In his influential essay “The Critique of Violence,” Walter Benjamin suggests that violent actions must be evaluated “within the sphere of means, themselves, without regard for the ends they serve.”¹ As Giorgio Agamben points out, this moment in Benjamin’s essay is informative for the relationship it establishes between sovereignty and law because it identifies violence as “a pure medium” and “a means that . . . is considered independently of the ends that it pursues.”² Benjamin and Agamben’s definition of violence, which eliminates its justificatory value, offers a useful characterization of one late-medieval English poet’s representation of the corporeal violence inflicted on Jews in the first-century Roman siege of Jerusalem. The Jewish bodies that appear in the late fourteenth-century alliterative romance, The Siege of Jerusalem, are afflicted by a kind of violence that demands attention to the violence itself, not its “necessity” within salvation history. While the christological “ends” of such violence are the supersession of the old Judaic law and the punishment of Jews for their “crime” of crucifying Christ, the Siege-poet consistently diverts attention from this purpose to critique violence as


a means divorced from its end. The violated Jewish bodies possess no value or rights within the operation of Roman sovereignty over Jerusalem and are accordingly reduced to what Agamben calls “bare life.” As extinguishable entities, these Jewish corpores assume a didactic power that modulates this antisemitic homily with a condemnation of Roman imperialism: the disciplined bodies are on display, creating a collective image that teaches its audience both the vengeance of God and the cruelty of Roman imperial siegecraft.

The Siege is primarily known as a vitriolic invective against the Jews for crucifying Christ that delights in describing scenes of excessive violence. With the notable exceptions of Christine Chism, Randy Schiff, and Suzanne Yeager, few scholars have been able to avert their gaze from the horrifying fate of the Jews in the poem to acknowledge the complex investigations of Roman imperialism that emerge through these disturbing scenes of corporeal malady and dismemberment. This chapter explores the way that the Siege-poet treats the bodies of the Jews and Romans as sites of anxiety-producing indeterminacy and recasts them as objects of both punishment and compassion. When the poem’s scenes of corporeal violence are read as didactic in nature, it becomes clear that the graphic details of these scenes are a manifestation of a pessimistic martial discourse that fails to delight, but rather

4. I accept Gavin Langmuir’s definition of antisemitism as an irrational form of anti-Judaism. Therefore, I use the adjective “antisemitic” to characterize the psychopathological discourse that colors the Siege-poet’s illustrations of the Jews. Also, the fact that this poem was composed after the twelfth century, when Langmuir claims such antisemitism began, suggests that its composition originated from the tradition of Christian accusations of Jewish ritual murder, blood libel, and host desecration. See Langmuir’s Toward a Definition of Antisemitism (University of California Press, 1990); Anna Sapir Abulafia, ed., Religious Violence between Christians and Jews: Medieval Roots, Modern Perspectives (New York: Palgrave, 2002), xvi.
instills a deep, emotionally overwrought ambivalence about the horrors of war and empire-building. The sympathy for the Jews that the Siege-poet interjects directs attention to the cruelty, imperial intentions, and internal division of a Roman Empire that had been fictively recast as newly Christian. Ultimately, the relentless succession of scenes of violence demands that readers question the martial ethics not only of the superseded pagan Roman Empire of Nero, but also of constructions of empire based on the logic of Christian “justice” embodied in the converted Titus and Vespasian.

As hard as they may try, however, Titus and Vespasian are unable to shed their Old Roman imperial identities. Even after the virtuous Jew Josephus heals his crippled body, Titus cannot control the wrath against the “Christ-killers” in exacting the siege that he has inherited from his father Vespasian, who is continually described as “wroþe” [angry] (371), “woðe wedande wroþ” [furious raging wildly] (385), and “wroþ as a wode bore” [angry as a wild boar] (781) in his confrontations with his Jewish enemies, an emotion that is in direct contrast to the Jews who talk “mekly” [meekly] (338) and fight as “fierce men & noble” [fierce and noble men] (867). The Siege-poet’s compassionate characterization of the Jews is unique given his sources in Flavius Josephus’ *Jewish War* and Ranulph Higden’s *Polychronicon*, which describe the Jews as filled with “impetuosity and unbridled rage” (6.159) and “furor cum temeritate” (429). Through new interpretations of these scenes, the Siege-poet attributes the Jewish rage in his sources to the vengeance of Vespasian, which he consequently translates to Titus when he grants him control of the siege. The translation of power is inextricably linked to the same kind of vengeance that infects Priam after the death of Laomedon and the destruction of the first Troy.


Titus and Vespasian, as representatives of a Christian Roman Empire, would have held a unique significance for a late fourteenth-century English audience because they serve both as the imperial predecessors of England and as the human hands of divine vengeance. The extensive illustrations of Roman siegework and glorified annihilation of a heathen Jerusalem have even led Malcolm Hebron to claim that poem “emphasizes the heroism of the Romans and the exotic strangeness of the defenders.” While I believe this reading can be supported, this chapter argues the opposite, claiming that the heroism of the Romans is undercut by intimate and sympathetic depictions of Jewish corporeal destruction. At times, it may appear that the Siege-poet “cheerfully sanction[s]” the violence the Romans inflict upon the Jews, but his overall perspective of Christian imperialism is more ambivalent than it seems.

This interrogation of imperialism is remarkable because it runs counter to the dominant ideology of empire in the Middle Ages, that of the *translatio imperii*. Rather than adhere to this optimistic model of imperial translation, the Siege-poet draws on the skeptical historiography of John Clerk’s *Destruction of Troy*, Guido delle Colonne’s *Historia destructionis Troiae*, and William of Newburgh’s *Historia rerum Anglicarum*. In making his own mark on this historical tradition, the Siege-poet interrogates the logic of empire-formation, which requires the destruction of one empire for the birth of the next, and accentuates the synecdochic relationship between cities and bodies. By treating the bodies of Jewish victims and Roman conquerors as irredeemable casualties of imperialism, he articulates what Agamben has characterized as the biopolitical nature of the sovereign body, which inflicts corporeal violence to assert power. Agamben’s theory of sovereignty originates in the ancient Roman law that posited criminals as *homines sacri*, a label that accorded them a contradictory status as both sacred and profane. In other words, the *homo sacer* may not be sacrificed, yet he may be killed by anyone with impunity. This ambivalence of the sacred eliminates any divine or civil value for the criminal and reduces him to the status of “bare life.” Such an evacuation of criminal life makes all humans potential *homines sacri* and subject to unsanctionable killing by state or sovereign authorities. Furthermore, if the sovereign is, as Carl Schmitt influentially suggests, “he who

decides on the state of exception,” sovereignty is an entity that exists outside of the law.\textsuperscript{15} Decisions about life and death then endow the sovereign with political power, establishing a sphere that Agamben calls “that of the sovereign decision, which suspends law in the state of exception and thus implicates bare life within it.”\textsuperscript{16} Within the eyes of a Christianized Roman Empire, Jerusalem and all of its inhabitants are subject to extermination that is justified outside of both messianic and secular law. The \textit{Siege}-poet’s critique of this reduction of the Jewish body to “bare life” reflects an awareness of the insidious operations of sovereignty and casts skepticism on historiographies that emphasize a redemptive optimism about the destruction of cities and the imperial glory of Rome.

\textbf{CHRIST AS HOMO SACER}

The most compellingly didactic figure that articulates pessimism about empire throughout the \textit{Siege} is the mutilated body. Christ’s scourging begins this motif, setting the inimitable example of a body that is both sacred to the faithful and criminal to his persecutors. As Sarah Beckwith notes, Christ’s body, both in the late medieval passion and Eucharist, was “the very meeting place of the sacred and the profane” that acknowledged both his human and divine nature.\textsuperscript{17} For modern anthropologists, the destroyed human body of Christ represents the paradox of the \textit{homo sacer}. As Agamben points out, over time the Latin term \textit{sacer} came to signify both sacrality and criminality, creating an ambivalence of the sacred that had been previously noted by Freud, among others. But in his examination of the phenomenon of \textit{homo sacer}, Agamben suggests:

What defines the status of \textit{homo sacer} is therefore not the originary ambivalence of the sacredness that is assumed to belong to him, but rather both the particular character of the double exclusion into which he is taken and the violence to which he finds himself exposed. This violence—the unsanctionable killing that, in his case, anyone may commit—is classifiable neither as sacrifice nor as homicide, neither as the execution of a condemnation to death nor as sacrilege. Subtracting itself from the sanctioned forms of both

\textsuperscript{16} Agamben, \textit{Homo Sacer}, 83.
human and divine law, this violence opens a sphere of human action that is neither the sphere of *sacrum facere* nor that of profane action.\(^\text{18}\)

This “double exclusion” refers to the location of the *homo sacer* outside both human and divine jurisdiction, which attributes a liminality to the body that obscures its status as distinctly sacred or criminal. Agamben connects the structure of this violent *sacratio* of the victim with what he calls the “sovereign sphere,” which is the political space wherein the sovereign subject has license to take human life without declaring the act as homicidal or sacrificial. This leads him to conclude that, “[t]he sacredness of life, which is invoked today as an absolutely fundamental right in opposition to sovereign power, in fact originally expresses precisely both life’s subjection to a power over death and life’s irreparable exposure in the relation of abandonment.”\(^\text{19}\)

The quintessence of sovereign or imperial power is therefore the violence it may inflict on human life. Read this way, Christ’s body, in its subjection to Roman sovereignty, possesses no individual right to life or sacrificial power and instead serves as the first casualty of Roman imperialism in the poem. The emphasis on Christ’s corporeal destruction invites readers to dwell on his human, expendable nature in addition to his spiritual transcendence and central role in providential history.

