over the Jews. The king of France, increasingly powerful as a feudal lord, was beginning to claim limited royal prerogatives, including some related to the Jews. The municipalities of northern France, demanding and acquiring greater jurisdiction over their own affairs, were often vexed by the presence within town boundaries of Jewish communities over which they could exercise no real control; efforts to gain some power over the Jews began during the twelfth century. The Church, while not descending directly into the political arena, could hardly remain aloof. As the French Church grew stronger and began to press on wide-ranging issues, ecclesiastical concern with the Jews developed. Finally, the populace at large could on occasion make its own rude and inarticulate attitudes deeply felt. The antipathy towards the Jews that had surfaced during the First Crusade continued to ferment within the popular ranks, crystallizing by the end of the century into a series of damaging stereotypes of alleged Jewish crimes.

As always during the Middle Ages, the foundation for Jewish political status lay in the mutually beneficial relationship between feudal overlord and Jew. In this relationship, the primary concern of the Jews was basic physical security. As had been the case prior to and down through the First Crusade, the political authorities of northern France were extremely effective in their protection of the Jews. The Second Crusade was in general far less destructive of Jewish life and property than had been the First; for French Jewry there are scarcely any reports of persecution. The Christian chronicles which recount Jewish suffering locate it exclusively in Germany. Ephraim of Bonn, the Jewish chron-

\textsuperscript{19} Ordonnances, vol. 11, pp. 211–13.
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ciler, knows only of the death of one eminent French Jewish scholar, of a near-disastrous attack on R. Jacob Tam, and of substantial financial loss.\(^{20}\)

During the period under consideration, the Jewish communities of northern France suffered but one major catastrophe—the Blois attack of 1171.\(^{21}\) In the late spring, the Jews of Blois were accused of drowning an innocent Christian youth in the Loire. The charge had first been brought by a Christian servant whose horse had been frightened at the riverside by a Jew; it was never even substantiated by a corpus delecti. The accusation, an increasingly popular one at the time, was fed by the political intrigues at the court of Blois, particularly by the hatred that grew out of the count’s fondness for the Jewess Polcelina. The Jews’ attempt at bribing their way out of difficulty fell short, and, further incited by clerical pressures, the count had more than thirty Jews burned on the fateful day of May 26, 1171. It is significant that this major crisis was in no way occasioned by a breakdown in the ability of the authorities to protect their Jews. The disaster struck only at the point when a major baron himself became a persecutor, rather than a protector.

That the Jews’ faith in baronial protection was in no way shaken by the events of May 1171 is indicated by their immediate and frantic efforts to secure enhanced seigneural assurances for the future.\(^{22}\) In the days and weeks following the burning at Blois, the leadership of northern French Jewry undertook a coordinated campaign to approach key political figures and to elicit promises of physical safety. The following is a firsthand documentary account of the encounter between Parisian Jewry and King Louis VII:

Today is a day of good tidings for his Jews from the great king [that is, Louis VII], who has beneficently inclined his heart towards us.

We went to the king at Poissy to fall before his feet concerning this matter [that is, the Blois incident]. When we saw that he was favorably disposed, we said that we would like to speak with him pri-

\(^{20}\) Neubauer and Stern, *Hebraïsche Berichte*, p. 64; Habermann, *Sefer Gezerot*, p. 121. There is an intriguing problem concerning three towns—דּוֹנִי, דּוֹנִי, דּוֹנִי—in which large numbers of Jews perished. Various identifications for these three locales have been proposed, some in France and some elsewhere. In the absence of corroborative evidence, all this speculation must remain highly tentative.


\(^{22}\) On these efforts, see Chazan, “The Blois Incident of 1171,” p. 22.
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vately. He responded: "Speak openly!" Then he himself called forth all his ministers stationed in the fortress and said to them: "Listen all of you to what Count Theobald has done—may he and his descend­

ants be barren through the entire year! If he has acted properly, fine; if he has behaved improperly, may he be punished. For I too am frightened over what he has done. Now then, you Jews of my land, you have no cause for alarm over what that persecutor has done in his domain. For people have leveled the same accusation against the Jews of Pontoise and Janville, and, when the charges were brought before me, they were found false. . . . Therefore, be assured, all you Jews in my land, that I harbor no such suspicion. Even if a body be discovered in the city or in the countryside, I shall say nothing to the Jews in that regard. . . ." Now, thank the Lord, the king has drawn up a sealed charter to be sent throughout his domain—that the Jews might be at ease—to all his officials, enjoining them to show respect for the Jews, protecting their lives and their property more zealously than heretofore.23

The king and the count of Champagne, who gave similar guarantees, were, it would seem, effective in providing the promised protection. The general impression is one of continued security, despite Jewish spread throughout the countryside of northern France and notwithstanding increasingly shrill verbal assaults and growing popular animos­

ity.

During the twelfth century the responsibilities of the barony towards the Jews expanded into the economic sphere as well. As we have seen, the authorities became the ultimate guarantors for Jewish loans, with the threat of confiscation or imprisonment by baronial officials serving as the final prod towards repayment. Here, too, of course, the situation of dependence meant eventually that the Jews had no real recourse from an adverse decision taken by their protectors.

Clearly the extensive obligations undertaken on behalf of the Jews were not the expression of an abstract concern for justice or of a deep-seated attachment to the cause of the Jews. As political power rapidly consolidated and ready resources became paramount, the tax potential which the Jews represented made them an object of interest

23Neubauer and Stern, Hebräische Berichte, p. 34; Habermann, Sefer Gezerot, p. 145. In Neubauer and Stern, the meeting place is designated as Vassy, for which no evidence is adduced (see p. 149). For some unfathomable reason, I have earlier suggested Falaise (see "The Blois Incident of 1171," p. 22). The correct identification is almost certainly Poissy, which (1) cor­

responds closely to the Hebrew, (2) is quite near Paris, and (3) was a well-known royal resi­

dence during the period, the scene in fact of the birth of Louis IX in 1214; see Henri Gross, Gallia Judaica (Paris, 1897), p. 453.

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to the most progressive and ambitious of the rulers of northern France. In the political sphere as in the economic, the Jews were extremely useful in furthering the new and more sophisticated order.