Most critics will acknowledge that the fourteenth-century environment, which Eustache Deschamps described as an “age of tears, of envy, of torment, . . . [an] age of decline nigh to the end,” may have contributed to the pessimism that runs through the extensive illustrations of bodily violence and digressive expressions of moral outrage.\(^\text{20}\) Yet, few modern readers of the *Siege* are willing to acknowledge the genealogy of destruction that this poem reaffirms. Michael Livingston notes this “dark” perspective of the poem, but insists that the *Siege*-poet believed that “the downward spiral of society would end, finally and inevitably.”\(^\text{21}\) To prove this point, he turns to the poem’s articulation of divine providence, which begins and ends with a visitation of Christ.\(^\text{22}\) Even though the poem begins with a visit from Christ, it is a macabre vision, in which Christ is bloodied with scourges. In fact, the Christ who appears is a tortured and mutilated body:

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 83.
\(^{21}\) Livingston, *Siege of Jerusalem*, 30.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., 30–36. See in particular Livingston’s helpful visual aid, “Figure 2: Structure of *Siege of Jerusalem*.”
A pyler pyȝt was doun upon þe playn erþe,
His body bonden þerto [and] beten with scourgis:
Whyppes of quyrboyle [vm]bywente his white sides
Til al on rede blode ran as rayn [i]n þe strete. (9–12)

[A pillar was placed down upon the plain earth, his body bound to it and beaten with scourges: whips of leather beset his white sides until blood ran on them as rain in the street.]

Such scenes of Christ’s passion in the late fourteenth century were commonplace, but in this poetic context, Christ’s scourged body serves both as the catalyst for future destruction and as an emblem of the corporeal violence that runs throughout the poem, just as his “blode ran as rayn [i]n þe strete” (12). The blood of the crucified Christ marks all in its path, from Titus’ facial lesion (30–32) to the Eucharistic sacrifice of Maria’s child (1081–88), both healing and destroying those it affects.

Likewise, if we expect “Christ’s second visitation” at the end of the poem, we are bound to be disappointed. After the Romans have obliterated Jerusalem and then sowed the land with salt (1295), they collect their booty and head home:

Whan alle was demed and d[on] þey drow[en] vp tentis,
Trossen here tresour and trompen vp þe sege.
Wenten syngyng away and han here wille forþred
And hom ridden to Rome; now rede ous our[e] Lord. (1337–40)

[When all was said and done they drew up their tents, packed up their treasure and trumpeted up the siege. Having had their will, they went away singing and rode home to Rome. May our Lord guide us.]

Presumably, Livingston reads the last half-line of the poem, “now rede ous oure Lord” (1340) as the path to Christ’s second coming, which he claims, “lies just beyond the end of the poem,” but such a stock ending surely carries less eschatological weight. In fact, Livingston aptly notes that these lines describe a return to Rome, both physically and spiritually, which recognizes the path of the imperial line more than a fulfillment of prophecy. Very little of this passage exhibits Christian optimism—rather it focuses on the trea-

23. Ibid., 35.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
sure obtained and the gleeful singing of the soldiers as they return home. I suggest that we read this “joy” within the context of previous events, which are the destruction of the temple, the selling of the Jews, and the suicide of Pontius Pilate. Even if we read these events as divinely sanctioned and the consequence of Christian supersession, the ending stanza does not reaffirm the justice of these acts. Instead, the Romans ride away with an ill-gotten profit of imperialism established through an arrogant display of violence.\textsuperscript{26}

**FLAYING JEWS AND IMPERIAL SIEGECRAFT BY PROXY**

Christ’s spiritual transcendence in the passion sequence is modulated by his role as \textit{homo sacer}, which posits his mutilated body as just one of the many casualties of Roman imperialism. As an object of corporeal punishment, Christ’s body is surprisingly equated with the bodies of Jews, which are also scourged and crucified for their crimes.\textsuperscript{27} An unforgettable instance of antisemitic corporeal violence is the flaying of Caiaphas and other Jewish clerics, an act that the \textit{Siege}-poet describes as an antitype of Christ’s passion and crucifixion:

\begin{verbatim}
Domesmen vpon de[y]es  demeden swyþe
Pat ech freke were quyk fleyn  þe felles of clene;
[Firste] to be on a bent  with blonkes todrawe
And sub honget on an hep  vpon heye galwes,
þe feet to þe firmament,  alle folke to byholden,
With hony vpon ech [half]  þe hydeles anonynted;
Corres and cattes  with claures ful scharpe
Foure kagge[d] and knyt  to Cayphases þeyes;
Twey apys at his armes  to angren hym more
þat renten þe rawe flesche  vpon rede peces.
So was he pyned fram prime  with persched sides
Tille þe sonne doun s[yed]  in [þe] somere tyme. (697–708)
\end{verbatim}

26. See also Chism, \textit{Alliterative Revivals}, 181–88.

then hanged all together upon a high gallows, with feet to the sky for everyone to behold, the skinless anointed with honey upon each side, four dogs and cats with sharp claws caught and latched to Caiaphas’ thighs, two apes28 at his arms to torment him further that rent the raw flesh to red pieces. Thus was he pained from prime with pierced sides until the sun set in the summer sky.]

While such attention to the detail of the punishment may express antisemitic odium against Caiaphas and his fellow priests, there is more than sadistic hate going on here. This juridical act is performed with a pedagogic objective in mind—the revered clerics are not simply flayed, but flayed publicly, for “alle folke to byholden,” which implies that all who observe the fate of their bodies will learn not to betray their allegiance to Rome. Vespasian intensifies this lesson by ordering the bodies to be burnt “into browne askes” (720) and their remains to be blown back over the walls of Jerusalem. He even takes his message a step further, beseeching his soldiers to cry out to the Jews, “Ther is doust for your drynke!” [There is dust for your drink!] (723) and “bidde hem bible of that broth for the bishop soule” [beseech them to imbibe that broth for the bishop’s soul] (724). By having his men desecrate the remains of the priests and force the Jews to drink in their ashes, Vespasian orders the besieged to become cannibals. This cannibalism is a parody of the passion and the Eucharist: Caiaphas is tortured, executed, and consumed in a way that both meets and exceeds the violence of Christ’s crucifixion. Like Christ, Caiaphas is pierced in his side (707), but the Romans amplify his suffering by having him drawn (699) and rent by dogs, cats, and apes (703–6). Caiaphas and his fellow priests’ bodies are burnt into ashes to prevent any possibility of bodily resurrection and then they are literally, without any divine act of transubstantiation, fed to the living Jews. Whereas the Eucharistic wine is

28. Livingston reads “apys” as “apiece,” which is plausible reading, but I prefer Hanna and Lawton’s reading of “apes.” While attaching apes might seem an excessive and ridiculous detail, I want to thank Tim Stinson, who is working on an electronic edition of the poem, for identifying the source for this in the Bible en François. See La Vengeance de Nostre-Seigneur: The Old and Middle French Prose Versions, 2 vols., ed. Alvin Ford, Studies and Texts 63, 115 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984–93). In describing this scene the Bible has, “Puis le fist atachier as cuisses a deus cheannes de fer, deus chiens et deus chaz et deus singes touz vis . . .” (116). The Siege-poet seems to keep the two apes (singes) of his source text. See also the Middle English prose translation of the Bible, edited by Phyllis Moe in The Middle English Prose Translation of Roger d’Argenteuil’s Bible en français: Edited from Cleveland Public Library, MS Wq091.92–C.468, Middle English Texts 6 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1977). This translation postdates the Siege, but that translator also rendered singes as apis (85). Stinson notes that the exemplar for this translation does not survive, but its appearance in the translation adds further support for the movement from singes to apys.
the catalyst for Christian communion, this cannibalistic dust is a catalyst for Jewish destruction. As Heather Blurton suggests, such representations of cannibalism enact “the too literal incorporation of one body into another. It is, however, precisely this metaphoric range—of incorporation, of the annihilation of the body and thus of identity—that lends cannibalism its utility as a metaphor for representing the dissolution of political as well as fleshly bodies.” Moreover, the forced consumption of the remains of their own high priests suggests that their religious and political fates will coalesce into a singular act of self-destruction.

At the same time that the Siege-poet establishes these Jews as antitypes of Christ, their dispersed remains symbolize the diaspora that the destruction of Jerusalem will effect. The Siege-poet sums up the nature and message of their death:

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Thus ended the lives of cursed Caiaphas and his twelve priests, completely mangled by beasts, and finally burned, as a token of the treason and trouble that they caused when Christ was put to death through their counsel.
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Here the Siege-poet identifies “tresoun” as the sin that Caiaphas and the twelve clerics committed through their “conseil.” Through the use of these terms, the Siege-poet characterizes Caiaphas and the clerics as treasonous counselors for their role in convincing Pontius Pilate to inflict Roman punishment for a false cause. Their crime of deceptive “conseil” would have been subject to the Old Roman rite of *sacratio* in which the criminals would have been declared *sacer*. Caiaphas and the clerics then join Christ as *homines sacri*, paying the ultimate price of their subjection to the Roman Empire. The more significant consequence of their misdeed is the ensuing destruc-


30. The phrase “tokne of tresoun” is strikingly similar to the “token of *vnt rawþe*”(2509) in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Gawain also sees his “token” as a didactic symbol, one which represents his treason against Bertilak. See *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002).

tion of their holy city, an obliteration that is intimately connected to the fate of their bodies.

If we follow the “flaying” motif throughout the poem, we discover that the death of the Jewish clerics parallels the imperial ascendency of Vespasian and reaffirms what Agamben calls “the inseparability of the imperium from a power of death.” No figure of Roman history better embodies the association between empire and death than Vespasian’s predecessor, Nero. After falling out of favor with the Roman people through his executions of Peter, Paul, and Seneca, and his burning of the city of Rome, Nero commits suicide, leaving the imperial throne vacant for a successor (897–900). After a series of botched emperors, Vespasian is called to the seat, which raises a chivalric dilemma regarding the “breaking of truth.” Vespasian had vowed to destroy Jerusalem and enact what he perceived as God’s vengeance for the Jewish killing of Christ. He is, in the eyes of a Christian audience, also fulfilling the scriptural prophecy (Matthew 24:2), which would seemingly bind him to his task. Yet, Sir Sabyn of Syria beseeches Vespasian to break his vow and assume the imperial throne, using the following “flaying” logic: “For as fers is þe freke atte ferre ende / Þat of-fleis þe fel as he þat foot holdeþ” [The man at the far end who flays off the skin is as fierce as he who holds the foot] (991–92). The language used here describes men engaged in breaking a deer, whereby one flays from the “ferre ende” and the other holds the foot steady. Through this distich, Sir Sabyn makes the argument that Vespasian’s chivalry and his attention to his vow to obliterate Jerusalem will remain intact even if his agency will reside at a geographical extremity, that is, Rome. By comparing the siege to the hunt, Sir Sabyn speaks to the sensibilities of an aristocratic audience who perceive hunting and hawking as staples of chivalric life. This flaying motif contributes to a larger pattern of hunting and hawking in the poem that David Lawton has characterized as “turning violence into the recreation of honourable men.” Vespasian agrees with this logic and leaves his son Titus to hold the foot steady, thereby privileging his own imperial stature to a fulfillment of Christian prophecy.

This means that Vespasian no longer has to be in the dirty business of repressing the Jews—the demands of the Roman Empire call him to exact the fate of Jerusalem callously from afar. As Hanna aptly puts it, “the total action of the poem is constituted by the displacement through which torn flesh blandly gets transformed into Vespasian’s heroic resolve and by the rule

32. Ibid., 89.
of agency through which such resolve animates cooperative underlings to perform ‘enobling’ acts of racial violence.”

For Hanna and many readers, Vespasian’s translation of power is presented to a late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century audience as an act of good faith, which would support such imperial governance by proxy. To justify this reading, Hanna points to the poem’s reception in the south by the scribe Richard Frampton, who in the 1410s copied the Siege into the manuscript now known as Cambridge University Library (CUL) MS. Mm.v.14. Hanna believes that Frampton worked for a “Lancastrian ménage” in London, not only because of recorded payments from the Duchy of Lancaster or Henry IV, but also because of the Roman road between the Duchy center at Pontrefract in West Yorkshire and Lancaster that runs right by the monasteries at Whalley, Sawley, and Bolton, the probable sites for the poem’s composition. He further suggests that Sir Sabyn’s flaying argument speaks to an issue of governmental agency that brought about the Lancastrian assumption of the English throne in 1399. In short, Hanna views the poem and its support of monarchical proxies as “arguments justifying usurpation and regicide” that would have been important subjects of discussion within the Ricardian and Lancastrian courts.

Speculating even further, Hanna suggests that the Siege-poet’s fascination with flaying the flesh of Jews may have been easily assimilated by Lancastrian readers who inflicted similar religious violence upon Lollards who rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation. In the absence of Jews who had been expelled in 1290, the Lollards “materialized the corpus Christi” and suffered the displaced cruelty of “Christian xenophobia.” Given the poem’s compo-

34. Hanna, “Contextualizing The Siege of Jerusalem,” 109–11. The breaking of the deer is explained in detail in The Parliament of the Three Ages, 75–78: “I raughte the righte legge byfore, ritt it þeraftir, / And so fro legge to legge I lepe thaym aboute, / And þe felle fro þe fete fayre I de-partede / And flewe it doun with my fiste faste to the rigge” [I grasped the right leg first, ripped it next, and thus from leg to leg I moved quickly around them, and I separated the skin clean from the feet, and flayed it down with my fist quickly to the backbone]. See Thorlac Turville-Petre, Alliterative Poetry of the Later Middle Ages: An Anthology (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 73; for his treatment of the flaying scene, see 168–69.


sition near York, the notorious location of the 1190 pogrom, it is likely that the Siege is a product of an environment of antisemitism.\textsuperscript{38} It is also plausible, I believe, to envision flayed Jews as flayed Lollards in the midst of virulent religious intolerance that led to Arundel’s Constitutions in 1409.\textsuperscript{39} That said, Hanna’s argument rests on a reading of the Siege, and specifically CUL MS. Mm.v.14, that praises the imperialism of Vespasian and justifies xenophobic violence, a reading that I wish to call into question.

THE SIEGE AND THE GUIDO-TRADITION

I begin by considering the manuscript context of CUL MS. Mm.v.14, which establishes a literary relationship between the Siege and the Guido-tradition. As I will demonstrate, their juxtaposition in the manuscript represents their larger thematic commonalities and fascination with the destruction of war, which undercuts rather than justifies imperial and martial violence. To do so, we should start with an examination of the contents of this fascinating early fifteenth-century codex:

I. Folios 2r–139v: Guido delle Colonne’s Historia destructionis Troiae.
II. Folios 140r–85r: the prose Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni.
III. Folios 187r–206v: The Siege of Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{40}

Even though the manuscript is primarily intended for the Latin reader, it has a particularly “alliterative” flair, not only because of the presence of the Siege, but also because the Latin texts are sources for two other alliterative poems, the Destruction of Troy and the Wars of Alexander. Given the subjects and languages of these works, the audience of this manuscript was deeply interested in Greek and Roman history and the Latin prose and alliterative English used to express it. The juxtaposition of Latin historical texts to English alliterative romance, and specifically Guido’s Historia to the Siege, compels us to revisit scholarship that has established the Siege’s relationship to the Guido-tradition and its contemporary alliterative romances.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 114.
\textsuperscript{40} For a full manuscript description, see Hanna and Lawton, The Siege of Jerusalem, xix–xx. For a recent discussion of other manuscript contexts of the Siege, see Michael Johnston, “Robert Thornton and The Siege of Jerusalem,” Yearbook of Langland Studies 23 (2009): 125–62.
We should first address the work that has established a compositional relationship between the *Destruction* and the *Siege* since they exhibit undeniable similarities in poetic vocabulary and structure. Scholars are divided on the relationship between the *Destruction* and the *Siege*, some claiming that the *Siege*-poet borrowed from the *Destruction*, and some claiming that the *Destruction* borrowed from the *Siege*. Mary Hamel, following the work of Mabel Day, argues that the *Siege* uses the *Destruction* in a way that transcends the stock formulas of alliterative verse, which Ronald A. Waldron had previously identified in an analysis of several Middle English alliterative poems.  

They reveal unquestionable correspondences of ideas, images, versification, word choices, and collocations. Given the irrefutable similarities not only between individual lines such as “Merked montayns and mores aboute” (*Siege* 730) and “All merknet the mountens & mores aboute” (*Destruction* 7350), but also between the overall structures and sequences of the lines, there is evidence of dependence that is difficult to dismiss even with arguments about the formulaic nature of alliterative verse. Hamel goes even further to claim that the *Siege* borrowed from the *Destruction* since there could be no other source for these lines in the *Siege* than the *Destruction*’s relatively faithful rendering of Guido’s *Historia*. This argument, she claims, is augmented by the fact that the author of the alliterative *Morte Arthure* used both the *Siege* and the *Destruction* extensively. If we accept this argument, it would appear that we are able to establish not only a relationship of dependence between the two poems, but also identify the *Destruction* as a source for the *Siege*.

Unfortunately, the correspondence between the two poems is not as certain as we might hope. In studying the dialect and date of the *Siege*, editors Ralph Hanna and David Lawton conclude that the *Siege* not only is earlier


42. They focus in particular on the correspondences between lines 729–37 of the *Siege* and lines 7348–56 in the *Destruction*.

43. Hamel, *Morte Arthure*, 54–55; Kölbing and Day, *The Siege of Jerusalem*, xxvi–xxvii; George Neilson also identified a number of "borrowings" to claim that the same author wrote both *Destruction* and *Siege*, but scholars have since refuted this claim. See Neilson, “Huchown of the Awle Ryale,” *the Alliterative Poet* (Glasgow: James MacLehose & Sons, 1902), 282–88. See Livingston’s helpful summary of the arguments about *Siege*’s date, provenance, and source material in his introduction to *Siege of Jerusalem*, 8–13, 21–30.
than the *Destruction* in its composition, but also may have no direct relationship to Clerk’s poem. They identify Barnoldswick, West Yorkshire, as the home of the *Siege*-poet, which would link him with Clerk geographically since Clerk comes from nearby Whalley, a town which lies approximately twelve miles to the west of Barnoldswick. Based on these identifications, these poets lived closer together than poets of any other two extant alliterative poems, which might indicate that they even knew one another and had access to each other’s work. Hanna and Lawton use this evidence not to demonstrate a relationship of dependence, but instead to argue that their proximity may show “their reliance upon a specific local tradition of alliterative verse, a common word-hoard and poetic grammar more closely related than simply a general ‘alliterative tradition.’” Yet, they qualify their claim by acknowledging, “direct borrowing may not be so easily dismissed.”