A number of sources leave the general impression of heavy exaction from the Jews. From the Christian side, Peter Abelard, in the Dialogus, has the Jewish protagonist emphasize strongly Jewish insecurity and the heavy price which the exposed Jews must pay for baronial protection.\(^{24}\) In his more famous Historia Calamitatum, Abelard, depicting his unhappy experiences as abbot of St. Gildes de Rhuys in Brittany, describes the situation of the abbey as follows:

The abbey itself a certain tyrant, the most powerful in that district, had for a long time kept in subjugation to himself. He takes advantage of the disorders there to convert to his own use the adjacent lands and to levy greater imposts on the monks than he would have on Jews subject to tribute.\(^{25}\)

Jewish religious leaders, in their discussions of the legality of governmental taxation, reinforce the impression of new kinds of levies and of an increasingly heavy tax burden.\(^{26}\)

Unfortunately, lack of records makes specific information on form and amounts of taxation unavailable. A grant of privileges to the municipality of Tonnerre does afford some insight, however. In this grant the count of Nevers included rights to revenue from the Jews, specifically 20 shillings per Jew, a further 5 shillings for heads of households, and ten percent of the Jews' wine and alms.\(^{27}\) Other royal grants indicate that Jews were subject to tolls at the key bridge crossings of major French routes.\(^{28}\) Taxation of the Jews took other forms as well, some undoubtedly connected with their moneylending business.

In addition to regular levies, Jews were always potentially or actually subject to many special exactions. One of Peter the Venerable's radical suggestions concerning the Jews was that their ill-gotten gains be taken from them in order to pay for the Second Crusade.\(^{29}\) While there is no record of the implementation of Peter's suggestion, there is abundant

\(^{24}\) PL, vol. 178, p. 1618.


\(^{29}\) RHF, vol. 15, p. 642.
indication that crisis would often call forth a heavy price from endangered Jewish communities. In the tragedy of 1171, the community of Blois seems to have miscalculated and offered far too low a bribe—220 pounds—to secure its release; this miscalculation, coupled with clerical pressure, sealed its doom.\textsuperscript{30} The Jews of the county, on the other hand, managed to save themselves by the payment of 1,000 pounds.\textsuperscript{31} Cham­penois Jewry closed its account of successful negotiations with Count Henry by indicating that, despite the count’s rejection of the malicious-murder charge, it gave liberally to halt the spread of the slander.\textsuperscript{32} So ubiquitous was Jewish bribery in the face of danger that Ephraim of Bonn, recounting the vigorous intervention of Bernard of Clairvaux against anti-Jewish preaching during the Second Crusade, notes quizzically that “we have heard no report of his taking bribes for speaking out on behalf of the Jews.”\textsuperscript{33}

The terminology and ramifications of Jewish political status developed slowly. By the early twelfth century, the expression “Judeus meus” or “Judeus suus” was already in use.\textsuperscript{34} The lack of documentary material obscures subsequent utilization of this important expression until it burst into prominence at the end of the century.

Transfer of rights over the Jews was already in evidence early in the twelfth century as well. There are instances of the royal grant of rights over the Jews of Saint-Denis (specified as \textit{justicia} and \textit{exactio}) to the famed abbey of that town.\textsuperscript{35} Shortly afterwards, Louis VI granted the revenue from the Jews of Touraine to the renowned abbey of Saint Martin of Tours.\textsuperscript{36}

The bureaucracy for handling Jewish affairs also began to crystallize during the reign of Louis VII. While we find the \textit{praepositus Judaeorum} active only as a governmental agent for the protection of Jewish business interests, it seems most unlikely that his responsibilities ended there. The very title \textit{praepositus} would seem to reflect a concern with revenue and probably a measure of judicial jurisdiction. The paucity of sources makes the precise range of his functions purely speculative, however.

\textsuperscript{32} Neubauer and Stern, \textit{Hebräische Berichte}, p. 35; Habermann, \textit{Sefer Gezerot}, p. 146.
\textsuperscript{34} Lecoy de la Marche, \textit{Oeuvres complètes de Suger}, p. 156.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ordonnances}, vol. 4, p. 137.
\textsuperscript{36} Luchaire, \textit{Louis VI le Gros}, p. 131 (dated 1119); Auguste Longnon, \textit{Études sur les actes de Louis VII} (Paris, 1885), p. 369 (a reference to the same transaction in a later act of Louis VII).
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Although the barony exercised the most decisive influence over the destiny of the Jews, there were other forces with some impact on their fate. As indicated, a municipality could be granted rights over its Jewish inhabitants, as in the case of Tonnerre. This, to be sure, was a rather rare occurrence. While often generous towards the municipalities of northern France, the barons were generally closefisted with rights over Jews. This reflects both baronial awareness of the profit to be exacted from their Jewish subjects and strong Jewish desires to remain out of the grasp of the burghers, whom they feared and distrusted.

It is difficult to discern the development of royal authority over the Jews. The king, as one of the major barons of the north, controlled his share of Jews. Regalian rights, however, do not manifest themselves prominently at this early period. The only signs of royal prerogatives are related to those religious and moral areas in which the king could claim special powers. Thus, for example, Louis VII's letter of 1144 dealing with the problem of relapsed converts seems to extend beyond the royal domain itself and to reflect the general authority of the monarchy.37 Louis was surely the prime secular proponent of the Second Crusade, and it is possible—although not certain—that his annulment of interest to the Crusaders, decreed in consonance with Eugenius II's papal bull, may have affected broad areas of the north beyond the royal domain. It is also possible that the alacrity with which the Jews hastened to the royal court after the Blois affair of 1171 may indicate recognition that the king, beyond his position as a major baron, exercised far-reaching moral and religious influence in the realm.

Although the municipalities and the throne represented but minor infringements upon the power of the barony over the Jews, not so was the case with the Church. The Church was a key factor on the medieval scene, a force often in conflict with the secular rulers and deeply distressed over problems flowing from Jewish presence and activities.

The traditional balance in ecclesiastical policy towards the Jews is expressed in the well-known *Constitutio pro Judeis*, the first promulgator of which was supposedly the early-twelfth-century pope, Calixtus II:

Therefore, just as license ought not to be granted the Jews to presume to do in their synagogues more than the law permits them, just so ought they not to suffer curtailment in those (privileges) which have been conceded them.38

37 *RHF*, vol. 16, p. 8.
38 Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century* (Philadelphia, 1933), pp. 92–95. The attribution of the first *Constitutio pro Judeis* is based on the list of previous
In a sense the Jewish hope during the Middle Ages was to maximize the protective aspect of this Church stance while minimizing its limitations.