And if we consider, as Mary Hamel and Roger Nicholson have, the crusading context that must have influenced the *Siege*-poet’s intense fascination with the Holy Land, it is likely that the *Siege* emerged from knowledge of the crusade that was organized by Richard II and Charles V in 1396. While the *Siege*-poet’s crusading fervor could have been gleaned from his late-antique source text, the *Vindicta Salvatoris*, the decision to translate this tale of the destruction of Jerusalem for English readers suggests a currency for its compositional moment in the late fourteenth century. A Ricardian campaign could have provided the motivation for such a poem since the crusaders had formidable opponents and obstacles ahead of them. The crusade began against the Ottomans, who were threatening Constantinople, and was expected to continue against the Mamluks, who had occupied Jerusalem since 1279. Of course this last gasp at crusade never reached the Holy Land since the Ottomans overwhelmed the crusaders at Nicopolis. However, since the *Siege*-poet could have never comprehended the finality of this event, it is not surprising that crusading ideology emerges in the living,

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45. Hanna and Lawton, *The Siege of Jerusalem*, xxxvi. Such an argument is both distinct from and reminiscent of Waldron’s oral-formulaic thesis, but for the purposes of this discussion, its contention for the existence of the “word hoard” does the same work as Waldron’s: it dispels attempts to identify borrowings and moments of originality. See also Turville-Petre, “The Author of *The Destruction of Troy*,” 267.
breathing form it does in the poem. In fact, Nicholson suggests that the Siege may be, at least in part, a result of a polemical tradition that had campaigned for crusade throughout the 1390s. This polemical context is best represented by Philippe de Mézières in his Epistre au roi Richart in 1395. This letter to Richard expresses anxiety about the increasing power of the Islamic Turks and the threat they pose to Christian imperialism. At this point, the Turks had defeated the Christian troops at Thessalonika in 1387 and Kosovo in 1389, and had begun to broach the borders of Christendom.\(^49\) Charles V added to this fervor with a letter to Richard II, stating that the outcome of their 1395 campaign was to “succor our fellow Christians and to liberate the Holy Land.”\(^50\) Such a goal accords with Philippe’s desire for a crusade and clarifies the ultimate object of the campaign to be the liberation of Jerusalem.

If the Siege is read with this crusade polemic in mind, the attention it pays to the chivalry of Titus and Vespasian in besieging Jerusalem recalls contemporary expeditions to regain the Holy Land. It is also appropriate that the site of Titus’ conversion to Christianity is Bordeaux, the location of a 1395 peace accord between the English and French; a negotiating agreement from the conference even claimed that this diplomatic action would allow “Christendom [to] be saved from the malice and evil onslaught of the infidels who are attempting to destroy and annihilate it in various areas.”\(^51\)

The outright obliteration of Jerusalem that occurs in the Siege represents this kind of aggressive response to threats against Christian dominion. It is then geographically consistent for Titus to embark from Bordeaux on a crusade to avenge the death of Christ by the Jews. Given the pervasive nature of this crusade polemic throughout England during the 1390s, it is quite probable that the Siege was a product of this discourse later in the decade, after the composition of the Destruction. And when the remarkably similar vocabulary, linear structure, and imagery are also factored into the equation, it is quite likely that the Siege-poet used the Destruction as a source. Such a rela-

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\(^50\) Nicholson, “Haunted Itineraries,” 464–65. Palmer also agrees that the “ultimate destination was to have been Jerusalem itself.” England, France, and Christendom, 205, 242–44. Richard II also sent a letter of support for his half-brother Robert Holland, who was negotiating with Sigismund of Hungary in 1394, which indicates a military expedition to Hungary and Jerusalem. See Tyerman, England and the Crusades, 263.

\(^51\) Cited by Palmer, England, France, and Christendom, 182, 203.
tionship of dependence would explain their common didactic program of dismembered cities and bodies that undercuts the discourse of imperialism.

Even if we were to concede that the *Siege* is not directly dependent upon the *Destruction*, it is still evident that the *Siege*-poet drew from Clerk’s source, Guido’s *Historia*. Despite their attempts to relegate the *Destruction* to the mid-fifteenth century, Hanna and Lawton admit that the *Siege* and the *Destruction* share generic affinities, particularly in their attention to chronicle history.\(^{52}\) This assertion is supported by CUL MS. Mm.v.14, which contains one of the nine extant copies of the *Siege* and is bound with Guido’s *Historia* and the *Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni*. Since the Latin texts are historical in nature and the same hand inscribed all three works, it can be inferred that the intended audience of this manuscript was learned and deeply interested in Greek and Roman history.\(^{53}\) This means that the scribe and audience most likely considered the *Siege* a history—and possibly the same kind of history as Guido’s *Historia*. This volume contains multiple glosses in English and Latin in handwriting of several different scribes, which indicates that these historical texts were of great interest to their audience over an extended period of time.\(^{54}\) Even though not all of the manuscript contexts for the *Siege* limit its genre as history, it is clear that its compliers often juxtaposed it with learned works that reflect its historical and theological significance.\(^{55}\)

In addition to a generic affinity, the *Siege* also shares a particular rhetorical technique with Guido’s *Historia*. As Nicholas Jacobs points out, the *Siege*-poet drew from Guido’s *Historia* in his use of amplificatio. In addressing what had previously been thought to be a specifically alliterative topos, Jacobs analyzes the spectacular storm sequences that appear in many of the alliterative poems, especially the *Siege*, the *Destruction*, and *Patience*, in order to demonstrate that their accounts originate in classical models.


53. Bonnie Millar, *The Siege of Jerusalem in Its Physical, Literary and Historical Contexts* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 25; G. Guddat-Figge, ed., *Catalogue of the Manuscripts containing Middle English Romances* (Munich: W. Fink, 1976), 109. Guddat-Figge observes that the *Siege* is not as thoroughly decorated in gold, blue, red, and white illuminations or initials as the Latin histories, possibly because the illuminator did not think that the *Siege*’s Middle English deserved decoration.

54. Millar, *The Siege of Jerusalem in Its Physical, Literary and Historical Contexts*, 25. She notes the following names on the Ms.: Arthur Maynwaring f.1r; Robert Cotton in Greek f.1r, f. 207; Richard Broyes f. 208; Edwardus Savage Capillanus f. 208; Johannes Redmayn f. 208; Johannes Kyngsinn of Endbern f. 208; see *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts preserved in the Library of the University of Cambridge*, iv. repr. (Cambridge, 1980), 320–21.

55. For a full discussion of its historical, theological, crusading, and alliterative manuscript contexts, see Millar, “The Manuscript Contexts of *The Siege of Jerusalem*,” 15–41.
Because of the large number of shared borrowings that exist in the *Destruction*, Jacobs also admits the possibility that the other alliterative poets could have developed their storm narratives through their readings of the *Destruction*, but Jacobs eventually concludes that Guido’s *Historia* is the more likely source because of its popularity throughout England in the late fourteenth century and the unique correspondence between the storm descriptions of Guido and Clerk. Since Guido’s extensive storm scenes are not found in his own French source, Benoît de Sainte-Maure’s *Le Roman de Troie*, it is evident that Guido was influenced by a Latin rhetorical tradition that he received through his knowledge of classical literature. While it is possible that the alliterative poets learned the technique of *amplificatio* from rhetorical manuals, it is not likely, especially since the printed manuals do not suggest storm descriptions as instances for elaboration.\(^{56}\) Instead, Jacobs suggests that Guido’s *Historia* was their source for this type of rhetorical embellishment—after all, Guido’s extensive influence in the later fourteenth century is manifested in the three English translations, which were completed within the period of fifty years.\(^{57}\) We cannot then arrive confidently at the conclusion that the *Destruction* had a direct influence upon the *Siege*, but given the *Siege*’s linguistic, structural, and rhetorical correspondences to both the *Destruction* and Guido’s *Historia*, we can establish the *Siege* as a poem that belongs to the Guido-tradition.

While scholars such as Hamel and Jacobs have addressed the *Siege*’s connection to Guido and Clerk’s texts in terms of language and style, they have not acknowledged larger thematic similarities, such as a pervasive ambivalence towards imperialism that manifests itself in the *Siege*’s graphic descrip-


57. Jacobs, “Alliterative Storms,” 704. However, Jacobs does not readily dismiss a relationship between the *Destruction* and the *Siege* and even proceeds to identify characteristics that are shared by the *Destruction*, the *Siege*, and *Patience*. He observes that their respective storm scenes all contain: (1) an elaboration on the height and depth of the waves; (2) a distinction between the dark clouds and the lucent storms; (3) the loss of the gear and rigging of the ship; and (4) the appeals to the gods or saints. Since nearly all these thematic correspondences that appear in the *Siege* and *Patience* also appear in the *Destruction*, it is possible that the *Destruction* was the medium through which the alliterative poets obtained knowledge of Guido’s meteorological amplifications; however, given many elements in Guido’s *Historia* that correspond to alliterative poems other than the *Destruction*, most notably the names of the winds, Jacobs concludes that it is not likely that the *Destruction* was the channel of transmission for the topos (704–12).
tions of the dismemberment of cities and bodies. Given the Siege-poet’s tendency to draw on Guido’s meteorological themes, it is not surprising that he would also translate Guido’s destructive figure of Troy into his treatment of the Romans. Even more intensely than the Destruction, the Siege meditates on the destructive consequences of treason, which, contrary to many derivative readings of this poem, reflects the evils committed by the Roman imperialists and connects their fate to that of their Trojan ancestors. The Siege’s juxtaposition to the Historia in CUL MS. Mm.v.14 suggests that its audience may have been one that interrogated, rather than simply accepted and promulgated, the value and consequences of imperial endeavors.

TITUS AND THE BIOPOLITICAL NATURE OF SOVEREIGNTY

If we also consider the way the Siege-poet presents the flaying maxim and Vespasian’s decision to become Roman emperor within the poem itself, it becomes clear that Vespasian’s imperial desires ultimately trump his original vow and belie readings that do not perceive the poem’s critique of Vespasian’s actions. By using the “flaying” language in this way, the Siege-poet connects the fate of the Jewish clerics with the fate of hunted deer and characterizes the Romans’ treatment of the Jews as inhuman. For many readers of the poem, this dehumanization of the Jews is part and parcel of a larger accepted anti-semitic tradition and would therefore seem unexceptional. However, as these scenes of Jewish dismemberment accumulate to a state of frenzy, the Siege-poet expresses compassion for the fate of the Jews. As I will demonstrate, the juxtaposition of the “flaying” scenes with a later questioning of these acts undermines what would otherwise be a glorious occasion for empire. Even by assuming the imperial throne, Vespasian cannot escape his culpability in the cruelty of the siege that he governs through his newfound inheritance, one that has a history, in the words of the Destruction’s Hector, of not being able to anticipate what horrid things will happen at “the fer end” (2246).