During the twelfth century, there are a number of incidents of the activation of ecclesiastical protection for the Jews. The most important was the concerted effort of Bernard of Clairvaux to save the Jews of Christendom from a repetition of the slaughter accompanying the First Crusade. Bernard responded vigorously to the reports of anti-Jewish agitation forwarded by the archbishop of Mayence, included specific prohibition of persecution in a number of his calls to the Crusade, and finally journeyed in person to the Rhineland to halt the activities of the recalcitrant Cistercian monk Radulph. The Jewish chronicler Ephraim of Bonn expresses the deeply-felt Jewish appreciation for the intervention of the abbot of Clairvaux:

The Lord heard our supplication, turned to us, and had mercy upon us in accord with the fullness of his pity and lovingkindness. He sent after the wicked one (i.e., Radulph), a proper monk, great and indeed the master to all monks, knowledgeable in their law and a man of understanding. His name was Bernard, the abbot of Clairvaux, in France. He too preached, as is their wont... Were it not for the mercies of our Creator in sending us the aforementioned abbot and his epistles, Israel would have been left without remnant and vestige.³⁹

Some years later, after the Blois crisis, the Jews of France again turned to a leading churchman for aid. While one thrust of Jewish activity aimed at securing repudiation of the malicious-murder charge by the key secular powers of northern France, there was also deep concern for the dignified burial of the victims and for the release of those still held captive. A skilled negotiator was chosen and the approach was made through the good offices of William of the White Hands, archbishop of Sens, bishop of Chartres, and brother of the count of Blois.⁴⁰

Far more prominent, however, was the desire of the Church for limitation of the Jews. This took a number of important forms, some very old and some quite new. One of the oldest concerns of the Church

⁴⁰Chazan, “The Blois Incident of 1171,” pp. 22–23. It was unusual of course for one man to hold power over two sees as William did. For the special circumstances, see Gallia Christiana, 13 vols. (Paris, 1739–1877), vol. 8, pp. 1144–46, and vol. 12, pp. 50–53.
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was for the potential influence of Jews on their Christian neighbors. During the twelfth century little concern was expressed over Jewish impact on heretical movements. Guibert of Nogent does paint a horrible portrait of Jewish involvement in the perversities of the family of the count of Soissons.

In the end the count, to whom it could properly have been said "Thy father was an Amorrhite and thy mother a Cethite," not only became as bad as his parents, but did things much worse. He practiced the perfidy of the Jews and heretics to such an extent that he said blasphemous things about the Saviour, which through fear of the faithful the Jews did not dare to do. How evilly he "set his mouth against heaven" may be understood from that little work which I wrote against him at the request of Bernard the dean. Since such words may not be uttered by a Christian's lips and must bring the horror of detestation to pious ears, we have suppressed them. Although he supported the Jews, the Jews considered him insane, since he approved of their religion in word and publicly practiced ours.41

This description, however, is an isolated one and reflects no ongoing preoccupation with the problem.

More persistent is the concern with the potential influence of Jews on those Christians who came within the orbit of the Jewish home. That Jews used Christian domestic help is perfectly clear from extensive rabbinic discussion of some of the ritual problems arising from the presence and activities of such non-Jews.42 It comes, therefore, as no surprise to find papal complaints addressed to Louis VII concerning the presence of Christian maids and servingmen in Jewish homes and exhortations to end such abuses.43 Rigord, in describing the anti-Jewish program of the early 1180's, mentions specifically not only the issue of Christian servants but the consequent religious complications as well. "When they [that is, the Jews] had made a long sojourn there [that is, in Paris], they grew so rich that they claimed as their own almost half of the whole city, and had Christians in their houses as menservants and maidservants, who were open backsliders from the faith of Jesus Christ, and Judaized with the Jews."44

42 See, for example, Albeck, "Rabbenu Tam's Attitude," pp. 123–25.
43 RHF, vol. 15, p. 968.
Equally unacceptable was the flourishing of Judaism in a way that might tarnish the luster of the ruling faith. As Peter the Venerable insisted, the Jews were to be preserved, but only in such a fashion as would make patently obvious their secondary status.\(^{45}\) Thus, the building of new synagogues and other Jewish communal facilities was of concern to many churchmen, and old canonical precedents were invoked to oppose such projects. The same papal letter that complained of Christian servants in Jewish homes also deplored the construction of new synagogues.\(^{46}\) In his rebuke of Louis VII for pro-Jewish activities, Geoffroy of Courlon singled out specifically the king’s support for a wide-ranging extension of Jewish communal facilities.\(^ {47}\)

Most alarming of all was the growing possibility of church vessels falling into the possession of Jews as a result of mounting debts. By mid-century Peter the Venerable already deplored the tendency, claiming rather absurdly that such sacred objects were purchased by Jews from thieves—pilferage from the churches of northern France could hardly have been so widespread.\(^{48}\) However the Jews may have come by these vessels, it was deeply disturbing to see them in Jewish hands and to contemplate the possibilities of sacrilege.

Rigord, describing the beginning of the reign of Philip Augustus, saves his most potent venom for alleged Jewish sacrilege.

Finally came the culmination of their wickedness. Certain ecclesiastical vessels consecrated to God—the chalices and crosses of gold and silver bearing the images of our Lord Jesus Christ crucified—had been pledged to the Jews by way of security when the need of the churches was pressing. These they used so vilely, in their impiety and scorn of the Christian religion, that from the cups in which the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was consecrated they gave their children cakes soaked in wine. . . \(^{49}\)

A new element in Church concern with the Jews related to Jewish economic activity. While not mentioning usury, Peter the Venerable was troubled over Jewish economic success, accruing, he felt, from nefarious Jewish business practices.\(^{50}\) By the end of the reign of

\(^{45}\) *RHF*, vol. 15, p. 642.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., p. 968.


\(^{48}\) *RHF*, vol. 15, p. 642.


\(^{50}\) *RHF*, vol. 15, p. 642.
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Louis VII, there was overt condemnation of Jewish usury, not only for related abuses such as possession and desecration of church vessels but as offensive in and of itself.

When they had made a long sojourn there, they grew so rich that they claimed as their own almost half of the whole city, and had Christians in their houses as menservants and maidservants, who were open backsliders from the faith of Jesus Christ, and judaized with the Jews. And this was contrary to the decree of God and the law of the Church. And whereas the Lord had said by the mouth of Moses in Deuteronomy (23:20–21), “Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother,” but “to a stranger,” the Jews in their wickedness understood by “stranger” every Christian, and they took from the Christians their money at usury. And so heavily burdened in this wise were citizens and soldiers and peasants in the suburbs, and in the various towns and villages, that many were constrained to part with their possessions. Others were bound under oath in houses of the Jews in Paris, held as if captives in prison.  

Although there is in these observations of Rigord reference to such traditional issues as Judaizing, there is also a direct condemnation of Jewish usury per se. This castigation is, on the one hand, theoretical, that is to say, a negation of the Jewish right to lend money at interest; at the same time it is a practical horror at the social results of Jewish lending—both Jewish wealth and Christian impoverishment. This new motif in Church thinking was destined to have the most profound impact on the fate of northern French Jewry.

While these specific concerns reflect primarily the developments in French economic life, the new avenues in which the Jews were moving, and perhaps increased Jewish wealth, the changing intellectual scene in the twelfth century had its own effect on ecclesiastical conceptions of Judaism and the Jews. In his superb study of the twelfth-century shift in Christian polemics against the Jews, Amos Funkenstein has shown convincingly two major developments. The first was a growing rationalism, which could potentially have led to greater tolerance but which in fact led to enhanced impatience with the Jews. Increasingly it was assumed that the Jewish failure to acknowledge the truth of Christianity, now further buttressed by the new rationalism, reflected satanic perversity. At the same time the expanding horizons of knowledge

included a serious though slanted investigation of the religious literature of Judaism and Islam. In the process, the unsympathetic reading of rabbinic texts composed in an idiom highly alien to twelfth-century Europe reinforced the sense of Jewish irrationality and perhaps willful disbelief.

The key French figure in this shift was the influential abbot of Cluny, Peter the Venerable. The famed cleric’s tone towards the Jews was unusually harsh. “You, you Jews, I say, do I address, who till this day do deny the Son of God—how long, poor wretches, will ye not believe the truth? How long will you fight against God? How long before your hearts of iron are softened?”

Thus Peter began his *Tractatus adversus Judeorum inveteratam duritiam*.

Peter the Venerable’s major contribution was dissemination of the Talmudic lore of the Jews first introduced to western Europe by the Spanish convert, Petrus Alfonsi. Peter the Venerable, strongly aware of new frontiers in the campaign for the spread of his faith, brought rabbinic materials to the attention of the northern European Church.

I lead out then a monstrous animal from its den, and show it as a laughing stock in the amphitheatre of the whole world, in the sight of all peoples. I bring forward, thou Jew, thou brute beast, in the sight of all men, thy book, yea, I say, that Thalmuth of thine, that thy precious collection of doctrine, which forsooth is to be preferred to the books of the Prophets and all Divinely approved opinions.

There follows a collection of Talmudic *agadot*, designed to prove the ludicrous nature of Jewish belief. The damage done by this viciously negative presentation of Jewish folk literature was substantial, extending over a number of centuries.

Related to this shift in Church concerns and attitudes was a marked upsurge in the popular hatred harbored against the Jews of northern France. While Jewish-Christian relations were rarely untroubled during the Middle Ages, the twelfth century was an especially active period in the gestation of deep-seated animosities. To be sure, this antipathy broke forth into physical violence only infrequently—a tribute to the power of the governing authorities—but it seriously endangered the Jews and exacerbated their already precarious position. Doubly disturb-

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ing from the Jewish point of view was the fact that many of the most vicious canards were repeated or even initiated by leading ecclesiastical and secular figures of the period. When the abbot of Clairvaux, the abbot of Cluny, and the count of Blois lent their prestige to the spate of anti-Jewish slanders, the Jewish community could properly feel profoundly threatened.

The concern voiced by Church leadership over Jewish influence and economic activity and the stance taken by key ecclesiastics towards Jewish doctrine and belief certainly filtered down into the populace, although on the economic issues the animosity may have risen up from the masses as well. Popular views during this period are permeated with the notions of Jewish power, Jewish irrationality, and Jewish malevolence.

The suggestion of an alliance between the Jews and the omnipresent satanic forces evoked real fright and had a serious impact on Jewish-Christian relations. Guibert of Nogent expresses this view in his story of an evil monk.

In a certain famous monastery, a monk had been brought up from childhood and had attained some knowledge in letters. Directed by his abbot to live in an outlying cell of the abbey, while he was staying there he fell ill of a disease. Because of this, to his sorrow, he had occasion for talking with a Jew skilled in medicine. Gathering boldness from their intimacy, they began to reveal their secrets to one another. Being curious about the black arts and aware that the Jew understood magic, the monk pressed him hard. The Jew consented and promised to be his mediator with the Devil. They agreed upon the time and place for a meeting. At last he was brought by his intermediary into the presence of the Devil, and through the other he asked to have a share in the teaching. That abominable ruler said that it could by no means be done unless he denied his Christianity and offered sacrifice to him.56

Perhaps the most pernicious and damaging set of popular motifs revolved about the Jews' alleged enmity towards Christian society. The notion of such Jewish hatred for Christendom had been traditional and had found powerful expression in the infamous First-Crusade battle cry with which the Rhineland Jewish communities had been attacked: “Behold we set forth on a long journey to seek the Holy Sepulcher and to take vengeance upon the Moslems. Yet the Jews dwell among us, those whose ancestors slew and crucified Jesus. Let us take vengeance upon

56Benton, Self and Society in Medieval France, p. 115.
them first. . . ." The powerful Jewish response to First-Crusade attacks can only have heightened the Christian sense of the Jew as adversary. In a classic case of vicious cycle, the conception of Jewish enmity led to assaults which evoked Jewish behavior that further ingrained the stereotype.

It is the supposed Jewish animosity against Christendom that lent credibility to Rigord's charge of Jewish defilement of sacred church vessels. This desecration, says Rigord, the Jews had committed "in their impiety and scorn of the Christian religion."

The same conception of Jewish enmity led to the more serious charge of Jewish willingness, and in fact compulsion, to murder Christian neighbors, generally those innocent, weak, and defenseless. This allegation, found throughout northern Europe from the 1140's on, made an early appearance in France, where it soon began to develop the same significant additions and refinements which it was undergoing elsewhere.

The accusation began in the simple form of a Jewish propensity for murder of Christian children. Prior to the incident at Blois the charge had already been made at Pontoise, at Janville, and at Éperrnay. The incident at Blois in early 1171 represented not the beginning but a culmination of this indictment in a dual sense. There was in this instance the flimsiest possible evidence—the testimony of a Christian servant unsupported by even the discovery of an unidentified corpse or the report of a missing child. Moreover, despite the shaky foundations of the allegation, it was dignified for the first time by acceptance on the part of a major figure in the political life of northern France.

The earlier incident at Pontoise shows a second stage of development. In this case the murdered boy became a martyr to his Christian faith, his body being transported to Paris and transformed into an object of veneration at the Church of the Holy Innocents. Readiness to

57 For reflections of this slogan, see inter alia the Hebrew chroniclers in Neubauer and Stern, Hebräsche Berichte, pp. 1, 4, 36–37, 47, and in Habermann, Sefer Gezerot, pp. 24, 27, 72, 93, and Guibert of Nogent in Benton, Self and Society in Medieval France, pp. 134–35.
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see the supposed victims of Jewish assault as martyrs reflects clearly an assumed religious basis for the attacks. Jewish animosity is not viewed, then, as the expression of social or economic antipathy; it is seen as the fundamental hatred of the enemies of Christendom for the true faith.62

Such views led, by the close of the twelfth century, to a novel and destructive twist in the murder motif, namely, the contention that this religiously-based aggression was cultic in form as well. The Jews were charged with killing their neighbors by crucifixion out of a perverse compulsion to reenact the great historic sin of their corporate existence. This allegation, raised first in England, was brought to the continent by Philip Augustus’s biographer, Rigord. The monk of Saint-Denis claims that his hero had become familiar with the accusation as a young lad.