The larger context of the flaying maxim supports this reading. Later in the poem, the Siege-poet continues his use of bodily violence and malady through Titus’ corporeal response to news of his father’s imperial ascendance. The joy that overtakes him is so overwhelming that his body betrays his enthusiasm:

And Titus for þe tydyng ha[þ] take [so] mychel ioye
Pat in his synwys soudeynly a syknesse is fallen.
Þe freke for þe fayndom of þe fadere blysse
With a cramp and a colde cauȝt was so hard
Þat þe fyngres and feet, fustes and ioyntes
Was lyþy as a leke and lost han here strengþe,
Becroked aȝens kynde and as a crepel woxen. (1027–33)

[Titus took so much joy from the news that a sickness suddenly struck his limbs. Because of his gladness about his father’s happiness, he was gripped with a cramp and a chill so intense that his fingers and feet, fists and joints were as limp as leeks and lost their strength. Against nature he grew crooked and walked like a cripple (or dwarf).]

Articulating a dialectic of imperial desire and illness that threatens the capacity of the Romans to sustain their siege against Jerusalem, the natural and political bodies of sovereignty become inseparable within the figure of Titus. This scene also belies the modernity of Foucault’s biopolitics, which insists that “modern man is an animal whose politics calls his existence as a living being into question.” Here a decidedly premodern figure embodies the inextricable relationship between what Agamben calls “bare life” (zoe) and political life (bios), in which the physical body of Titus reacts somatically to transformations in the imperial life of Rome. The image of Titus as a “crepel,” which according to the MED could refer both to a “cripple” and “dwarf,” suggests a deflation of imperial power and descent to a death-like state that can only be remedied through the reduction of superfluous “ioye.”

In his unnatural sickness, Titus possesses neither the physical nor imperial power that Vespasian bestowed upon him.

As Chism has argued, this moment “threatens the poem’s trajectory towards 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.”

When Chism refers to “predecessors,” she naturally means Old Rome and Jerusalem, but given the Siege’s place in the Guido-tradition, we should add Troy. This is not to say that readers would literally perceive Troy to be a city that stands transparently behind Rome and Jerusalem, but only that the figure of the crippled Titus represents the dangers of imperial translation that Guido’s fractured figure of Troy embodies. While it is possible to read Troy as the pagan ancestor of Nero’s Old Rome and completely separate from the New Roman Christendom, Titus’ unnatural enthusiasm for the news of his imperial lineage indicates that he cannot fully divorce himself from the Old Roman destructive desire for power. Acting as the proxy for the sovereign body of his father, Titus’ corporeal reaction represents the inseparability of the sovereign’s body from the physical body. Understood this way, the excessive zeal of the political body overwhelms Titus’ physical body and confounds any separation of Roman imperial desire and Christian retribution. If Vespasian’s preference for imperial authority and translation of power to Titus were to go unquestioned, we might embrace readings of the poem that legitimize the casualties of empire, but this is clearly not the case.

Failing to purge his imperial heritage and fantasies and to escape the limitations that his body has imposed upon him, Titus seeks help from his Jewish enemies, who prove to be superior both in virtue and reason. Titus sends for Josephus, who is not only a Jewish cleric and defender of Jerusalem, but also the historian who wrote The Jewish War, an account of the siege that is sympathetic to the Romans. The choice to have a Jew provide counsel in such a medical matter not only violates medieval canon law, which forbids Christians to consult Jewish physicians, but also defies the predominant medieval Christian perception of the relationship between Jews and the body. As Anna Abulafia suggests, since Jews refused to accept the orthodox teaching that God retained his divinity after assuming human form, “they were viewed by these Christians as lacking spiritual qualities and being dominated by their bodies.”

cannot secure a Christian remedy for his body’s revolt, consults the reason of a Jew would have been perceived by many medieval readers to be implausible, to say the least. But when we consider the bodily nature of the cure, it is clear that Titus is the one ruled by his body. Josephus obtains safe passage to Titus’ bedside, where he presents a man whom Titus hates more than any other on the earth.

When Tytus saw þat segge sodeynly with eyen,  
His herte in an hote yre so hetterly riseþ  
þat þe blode bygan to [b]red[e] abrode in þe vaynes  
And þe synwes resorte in here self kynde.  
Feet and alle þe fetoures, as þey byfore were,  
Comyn in here owen kynd. . . . (1049–54)

[When Titus saw that man suddenly with his eyes, his heart rose so furiously in a hot rage that his blood began to pulse in his veins and his sinews were restored to their old strength. His feet and all his features were as they had been before, revivied to their natural state. . . .]

The mere sight of this man inspires such “hote yre” (1050) that his blood resumes its course and revives his limbs to their former strength. Detailing the course of the blood as it restores his features not only reminds us of Clerk’s account of the pouring of balsam through Hector’s dead body in an attempt to revive his body to an illusory living state in the Destruction, but also articulates the relationship between superfluous wrath and healing. An excess of joy is therefore balanced by an excess of anger to resurrect Titus’ lifeless body back to its “owen kynd” and his status as “kyng” (1054).66 If this miracle is read according to the principles of patristic exegesis, it is curious to say the least. Not only does the Siege-poet offer no real explanation of this cure by wrath, but also he significantly alters his source, the Legenda Aurea of Jacobus de Voragine, in retelling it.67 Jacobus continually denies the apocryphal miracle’s significance and only recounts it because his own source includes it. Also, Jacobus specifically identifies this hated “segge” as Titus’ slave and offers the explanation of the cure that opposites have the power to cure one another. In the Siege, the man who inspires such hatred is undoubtedly a Jew, since Josephus brings him from the city. This substitution attri-

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butes the cure entirely to Jews and “God of his grace” (1055) and leads to a scene of forgiveness between Titus and his enemy. Titus then offers Josephus a reward for his efforts, which Josephus rejects, choosing instead to return promptly to Jerusalem.68 These alterations reveal the Siege-poet’s admiration of benevolent Jews such as Josephus, who repress their own hostilities in offering compassion to an enemy.

Even though the details of Josephus’ cure of Titus highlight the usefulness of the Jews to the triumphal narrative, this compassionate experience only tempers Titus’ enthusiasm about his father’s imperial status. After Titus is healed, he returns to his martial task with a renewed vigor, unlike previously in the poem when he and his soldiers emotionally withdraw from the siege, taking up chivalric activities such as hunting and hawking (885–93). This earlier movement away from the horrors of their military campaign recalls Vespasian’s decision to break his vow and assume the emperorship, which again demonstrates the Romans’ preference for the security of their empire over adherence to Christian vengeance. Bonnie Millar notes, “This indicates a change in them, how they are raised above the problems of siege warfare, and separates them from the city where Mar[ja] is driven through the madness of hunger to eat her own child, representing the breakdown of social identity and order.”69 The Romans’ retreat into the pleasures of imperial excess is in direct contrast to the starving Jews, who arise to the forefront of the narrative directly after the resurrection of Titus’ body.

Instead of causing forgiveness and peace, Josephus’ act of mercy unleashes the destruction that accompanies the revival of sovereign power. Like Hector’s vivified corpse in the Destruction, Titus’ healed body enacts further destruction that begins the line following Josephus’ return to the city:

Bot alle forsakeþ þe segge and to þe cite ȝede
With condit as he come— he kepiþ no more.
[And] Tytus segþ þe toun þer tene is on hande
For hard hunger and hote þat hem is bylompyn. (1065–68)

[But the man left them all and went to the city, with safe conduct as he had arrived, he kept nothing more. And Titus besieged the town where woe was at hand, for painful and intense hunger had wracked them.]

68. Jacobus de Voragine, Legenda Aurea, 301. Josephus’ refusal to accept an award is an original contribution to the story by the Siege-poet. According to the Legenda, “Titus et servum in sui gratiam et Josephum in sui amicitiam receptit” [Titus accepted the slave into his favor and admitted Josephus into his friendship], but a reward is not mentioned.

69. Millar, The Siege of Jerusalem in its Physical, Literary, and Historical Contexts, 89.
Both the visual and aural similarities between “segge” (man) and “segyþ” (besieged) invite us to read the abrupt transition between the miracle and the final days of the siege together, suggesting that Titus’ consequent actions are contemptible. The phrase “forsakeþ þe segge” and its proximity to “segyþ þe toun,” encourage us to imagine Titus as one who “forsakeþ þe sege (siege)” just as Josephus had forsaken all gold and jewels he had been offered for his services. Using the same grammatical positioning two lines later, the Siege-poet reverses the syntax so that attention is directed to Titus’ identity as a cruel military commander, who callously “segyþ þe toun.” The introduction of such evocative aural and visual correspondences between “segge” and “sege” demarcates a clear line between the lesson of forgiveness and imperial vengeance. Having learned nothing from the Jewish “segge,” the healed Titus continues the siege with renewed vigor.

Like his father before him, Titus’ cruelty forces the Jews to revert to unnatural consumption and cannibalism, actions that inspire the Siege-poet’s sympathy. As Blurton suggests, the threat of cannibalism is especially poignant because “cannibalism is not simply a destructive act: rather it is an act that targets the fundamentals of identity.” For the Siege-poet, these desperate acts may potentially be performed by anyone, even a nobly born and loving mother. After forty days of no food and water, the Siege-poet reports that the Jews must resort to drinking their own tears, and eating their shields and shoes (1071–76). To amplify the horror of the siege, the Siege-poet describes the fate of a woman Maria, whose hunger deludes her into roasting and eating her own child:

On Marie, a myld wyf, for meschef of foode,
Hire owen barn þat ȝo bare brad on þe gledis,
Rostyþ rigge and rib with rewful wordes,
Sayþ, ‘sone, vpon eche side our sorrow is alofte:
Batail aboute þe borwe our bodies to quelle;
Withyn h[u]nger so hote þat ne ȝour herte brestþ.
Perfor ȝeld þat I þe ȝaf and æȝen tourne,
Entre þer þou [o]ut cam, and etyþ a schouldere. (1081–88)

[One Maria, a noble woman, out of hunger for food cooked on coals her own child that she bore, roasted its back and its ribs with rueful words, saying, “Son, our sorrow has surrounded us on all sides: a battle outside the city to slay our bodies; within a hunger so intense that it nearly bursts our

70. Blurton, Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature, 8.
hearts. Therefore give back the life that I gave you. Turn about and enter the body you came out from.” And she ate a shoulder.