For he had heard many times from the children who had been raised with him in the royal palace—and had carefully committed to memory—that the Jews who dwelt in Paris were wont every year on Easter day, or during the sacred week of our Lord’s Passion, to go down secretly into underground vaults and kill a Christian as a sort of sacrifice in contempt of the Christian religion. For a long time they had persisted in this wickedness, inspired by the devil, and in Philip’s father’s time many of them had been seized and burned with fire. St. Richard, whose body rests in the church of the Holy-Innocents-in-the-Fields in Paris, was thus put to death and crucified by the Jews, and through martyrdom went in blessedness to God. Wherefore many miracles have been wrought by the hand of God through the prayers and intercessions of St. Richard, to the glory of God, as we have heard.63

The twelfth century thus saw in northern France an upsurge in Church concern with specific aspects of Jewish economic and social life accompanied by deepening distrust and hatred of the Jews in broad segments of Christian society. Rather than abating, these tendencies accelerated during the ensuing century and played a major role in the deterioration of Jewish status that culminated in total expulsion.

These strong anti-Jewish pressures formed the final strand in the bonds that tied the Jews to the feudal barony. Despite hopes in many quarters for enhanced control over the Jews, the old alliance between the secular authorities and the Jews intensified during the twelfth century. This resulted from the new need for governmental support of

63 Ibid., pp. 11–12.
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Jewish business, from the increasing ecclesiastical clamor for limitation, and from the rising chorus of popular slanders. Reliance on the feudal lords was, in these circumstances, unavoidable; but it spawned its own set of dangers.

The Jewish community, during the twelfth century, continued to function as an independent self-governing body. This autonomy had for some time been recognized by the feudal authorities of northern France and had been anchored in a viable set of self-governing institutions. Since the communities of the twelfth century underwent no radical change in size or structure, there was no need for any thoroughgoing reform. There was progress in a number of directions, but it proceeded from previously-laid foundations.

Jews continued to settle in a distinct section of town, known usually as the Juiverie or the rue des Juifs. A rue des Juifs is attested early in the century in Rouen—it is mentioned in a Norman chronicle as the area out of which a devastating fire swept the city. Some specific information on the location of the pre-1182 Juiveries of northern France is available in the documents that dispose of Jewish property in the wake of the expulsion by Philip Augustus. The most famous of these Jewish quarters was that of Paris, located in the center of the Île-de-la-Cité on the major trade route traversing the capital. From the number of Jewish houses confiscated by the king and granted to others, it seems that the Paris Juiverie was extensive.

The Juiverie included a number of major facilities, especially a synagogue. Larger Jewish communities were normally equipped with cemeteries, usually placed some distance from the Jewish neighborhood, and occasionally a leprosarium or a communal oven. It will be recalled that Geoffroy of Courlon admonished Louis VII for granting the Jews rights to establish new synagogues, cemeteries, and leprosaria. We have earlier suggested that this expansion of facilities may well reflect the founding of new Jewish settlements.

As a result of its physical separatism, the Jewish community of northern France exhibited remarkable cohesiveness. There were a number of additional factors that maximized intense solidarity. The small size of these Jewish settlements surely had an impact. The Jews of any

64 Alexandre Heron, ed., Deux chroniques de Rouen (Rouen, 1900), p. 31.
66 See above.
given town were certain to know one another intimately, many or even most being related by family ties. There was also a constant sense of pressure from non-Jewish society, making the Jewish community an oasis of physical and psychological security for its members. Cohesiveness was reinforced by the relative economic homogeneity among the Jews. While there were unquestionably differences in wealth, all the Jews were members of a broad urban trading class. In fact, the money-lending enterprise so widely pursued was particularly well-suited towards aiding the impoverished members of the group. Partnerships in which the wealthy afforded the capital and the poor provided the energy undoubtedly sustained many Jews who otherwise would have been forced to live on charity. Twelfth-century complaints rarely reflect serious social or economic cleavage within Jewish society.

In providing for its internal needs, the Jewish community had already developed extremely effective institutions. The Jewish courts were of decisive importance, of course, handling the major portion of litigation between Jew and Jew. These courts continued to fulfill the broad range of functions which they had arrogated to themselves early in their development. The Jewish courts judged civil cases, decided religious questions, and even levied fines for breach of communal regulations. Under certain circumstances, Jews were permitted to by-pass the Jewish courts and appear before the gentile authorities. This was permissible, first of all, if both parties agreed to the procedure. Where the defendant refused to appear before the Jewish tribunal, the plaintiff could unilaterally appeal to the non-Jewish courts. The losing parties in litigation did on occasion seek redress before external powers—a breach severely condemned. For the Jew dissatisfied with the justice meted out by a particular Jewish court or apprehensive at the prospects of the decision to be reached, there was an alternative more moderate than turning to the non-Jewish world: it was possible in some cases to request a change of venue. The question was raised, towards the end of the twelfth century, before R. Isaac of Dampierre of a Jew who refused to appear in the Jewish court of R. Haim in Paris and insisted instead on appearing before R. Joseph in Orléans. R. Isaac sustained the refusal, although he did insist that the recalcitrant party pay the expenses involved. A second request to R. Isaac, reflecting the same situation, has also been preserved. In this second instance the reason for the request is specified. The two litigants in this case were the nadiv R.

68 Quoted by R. Meir of Rothenberg and cited by Urbach, Ba'aley ha-Tosafot, p. 199.
Eliezer and the nadiy R. Abraham, the head of the Jewish community of Troyes. R. Eliezer requested a court other than that of Troyes because of the influence of R. Abraham. Again the request was allowed. 69

The Jewish community also boasted its philanthropic agency—the charity box, or communal fund (kupah shel zedakah). This communal fund was supported by contributions, especially by bequests. Its disbursements were varied. Some authorities (R. Isaac of Dampierre, for example) indicated that the number of poor in the small Jewish communities of northern France was low. 70 Given the kind of business cooperation already noted, this is not surprising. The communal charity box was also used for support of wayfarers. Most authorities generally took a liberal stand on the range of permitted uses for these communal funds. A vexing problem was the obligatory nature of contributions to these charity funds. R. Jacob Tam opposed the use of force; many of the other authorities permitted it. 71 With the growing burden of taxation, forced contributions to Jewish philanthropic agencies may have been increasingly necessary.