The reference to a “myld” or “noble” woman accentuates the supposedly uncharacteristic nature of her behavior and emphasizes the depths of despair that have driven a gentle woman to commit such a base act. More importantly, the invocation of the name “Marie” and the expression of her sorrow connect her suffering with that of the Virgin Mary when she watched the crucifixion of her son Jesus. Given the Virgin Mary’s image as the quintessential mother who nursed the savior of humankind, devout Christians would have been disturbed by the perversity of the scene. The reference to the Virgin Mary juxtaposed with the eating of a child, invites us to read this Maria as a monstrous version of Christ’s Mary, who is transformed from the bearer and nurturer of Jesus into a desperate cannibal, who justifies her right to the consumption of his body by claiming that he will return to her stomach from whence he came. The Eucharistic nature of this cannibalism is even more explicit than Vespasian’s earlier order to blow the ashes of Caiaphas and the other flayed Jewish clerks over the walls of Jerusalem for the living Jews to drink. By demanding that the Jews “bible” (724) or drink the powdered remains of the priests and then later reducing Maria to the eating of the shoulder of her child, the Siege-poet highlights the contaminated Eucharistic structure behind these antitypical acts. In these cases, no transubstantiation is necessary or desired—the ritual is raw in its literality and evokes the horror of those that discover Maria’s sacrilege. To medieval Christians, cannibalism was the most heinous crime one could commit because the act confused bodily identities and posed a problem for the last days when the bodies of the faithful would be reunited. To make matters worse, it is the

71. Compare also Geoffrey Chaucer’s Prioress’s Tale, in which similar “pitous” language is used to describe the sorrow of the mother of the “litel clergeon” who is ritually sacrificed by Jews (593–624). See The Riverside Chaucer, ed. Larry Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

72. Chism, Alliterative Revivals, 161. For the literary history of Maria’s cannibalism, see Merrall Llewelyn Price, “Imperial Violence and the Monstrous Mother: Cannibalism at the Siege of Jerusalem,” in Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts, eds. Eve Salisbury, Georgiana Donavin, and Merrall Llewelyn Price (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 272–98. Price suggests that Josephus may have created this cannibalistic Maria, since his Jewish Wars contains the earliest account. However, the starving mother motif originates in 2 Kings 6:28, in which a Samarian woman and her neighbor devour her son with the agreement that they will eat the neighbor’s son the following day. Unfortunately for the Samarian woman, the neighbor hides her son the next day, breaking their agreement (273).

most vilified Other, the Jew, who violates the innocent body of a child, which conjures images of other antisemitic allegations, such as child abuse, host desecration, and well-poisoning that were common after the twelfth century. The image of a Jew devouring a child specifically plays on the Christian fear of Jewish ritual cannibalism, made famous at the German monastery at Fulda where Jews were accused of murdering five boys and drawing their blood for religious or medicinal purposes. As Miri Rubin observes about such xenophobia, “The Jew came to carry all of the pent up anxiety, shame and fear which Christians harboured about themselves, their bodies, their God, their doubts, their desires.” Because of the horror of bodily fragmentation and the innocence of the Christ-like infant, its dismemberment and consumption strikes a ghastly note for the Christian reader.

In describing this episode, however, the Siege-poet does not use Maria’s cannibalism to condemn the Jews. Instead, he alters his sources and provides sympathetic commentary through eyewitness testimony, another hallmark of the historiography of the Guido-tradition. The Siege contains one of the earliest versions in English of this infamous tale of Maria’s cannibalism and primarily depends on Josephus’ account; however, the Siege-poet also draws from Hegesippus’ fourth-century Latin redaction of the Jewish War, which uniquely includes Maria’s claim that her child return to her womb. Yet, instead of translating Hegesippus’ condemnation of “factum Mariae, quod cuiusvis barbari atque impii mens perhorrescat” [“the deed of Maria, at which the mind of even the barbarian and the impious would shudder”], the Siege-poet offers no moral evaluation of Maria’s act and emphasizes the pitiable nature of her state through a revised account of the eyewitnesses of


75. Langmuir, Toward a Definition of Antisemitism, 264; Annales Ephordenses in Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores (Hanover, 1826–1934), 16:31; Annales Marbacenses in Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 17:178.


77. Price, “Imperial Violence and the Monstrous Mother,” 279. Price contends that since the Siege-poet emphasizes the place “þer þou [o]ut cam” rather than Hegesippus’ “redi fili in illud naturale secretum in quo domicilio sumsisit spiritum” [return, son, into that natural mystery in which place you took up the spirit], the Siege-poet transforms Hegesippus’ “womb-stomach conflation” into “a vagina-mouth conflation, suggesting a connection between the motif of the devouring mother and castration anxiety. See also Barbara Creed, The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis (London: Routledge, 1993), 109.
this horror. After smelling the roasting meat, starving Jews storm through her door, demanding their share. When she offers them a piece of her son they recoil in horror:

[Forþ] ey went for wo wep[ande sore]
And sayn, ‘alas in þis lif how longe schul we dwelle?
ȝit better were at o brayed in batail to deye
Þan þus in langur to lyue and lengþen our fyne.’ (1097–1100)

[‘They went away from this woe, weeping sorely and saying, “Alas, how long shall we endure in this life? It would be better to die from one blow in battle than to live in anguish this way and prolong our end.”’]

Far from rejoicing in their plight, the Siege-poet expresses ambivalence for the dire fate of the Jews in reproducing their sympathetic laments. This is in contrast to his source Josephus, who precedes this scene with a barbarization of his fellow Jews, claiming that they consume feces and other “food” that even the lowest of animals would reject (5.571). Instead of following his sources that emphasize the perversions of the Jews, the Siege-poet transforms the episode’s effect from disgust to desperation. In the manner of the Kiddish ha-Shem or Sanctification of God’s Name, they decide to sacrifice all who do not possess the strength to fight. According to the Vindicta salvatoris, twelve thousand Jews slay one another to claim the glory of their own defeat, but in the Siege, it is characterized as a mercy killing. By creating a more desperate fate for the Jews, the Siege-poet does not paint their deaths as unjustified, but rather condemns the manner of their deaths. Titus amplifies his power as an instrument of God to a level of imperial cruelty that transcends the ethics of Christian vengeance. The decision to kill themselves also intimately connects Jewish cannibalism and suicide in a way reminiscent of

78. For a more extensive discussion of Hegesippus’ account, see Price, “Imperial Violence and the Monstrous Mother,” 275–76.


80. “Melius est nobis ut nosmetipsum interficiamus, quam dicant Romani quod illi occidissent nos et fecissent super nos victoriam. Et extrarun gladios suos et percusserunt se, et mortui sunt numero duodecin millia hominum ex ipsis” [It is better that we should destroy ourselves than the Romans say that they had struck us down and had obtained victory over us. And they drew forth their swords and pierced themselves, and twelve thousand people died]. For the text of Vindicta salvatoris see Constantin Tischendorf, ed., Evangelia apocrypha (Leipzig: Mendelssohn, 1876), 477; 471–86.
their earlier consumption of the ashes of Caiaphas and his fellow priests, a crime which had been directly preceded by seven hundred Jews who “slow himself for sorrow of here clerkes” (714). Here again, grief, not a desire for glory, instigates self-immolation.

Both their refusal to satisfy their hunger and their desire to die honorably elevates their virtues and reminds us of the temperance and grace of Josephus that directly precede Maria’s pitiable cannibalism. Through the juxtaposition of Jewish mercy and suffering, the actions of the Romans in the figure of Titus are called into question. Titus receives the grace of God through Josephus, but refuses to grant a truce to the Jews who have been reduced to eating their clothes and their children (1110). It is only when Titus hears about the dead being thrown over the city walls because of the lack of burial ground that he finally breaks down and shows remorse:

Whan Titus told was þe tale, to trewe God he vouched
Pat he propfred hem pes and grete pite hadde. (1155–56)

[When Titus was told this tale, he vowed to true God that he had offered them peace and had great pity for them.]

His grief at the Jewish suffering commences the sixth and final passus of the poem, which prepares readers for the lamentable obliteration of Jerusalem. As the events unfold and the Roman besiegers are confronted with the sight of the emaciated bodies of the Jews, the sympathy expressed for the fate of the besieged increases. Titus makes his way into the city, smelling the dead corpses and viewing those who had become reduced to “[n]o gretter þan a grehounde to grype on þe medil” [no greater than a greyhound to grip around the middle] (1252). Even though Titus “tarieþ no ȝt” [did not delay] (1253), the Siege-poet interrupts the narrative to lament that it “was pite to byholde” [was a pity to behold] (1247). The humanity of the Jews also swells—whereas they are normally characterized as the infidel, the Jews now become “[w]ymmen” (1147), “ladies” (1249), “[b]urges” (1251), and “peple” (1247). Even though the Siege-poet ultimately sanctions their destruction, he cannot refrain from expressing what Elisa Narin van Court has called “the humanizing impulse” that mollifies the antisemitism of the narrative and condemns the imperial resolve of the Romans.81

To consolidate his sympathy for the Jews and his ambivalence about Roman imperialism, the Siege-poet attends to the fate of Sir Sabyn of Syria,

the soldier who earlier used the flaying motif to persuade Vespasian to embrace his imperial seat. As the Romans cease their siege and storm the city, Sir Sabyn and Domitian begin an assault of the walls. Sir Sabyn ascends the ladder and slays six Jews, before the seventh bests him:

Þe seueþ hitteþ on hym  an vnhende dynte
Þat þe brayn out brast  at boþ noseþrylles,
And Sabyn ded of þe dynt  into þe diche falleþ. (1202–4)

[The seventh hit him with such a hideous strike that his brain burst out through both nostrils, and Sabyn, dead from the blow, fell into the ditch.]

The numerologically significant seventh debrains Sir Sabyn and sends his body to the ditch where the other rotting bodies lie. It is important to note that the Siege-poet does not describe the specific fate of any other character and that Sir Sabyn is the only Roman captain to be killed. When we juxtapose this scene with Sir Sabyn’s earlier imperial logic in his advice to Vespasian, the strike to his head becomes a blow to imperial reason. Unlike his source Josephus, who distinguishes Sir Sabyn from the other soldiers as exceedingly thin with blackened skin, the Siege-poet does not emphasize his eastern heritage and instead associates him with the future Roman emperor Domitian in their assault upon the walls. Sir Sabyn’s violent death then serves as a Roman portent of doom that reminds readers of the biblical prophecies and visions of the sword and heavenly army that had appeared three years prior, spelling the judgment of Jerusalem. By recalling them in the aftermath of Sir Sabyn’s death and in the midst of Titus’ ire, the Siege-poet does not, as Chism suggests, “separate the invaders from the victims.” Instead the fates of the conquering Romans are conflated with the conquered Jews. The Siege-poet never wavers in exacting what the audience would have perceived as a justified punishment of the Jews, but complicates a clear opposition between the besiegers and the besieged to critique Roman imperialism.

From the scourged corpus Christi to the brainless Sir Sabyn, the Siege-poet inserts horrific illustrations of mutilated, dismembered, and revived bodies into his alliterative narrative not to delight bloodthirsty readers, but rather to emphasize the indiscriminate corporeal damage that inheres to

martial assertions of imperial sovereignty. The alliterative long line is an appropriate choice, not only because of its adaptability to historical themes, but also because of its ability to replicate the violence and frenetic pace of battle. As Thorlac Turville-Petre observes, alliterative romanciers such as the Siege-poet “realized how wonderfully alliterative verse, with its repeated emphasis on the stressed syllables, evoked the energy of a violent battle or a storm at sea, and some poets seize on every opportunity for a display of this sort. The Siege of Jerusalem is mainly taken up with endless descriptions of battles. Individually they are fairly powerful, but together they quite overwhelm the story.”

The relentless succession of scenes of dismemberment and corporeal malady are so vivid and dominant that the poem reads as if it belongs to an unrecognized genre of medieval horror. Through these horrific images, the Siege-poet obscures the message of Christian vengeance and submits the imperialism of the Romans to scrutiny. Attention is consistently directed to victimized bodies, which exhibit a corporeal didacticism that privileges compassion over vengeance. While a providential structure is certainly evident throughout the poem, its articulation of salvation history is frequently interrupted by dismembered bodies, which express a message that strives against enthusiasm about martial endeavors, Roman imperialism, and antisemitism. Because of their status as “bare life” within the Roman sovereign sphere, the bodies of Caiaphas, his clerks, Maria, and her son are equalized with Christ as casualties of imperialism. By eliminating the sacrificial nature of Christ’s crucifixion and reminding the audience of his identity as a Jew, this corporeal didacticism belies the providential nature of the salvational poetic that emphasizes the redemption of Christ’s sacrifice. Without a christological justification for such violence against Jews, the destruction of Jerusalem becomes merely an object the expanding Roman Empire may consume.

AUGUSTINIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

As tempting as it might be to reduce the Siege to a singular product of the skeptical Guido-tradition, its thematic complexity and tentative providentiality reflect the influence of a variety of theological and historical discourses. The Siege-poet’s reluctance to embrace Jewish suffering may have been influenced by the Augustinian teaching that urged the preservation of Jews as the witnesses to Old Testament law. Based on manuscript evidence, the

poem was likely composed at Bolton Priory, which would make the Siege-poet an Augustinian canon who would have been conversant not only with a large number of Latin histories such as Guido’s *Historia* and Ranulph Higden’s *Polychronicon*, but also the Augustinian doctrine of toleration that was expressed through texts such as William of Newburgh’s twelfth-century *Historia rerum Anglicarum*. These histories vary widely in their subject matter and scope, using genealogical modes of history, arguing for the preservation of the Jewish people, and questioning the validity of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s popular version of British history. Scholarly studies have already traced the influence of Higden and Newburgh upon the *Siege*, but they have not commented on the significance of this anti-Galfridian strain upon the poem. As the following analysis indicates, the *Siege’s* place within the Guido-tradition suits this Augustinian historiographic context.

We should begin our investigation of local anti-Galfridian sentiment with the Augustinian canon William of Newburgh since his *Historia* is the most intimately connected with local Yorkshire history and expresses a sympathetic perspective of Judaism. Like the *Siege*, William’s chronicle contains explicit accounts of violence against Jews, but his subject is not the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Instead, William records the pogroms that occurred in Yorkshire in 1190, including both specific details of the riots and his own opinions about the necessity of preserving the Jewish race as physical representations of Christ’s sacrifice (316–17). Even though William considers Jews to be the treacherous crucifiers of Christ, he also criticizes their barbarous treatment at the hands of avaricious English Christians (308–9; 312; 313). In his account of the massacre at York, he cites Psalm 59:12, which commands, “Ne occidas eos, nequando obliviscantur populi mei” [Slay them not, lest my people forget] (316). This central passage to the Augustinian doctrine of toleration is the basis for the claim that Jews should be preserved as living witnesses of the Old Testament law. Jeremy Cohen urges, however, “One ought not to characterize Augustine as an advocate of Jews and Judaism,” since he did not stray from the standard patristic


exegesis that supported their diaspora. In following Augustine, William still expresses an anti-Judaic xenophobia, but he contextualizes the York pogrom with the siege at Masada (318–9), providing a frame that redirects his ire onto the persecuting Christians. He draws on Josephus’ *Jewish War* to describe the way the Jews in Clifford Tower slay themselves in avoidance of capture by the Christian townspeople, which increases his sympathy for the Jewish victims and compels him to condemn the Christian murderers. William even shockingly suggests, “Et de his quidem, quos ita plusquam belluina illa confecit immanitas, incunctantur dixerim, quia si in petitione sacri baptismatis fictio defuit, ejus nequaquam effectu fraudatos sanguis proprius baptizavit. Sive autem ficte sive non ficte sacrum petierunt lavacrum, incensusibilis est exocrinanda illa crudelitas lanistarum” [With regard to these persons, whom savage excess executed thus, if there was no fiction in their petition for holy Baptism, I will assert, without hesitation, that their own blood baptized them, and by no means were robbed of its efficacy; but whether they sought the holy font with deception or without deception, the cruelty of those murderers is to be execrated without excuse] (321–2).

Here, William not only illustrates the baptismal power of their sacramental death, but also upbraids the actions of the Christians who enacted the pogroms. This defense of besieged Jews within the context of the Roman siege of Masada and William’s use of Josephus translates almost seamlessly into the ideologically modulated antisemitism that we find in the *Siege*.

The *Siege*-poet, likely an Augustinian canon from Yorkshire as well, would have been familiar with the doctrine of toleration and Newburgh’s history, which explains not only his disgust for antisemitic violence, but also his distrust of imperialistic enthusiasm. The consummate historiographic tradition that reflects the potential for global sovereignty emerges from Geoffrey’s popular *Historia*, since it articulates the genealogical power of empire from the fall of Troy through the prophecies of Merlin. However, historians such as William of Malmesbury and Gerald of Wales rejected Geoffrey’s claims to historical accuracy and attacked the existence of his anonymous Welsh source. One of the central figures of this anti-Galfridan historiography was none other than William of Newburgh.


In the preface to his *Historia*, William launches an invective against the “ridicula figmenta” (11) of Geoffrey, contrasting his ridiculous fictions to his truthful sources in Bede and Gildas, who make no attempts to embellish the glory of the Britons and unashamedly relate the, sometimes embarrassing, truth of the English people. Gildas in particular emerges as admirable in his truth telling: “nec veretur, ut verum non taceat, Brito de Britonibus scribere quod nec in bello fortes fuerint, nec in pace fideles” [Nor is the Briton (Gildas) afraid, so that as a result he keeps quiet about the truth, to write about the Britons that they were neither courageous in war, nor faithful in peace] (11). William’s praise of the guileless historiography of Bede and Gildas is strikingly similar to Guido’s admiration of the eyewitness accounts of Dares and Dictys, which he claims adhere to “veritatem” [truth] and “fidelis scriptura” [faithful writing] (3). The similarities continue as William commences his philippic against Geoffrey; he not only accuses Geoffrey of inventing fictions, but also derides him for praising the Britons above the Macedonians and the Romans (11). Guido likewise criticizes Homer, Ovid, and Virgil for inserting “fictionibus” [fictions] (3–4) into their epic histories, which then caused future generations to receive a contaminated version of the fall of Troy. Using the examples of poor historians, both William and Guido distance themselves from historiography that blends truth with invention.