The Jews of northern France possessed a well-developed school system for both elementary and advanced education. There is a curious encomium to the Jewish school and the Jewish thirst for learning penned by a student of Abelard:

If the Christians educate their sons, they do so not for God, but for gain, in order that the one brother, if he be a clerk, may help his father and mother and his other brothers. They say that a clerk will have no heir and whatever he has will be ours and the other brothers'. A black cloak and hood to go to church in, and his surplice, will be enough for him. But the Jews, out of zeal for God and love of the law, put as many sons as they have to letters, that each may understand God's law. . . . A Jew, however poor, if he had ten sons would put them all to letters, not for gain, as the Christians do, but for the understanding of God's law, and not only his sons, but his daughters. 72

The major institutions of higher learning were centered in larger Jewish communities, such as Paris, Sens, and Troyes. They attracted students from all of northern Europe, a tribute both to the veneration of

69 Ibid., p. 399. In this second responsum of R. Meir of Rothenberg, reference is made to three similar cases during the thirteenth century.
70 Quoted by R. Isaac b. Moses of Vienna, Or Zaru'a, 4 vols. in 2 (Zhitomir, 1862–90), vol. 1, 9a, and cited by Albeck, "Rabbenu Tam's Attitude," p. 135.
71 See Or Zaru'a, vol. 1, 7b, and Albeck, "Rabbenu Tam's Attitude," p. 135.
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the earlier R. Solomon b. Isaac of Troyes and to the continued vitality of the schools and their outstanding teachers. The curriculum continued to revolve about Biblical and Talmudic studies. The former proceeded in a number of directions, including careful literal analysis of the text, development of the midrashic tendencies found in Rashi, and concern with the polemical issues raised in Scriptures. Talmudic studies became increasingly dialectical, with the simple commentary of Rashi often serving as the starting point for reexamination of the text. Inconsistency between Talmudic law and contemporary practice also served as the goad for reanalysis of the classical sources. There is substantial evidence for the impact of the Jewish scholarship of the period on Christian learning; relatively unexplored is the reverse impact of developments in Christian academic circles on their Jewish counterparts. There are a number of striking parallels, but a full-scale investigation is required.

In enforcing its decision within the community, the leadership had essentially three sources of power at its disposal: religious authority, the social force of boycott, and appeal to the gentile government. In a sense, the second of the powers indicated, that of boycott, derived from the first; for, in essence, the boycott was the utilization of religious authority on the rest of the community, in cases where it had failed with an individual. Given the smallness and cohesiveness of most of the Jewish communities in medieval northern France, the boycott was a powerful weapon.

It was the appeal to secular authorities that was the final and most forceful alternative. Utilization of governmental support in the internal affairs of the Jewish community is revealed in a decree of R. Yom Tov of Joigny concerning a Jew who married a girl without the consent of her father or her relatives. According to R. Yom Tov, the Jewish community may force the offender to divorce the girl and may even use the power of the non-Jewish government in achieving that end.

Similar permission for the utilization of governmental authority is indicated in the well-known ordinance of R. Jacob Tam and his older brother, R. Samuel b. Meir. The purpose of this edict was to eliminate

73 See Samuel Poznanski’s introductory essay to the commentaries of R. Eliezer of Beaugency.
74 The most important study of this aspect of the intellectual life of the community is Urbach’s Ba’aley ha-Tosafot.
75 For the Jewish influence on Christian scholarship, see Smalley, The Study of the Bible, pp. 149-72.
76 Urbach, Ba’aley ha-Tosafot, p. 126.
undesirable interference by the non-Jewish world in the affairs of the Jewish community. After the decrees prohibiting appeal by any individual Jew to the non-Jewish powers, the ordinance detailed the excommunication to be levied against the transgressor. To this excommunication one exception was made: "If one refuses to come to court and there are proper witnesses in regard to the matter and the plaintiff collects a claim through the power of Gentiles, our excommunication will not apply." In other words, there could be legitimate instances of such appeal.

The same ordinance concludes with the following exhortation: "We, the undersigned, request all those that are in touch with the government to coerce through the power of Gentiles anyone who transgresses our commandments in order that the Scriptural injunction, 'to observe very much and to carry out' what they are commanded, may be fulfilled. And righteous action leads to peace." Although it may seem contradictory to end an ordinance outlawing the use of gentile force in Jewish affairs with a call to marshal just such force, the contradiction is only superficial. What is prohibited is individual, unwarranted use of external intervention; what is encouraged is the enlisting by the community and its duly appointed leadership of gentile support.

As rich individual Jews came to the fore in the Jewish community, there was the dangerous possibility that these men of wealth might abuse private links to their overlords in order to circumvent the authority of the Jewish self-governing agencies. Undercutting the Jewish communal leadership was disastrous for Jewish self-government. Rashi, in the ordinance on taxation already mentioned, outlawed individual appeals by means of which the Jew might evade his communal responsibility. A clear and decisive stand against such actions was taken in the ordinance of R. Tam and R. Samuel b. Meir noted above. The essentials of the ordinance are as follows:

1. We have voted, decreed, ordained and declared under the herem, that no man or woman may bring a fellow-Jew before Gentile courts or exert compulsion on him through Gentiles, whether by a prince or a common man, a ruler or an inferior official, except by witnesses.

2. If the matter accidentally reaches the government or other Gentiles, and in that manner pressure is exerted on a Jew, we have decreed that the man who is aided by the Gentiles shall save his

78 Ibid.
79 Ibid., p. 149.
fellow from their hands, and shall secure him against the Gentiles who are aiding him so that the Jew may not be harmed or even be in apprehension because of the Gentiles, nor shall he lose his claim or his property. He shall see to it that his fellow shall be in no fear of them, and he shall make satisfaction to him and secure him in such a manner as the seven elders of the city will ordain. If there is no such board in his town, he shall act on the order of those of the nearest city in which such are to be found.

3. He shall not intimidate the "seven elders" through the power of the Gentiles. And because the masters of wicked tongue and informers do their deeds in darkness, we have decreed also excommunication for indirect action unless he satisfy him in accordance with the decision of the "seven elders" of the city.

4. It was further decreed that he should apply to them (to the "seven elders") on the first possible day, and that he should return the damage in accordance with all that they decree to him.

5. No man shall try to gain control over his neighbor through a king, prince, or judge, in order to punish or fine or coerce him, either in secular or religious matters, for there are some who play the part of saints and do not live up to ordinary standards.  

Again, this is not an absolute condemnation of the appeal to gentile powers. The ordinance ends with a plea for the aid of these authorities. It is a strong condemnation of an illicit appeal beyond the confines of the Jewish community.

In addition to the role that Jewish communal leaders played in controlling internal affairs, they continued to serve an indispensable function as liaison between the Jewish world and gentile society. From the point of view of the feudal barony, the major contribution of the Jewish self-governing apparatus lay in its ability to provide easily and cheaply substantial tax revenues. The arrangements for fair apportionment and rapid collection of these taxes were already well-established by the dawn of the twelfth century, and there is no sign of any significant change in this area. There are reflections, in both Jewish and non-Jewish sources, of an increasingly heavy tax burden, which probably began to strain both the resources and the patience of the Jewish community.

For the Jews, their leadership provided the most effective possible representation before the non-Jewish political powers. Suger describes,

80 Ibid., pp. 153–54 (Hebrew) and pp. 155–57 (English).
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for example, the representatives of Paris Jewry presenting themselves before Pope Innocent II during his visit to Saint-Denis.  

The one incident that lifts the curtain of obscurity from the political negotiations undertaken by the Jewish community is the Blois incident of 1171. The seriousness of the catastrophe prompted both a feverish whirl of Jewish activity and deep concern for information and memorialization. The fortuitous preservation of a set of four communal and personal letters in a late-twelfth-century Spires chronicle affords a rare glimpse into the Jewish community’s ability to mobilize politically in self-defense.

The Blois community itself seemingly depended at the outset upon the personal influence of the Jewess Polcelina, who had for some time been the object of Count Theobald’s affections. This type of special power in courtly circles, whether flowing from an affair of the heart or of the purse (as was more usual), normally provided an effective tool for the Jewish communities. In Blois, Polcelina had unknowingly lost her leverage with the eroding of princely ardor. There is, nonetheless, sharp awareness on the part of her enemies of her potential power. After being taken prisoner she was accorded special treatment, probably out of fear that mistreatment of his former favorite might provoke Theobald. Only in one respect was she seriously limited, namely, from speaking to the count himself—tacit recognition of her possible sway over him.

Other channels of influence functioned as well. According to the Orléans letter, Baruch b. David ha-Cohen and Isaac b. Judah, Jews of the county of Blois but not residents of the city itself, approached Theobald directly. He utilized them as intermediaries in approaching the imprisoned Jews to ascertain the ransom the Jews would be willing to pay for their release. A misestimate on the part of the Jews, coupled with the inflammatory appearance of an Augustinian canon, nullified this effort. However, Baruch b. David ha-Cohen was successful in rescuing the sacred objects of the Blois community and in protecting the remaining Jews living under the rule of Theobald. The price was a high one—1,000 pounds. It is not clear whether Baruch undertook these negotiations as a representative of the Jews of the county or by virtue of his own personal access to the comital court.

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81 Suger, *Vie de Louis le Gros*, ed. Auguste Molinier (Paris, 1887), p. 120.
83 Ibid., p. 21.
84 Ibid.
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The unprecedented acceptance of the malicious-murder charge at Blois deeply disquieted all of the Jewish communities of northern France. In its wake a major campaign of political negotiation was undertaken.

The most important figure in northern France was King Louis VII, and it was to him that the first efforts were directed. The representative leadership of the Jewish community of Paris (kezinei Paris) approached the king, asking to confer with him in private. The king, who already knew of the matter which had brought his Jews, insisted on a public sitting, to which he called all of his advisors. In this public meeting, he indicated explicitly his refusal to accept the increasingly popular slander, in the case of Blois as well as in the earlier cases in which tangible evidence of crime had existed. According to the Paris letter, the king ordered a charter prepared which would circulate throughout his realm, reassuring his Jews and ordering his officials to guard even more carefully these endangered subjects.85

The king was not the only ruler approached in northern France. The count of Champagne, a brother of Theobald of Blois, was, like Louis VII, both a prominent governmental figure and ruler over an important Jewish community. He too received a delegation of Jews and gave much the same response. The charge was not new to him. It had recently been sounded in the Champenois town of Épernay, and he had refused to accept it. So too did he reject the accusation of Blois, despite his own brother’s actions. The effort to halt the spread of the slander would seem to have been successful, for the moment at least.86

Northern French Jewry, however, did not stop here. Although deeply concerned with insuring their own safety, the Jewish communities did not neglect their responsibilities to the remnants of Blois Jewry. Attempts had to be undertaken to salvage whatever possible. These negotiations had to be conducted in an altogether different manner; commissions of Jews would have been out of place. What was needed was a skilled negotiator, and for this sensitive undertaking the Jews chose Nathan b. R. Meshullam. Nathan was the scion of a distinguished Jewish family, the “Officials.” This clan, so well traced through a number of its generations by Zadoc Kahn, was prominent both within the Jewish community and in the non-Jewish world. Various members of the family are widely cited as disputing Biblical verses with prominent churchmen. Such a background of contact with the higher clergy

85 Ibid., p. 22.
86 Ibid.
made Nathan a fine choice to represent the Jews in this delicate matter, for it was obvious to the Jews that greatest leverage on the actions of Theobald of Blois could be exerted by his brother William, archbishop of Sens and bishop of Chartres. The Troyes letter, written prior to the reception of Nathan’s account of his achievements, mentions two specific goals to the negotiations: burial of the deceased and redemption of captives. In his own letter detailing his accomplishments, Nathan fails to mention burial of the dead. He does indicate a number of other successes, including release of the captives, permission for youngsters forcibly converted to return to the Jewish fold, and a declaration by Theobald that the same charge would not be raised again. All the foregoing was accomplished through the mediation of William, with the sum of 120 pounds paid to him for his efforts and a further 100 pounds for the assent of his brother Theobald.87

The final stage in this political activity involved alerting the Jewish communities of the area to both the nature of the incident itself and to the vigorous and successful negotiations which followed in its wake. The Orléans community, which had been the first to hear of the tragedy and had firsthand information at its disposal, was assigned the onerous task of detailing the catastrophe. The major communities, Paris and Troyes, drew up letters describing their negotiating successes.88

In all this flurry of activity can be seen both the operation of the recognized representatives of the Jewish communities of northern France and the occasional intervention of one or another of the Jews with special connections in courtly circles. In this one instance, at least, these various kinds of negotiators were able to function in complete harmony.

If there is any major development in the machinery of Jewish self-government during the twelfth century, it is the ability of the Jewish communities spread across northern France, over a variety of principalities, to work together for their common benefit. The twelfth century saw the growing crystallization of ever larger and more powerful principalities. In an area where unification was very much in vogue, the always exposed Jewish minority had to follow suit.

Even during the pre-Crusade period, some intercommunal cooperation was called for, particularly by the problem of small communities unable to provide for themselves all the needed facilities. What resulted was a constellation of communities clustered about a major center

87Ibid., pp. 22-23.
88Ibid., pp. 18-19.
whose extensive institutions they could always utilize. The preamble to the important ordinance of R. Tam indicates a continuation of the same arrangements. R. Tam mentions “the elders of Troyes and its sages and those in its surrounding environs”; “the sages of Dijon and its environs”; “the leaders of Auxerre and Sens and its adjacent communities”; and “the elders of Orléans and surrounding territories. . . .”

What was new in the twelfth century was the ability of these local groupings to function as a cohesive unit. This unity is again revealed most strikingly by the crisis of 1171. The foundation of Jewish cohesion lay in the system of communication that linked Jewish settlements. Immediately upon reception of eyewitness accounts of the execution—both Christian and Jewish—Orléans Jewry spread the unhappy news. Again, it was Orléans Jewry, with its comprehensive information, that composed the detailed report of the incident for its fellow communities. This report reached Ephraim of Bonn in Germany and the Jewish community of Spires, where it was fortunately preserved for the future. The Paris letter clearly passed through Troyes. It too obviously reached Spires, as did the letters of Nathan b. R. Meshullam and of the Troyes community.

Tangible behind this communication is a central force, directing almost all of this activity. The focal point out of which the diversified response of northern French Jewry emanated seems to have been the towering figure of R. Jacob Tam. R. Tam, one of the well-known grandchildren of Rashi, has long been recognized for his outstanding contributions to the development of the Tosafist school. His position as a Jewish communal figure has also been long acknowledged. Nowhere, however, does his commanding role in Jewish affairs emerge with as much clarity and specificity as in the aftermath of Blois.

Most of the stages of Jewish response radiated from headquarters at Troyes. Although the approach of Parisian Jewry to Louis VII is nowhere linked to R. Tam, the audience with Henry of Champagne was undoubtedly carried out by Troyes Jewry and its great leader. The entire approach to William, archbishop of Sens and bishop of Chartres, reflects the hand of Jacob Tam. The Troyes letter, written prior to Nathan’s letter, details the goals of the negotiations, specifying in fact the exact sums of money to be offered. At the successful close of his mission, Nathan immediately communicated the results to R. Tam.

The circular letter drawn up by Orléans Jewry to inform the Jewish communities of the details of the disaster was composed at the behest

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of R. Tam. The institution of an annual commemoration fast, mentioned in the Orléans letter, is specifically attributed by Ephraim of Bonn to the dictate of Jacob b. Meir. The other ritual commemorations enumerated in the Troyes letter must also have been initiated by R. Tam. 91

The Jewish drive towards coordinated activity, spurred by the growing political consolidation of northern France, at this point managed to draw together Jews from a number of discrete principalities. The Orléans community, so responsive to the directives of R. Tam of Champagne, was not subject to the same political authority but was under the control of the king of France. Indeed Ephraim of Bonn records that all of northwestern European Jewry accepted the annual fast ordained by R. Tam of Troyes. 92

The same network of communication and the same far-reaching authority exercised by key religious leaders were also effective under peaceful circumstances. A number of important ordinances were widely adopted as a result of extensive intercommunal action. 93 The most well known of these ordinances was the prohibition of the unauthorized private use of governmental authority in Jewish affairs. The technique for the acceptance of this document is revealed in the following heading:

This is the document called Zaẓ ha-Mateh, that was decreed by R. Samuel b. R. Meir and R. Jacob b. R. Meir and their brother R. Isaac, the descendants of the great guide Rashi. They sent [this document] throughout the entire dispersion in the kingdom of France and Lotharingia and Germany and much of Spain. The great and the illustrious all signed this letter and levied excommunication on its transgressors and their descendants forever. 94

A more detailed list of assenting communities has also been preserved:

Therefore have we taken counsel together: the elders of Troyes and its sages and those in its surrounding environs; the sages of Dijon and its environs; the leaders of Auxerre and Sens and its adjacent communities; the elders of Orléans and surrounding territories; our brethren the inhabitants of Châlons; the sages of the area of Reims; our masters in Paris and their neighbors; the scholars of Melun and Étampes; the inhabitants of Normandy and Brittany and Anjou and

91Ibid., pp. 24-25.
92Ibid., p. 25.
93Ibid., pp. 26-30.
94Finkelstein, Jewish Self-Government, p. 159. The translation has been modified slightly.
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Poitou; the greatest of our generation, the inhabitants of Lotharingia. Of those listed here, some have assented, but the reaction of others we have not heard—for the matter was urgent. Therefore we have depended on the fact that we know them to be great authorities who accede to their inferiors. For the law is a just one, and were it not so stipulated, it would be worthy of stipulation.95

The communities mentioned stretch from imperial lands through Burgundy, Champagne, the royal domain, and on into Angevin territories in the west—a remarkable degree of unity.

The most explicit indication of the mechanism for the achievement of joint consent to important enactments stems from an ordinance concerning disposition of dowry. The ordinance was promulgated by the key communities of Troyes and Reims, and from there its authority spread widely.

This principle we have accepted upon ourselves, the inhabitants of Troyes and Reims. We then sent messengers to those neighboring communities within the radius of one day’s travel, and they responded favorably. We then decreed all the foregoing for ourselves, for those who had joined us, and for our descendants; [indeed we decreed this] for all of the inhabitants of France, Anjou, Poitou, Normandy, and those inhabiting areas within a day or two’s travel time of these communities—that they and their descendants observe this decree.96

This impressive unity in a still fragmented northern France suffered from one major shortcoming: it lacked the crucial quality of stable continuity. Mechanisms for joint effort existed, but activation of these mechanisms was normally effected only through the authority of an outstanding personality. It is by no means accidental that all the important instances of intercommunal cooperation in twelfth-century French Jewish history are linked with the name of R. Jacob Tam. The power exercised by R. Tam was the result of a unique combination of wealth, political influence, prodigious scholarship, and religious prestige. Such an individual could fuse the shaky bonds linking the independent Jewish communities of northern France into a strong chain of concerted action. Obviously, such individuals were rare—and without them French Jewry had to slip back into a pattern of disorganization.

95Ibid., p. 153 (Hebrew) and p. 155 (English).
96Ibid., pp. 164–65 (Hebrew) and p. 167 (English).
The twelfth century thus reveals a Jewish community that exhibited many of the major characteristics of Christian life of that period: expansion; growing business sophistication, where the Jews in some senses pioneered; vigorous intellectual creativity. Yet these decades saw a number of ominous signals that boded ill for the future of northern French Jewry. As a result of the business advances of the times, the Jews were thrown ever more firmly into the alliance with the feudal rulers; increasing ecclesiastical agitation and heightened popular animosity deepened these ties. The alliance which now afforded both physical safety and business stability left the Jews very little political mobility, a development fraught with serious dangers.

Only against this background can the unexpected outbursts of the early 1180’s be fully understood. Philip Augustus may have been moved by the impetuosity of his youth. However, he also reflected the twelfth-century legacy of anti-Jewish animus and Jewish political vulnerability.