William then proceeds into a much more amplified invective than can be found in Guido—he launches a full-scale attack on Galfridian historiography, critiquing especially the prophecies of Merlin and the outlandish accounts of King Arthur’s conquests (12–17). As he concludes his assault, William sarcastically asks, “An alium orbem somniat infinita regna habentem, in quo ea continguerunt, quae supra memoravit?” [Does he dream of another world possessing countless kingdoms, in which the circumstances he has recounted took place?] (17). This charge against Geoffrey for indulging imperial fancies positions his own history as one that will remain not only faithful to the truth, but also critical of British attempts to match the empire of the Romans. Given the fact that William was a historian who followed the Augustinian-Orosian paradigm, his reluctance to accept Geoffrey’s new secular history is no surprise. For the *Siege*-poet, the historical perspective he obtained from


93. “At contra quidam nostris temporibus, pro expiandis his Britonum maculis, scriptor emergit, ridicula de eisdem figmenta contextens, eosque longe supra virtutem Macedonum et Romanorum impudenti vanitate attollens.”

both William and Guido provided him with a suitable basis for his ambivalence about the birth of the Christian imperialism that he relates in his account of the fall of Jerusalem. With this historical context in mind, we are hard pressed to read the Siege-poet’s graphic descriptions of mutilated bodies as merely an indulgence in a “decadent poetic” and instead are urged to see these gruesome images as representations of the unsavory consequences of war and empire.\footnote{Pearsall, \textit{Old and Middle English Poetry}, 169.}

Another of the Siege-poet’s sources, Higden’s \textit{Polychronicon}, corroborates his skepticism of Galfridian historiography. While Higden draws on Geoffrey’s \textit{Historia} extensively in producing the English portion of his universal history, he expresses doubts about the veracity of King Arthur’s conquests in a manner strikingly similar to that of William: “Gaufridus dicit se mirari quod Gildas et Beda nullam de Arthuro in suis scriptis fecerunt mentionem; immo magis mirandum puto cur ille Gaufridus tantum extulerit, quem omnes antiques veraces et famosi historici poene intactum reliquerrunt” [Geoffrey states that he wonders why Gildas and Bede made no mention of Arthur in their writings, but I think it should be wondered why Geoffrey praised him so much, whom all ancient authorities and famous historians left untouched] (5.334, 336).\footnote{For more on Higden’s use of Geoffrey in the writing of British history, see John Taylor, \textit{The Universal Chronicle of Ranulph Higden} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 44–45; T. D. Kendrick, \textit{British Antiquity} (London: Methuen, 1950), 14.} His invocation of Gildas and Bede is reminiscent of William’s invective, a reference that was not lost on Higden’s English translator John Trevisa, who seems, at first glance, to be a staunch defender of Galfridian historiography.\footnote{As I demonstrate in the sixth chapter (208–18), Trevisa’s defense of Geoffrey is most likely inserted to please his patron, Lord Berkeley.} After translating Higden’s doubts about Geoffrey’s historical accuracy, Trevisa interrupts the narrative, insisting, “Here William telleþ a magel tale wiþ oute evidence; and Ranulphus his resouns, þat he meveþ ajenst Gaufridus and Arthur, schulde non clerke move þat can knowe an argument, for it followeþ it nouȝt” (5.337). Trevisa attacks both Higden and William in an ardent attempt to defend Galfridian historiography, which not only attests to Geoffrey’s continuing popularity throughout the later Middle Ages, but also represents a larger move to suppress such skepticism about Arthur’s existence and his continuation of empire.

Furthermore, Higden’s doubts about Geoffrey’s veracity may be evidence of a particularly northern interpretation of British history, since Higden wrote the \textit{Polychronicon} at nearby St. Werburgh’s in Chester. Since it began to be circulated among nearby monasteries as early as 1340, it had a wide

influence throughout the region, and one copy, British Library MS Harley 3600, even ended up at Whalley Abbey, the residence of John Clerk.98 Clerk may have even obtained the idea for concealing his name in the flourished capitals of each of his chapters from Higden, who disguised his name in the same way.99 Since the Siege-poet was most likely a neighbor of both Chester and Whalley, it is reasonable to suggest that both the Destruction and the Polychronicon served as local historiographic influences for his perspective on imperialism.

When we consider the collective influence of Guido, Clerk, William, and Higden, it becomes clear that the Siege-poet contributed to historiography that sought truthful accounts of British deeds and questioned imperial fantasies. While this analysis of William’s Historia and Higden’s Polychronicon does not prove the composition of the Siege at Bolton, it strengthens the previous suggestions by Ralph Hanna, David Lawton, and Elisa Narin van Court that the Siege-poet wrote and disseminated his work from this region. Furthermore, the existence of anti-Galfridian invective within these texts reinforces the Siege-poet’s assimilation of a skeptical discourse that interrogates English hereditary claims to empire. When the Siege, a poem replete with horrifying and sympathetic depictions of violence against Jews, is read within the context of the Augustinian doctrine of toleration and the repudiation of imperial designs, it is difficult to interpret the Roman siege of Jerusalem as a providential inevitability carried out with the enthusiastic sanction of the poet.

ROME AS TROY

Having argued for the Siege as a poem that strives against Galfridian historiography and embraces the Guido-tradition, I conclude this chapter by addressing a potential objection to my claim that the poem engages in the debate of translatio imperii: the apparent absence of the figure of Troy.

99. Turville-Petre, “The Author of The Destruction of Troy,” 264–65. Just as the initial letters of each chapter of Destruction spell “Maistur Iohannes Clerk de Whalele,” the initial letters of the first sixty-six chapters of Polychronicon spell “PRESENTEM CRONICAM CONPILAVIT FRATER RANULPHUS CESTRENSIS MONACHUS” (“Brother Ranulph, a Cisterian monk, compiled this present chronicle”). Turville-Petre also notes that the Speculum Curatorum uses the same naming method and that the end of Ars Componenti Sermones contains a note that states, “littere capitanei huius artis syllabatim inuicem tantum sonant Ars Ranulphi Cestrensis” (“These capital letters by the method of alternating syllables are consistent with the method of Ranulph, the Cistercian”).
As pervasive as the popular knowledge of Trojan historiography was during the fourteenth century, we may ultimately wonder if the readers of the Siege would have so intimately associated the fates of Troy and Rome. And even if they did, would they have related the fall of Troy and Rome with the destruction of Jerusalem? To resolve these doubts, we should return to Guido’s text. First of all, despite the fact that his Historia, both by virtue of its title and content, is indelibly concerned with the figure of Troy, it also reflects a prominent interest in the figure of Rome. This is no real surprise, since the logic of the translatio imperii demands that the Roman Empire subsume its destructive past in order to create imperial glory, so much so that the very fact that Troy was never really an empire is entirely forgotten in the later Middle Ages. Since the linearity of the translation of power demands a constant movement forward, from destruction to rebirth, and the Roman Empire looms large as having achieved the penultimate western imperial fantasy, Britain’s claim to a Trojan origin becomes an allegory for a genealogical claim to Rome. To invoke Troy is to invoke Rome, and vice versa.

But just as Roman glory sheds imperial light upon Troy, the destroyed figure of Troy provides a faulty architectural model for Rome. This is demonstrated most clearly when Guido describes the construction of the New Troy and the river Xanthus that runs through it. He naturally compares its layout to that of Rome: “Ad huius itaque fluminis instar ordinates extitit Tyber Rome, qui, per medium Rome erumpens, per Troyanum Heneam ad similtudinem Troye factam vrbem Rome geminas distinctxit in partes” [The Tiber at Rome was arranged in the image of this river, which, running through the middle of Rome, divided into two parts the city of Rome made in the likeness of Troy by the Trojan Aeneas] (48–49). Here Guido identifies Aeneas as a kind of mimetic Aristotelian architect. Aeneas does not simply establish the Trojan origin of Rome by virtue of his heritage—he consciously builds a third Troy in the image of its predecessor. Guido’s use of “image” (instar) and “likeness” (similtudinem) spell doom for Rome, because it is the

100. Nicholas Birns, “The Trojan Myth: Postmodern Reverberations,” Exemplaria 5.1 (1993): 45–78, at 53. Drawing on Harold Bloom’s The Anxiety of Influence, Birns contends that this dislocation is not only a “diachronic anxiety” whereby claims to Trojan ancestry are attempts to avoid “the inverse dialectic between imperium and ecclesia . . . and avert a fate like Rome’s,” but also a “lateral anxiety” that essentially erases the significance of eastern rivals such as Byzantium and Islam. Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973). See also Geraldine Heng, Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 17–61, 115–79. Heng similarly suggests that Rome in Geoffrey’s Historia and in the alliterative Morte actually represents twelfth-century Constantinople within the context of the First Crusade.
same Aeneas who callously watches Troy burn to the ground through his treasonous negotiations with the Greeks later in the *Historia*.

Guido’s articulation of the architectural aesthetic of mimesis marks a clear divergence from Aeneas’ role as the founder of Rome in Virgil’s *Aeneid*. In Book III of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas and his band of fleeing Trojans arrive on an island that has been inhabited by Trojan refugees such as Andromache and Helenus. Here at Buthrotum, Aeneas witnesses a replica of Troy (*parvam Troyam*) that includes all of the architectural details of the former Troy, including Pergamum and the Xanthus. Yet, Virgil takes pains to show that Aeneas is not satisfied with the *imitatio* before his eyes, and that he will construct a Rome that will prove to be more than a simple reproduction. As Aeneas prepares to leave, he declares,

> effigiem Xanthi Troiamque uidetis  
> . . . si quando Thybrim uicinaque Thybridis arua  
> intraro gentique meae data moenia cernam,  
> cognates urbes olim populosque propinquos  
> . . . unam faciemus utramque / Troiam animis. (497–505)\(^{101}\)

[A copy of Xanthus and Troy you see. . . . If ever I enter the Tiber and Tiber’s neighboring fields and observe the city-walls granted to my race, at that time, of our sister cities and neighboring peoples . . . of these two we shall make one Troy in spirit.]

The use of the word “cernam,” which I translate as “observe,” literally means “separate,” implying a distinction between the city-walls of Rome and those he has witnessed of Troy and its effigy. He also establishes that they will only be Troy in spirit (*animis*), which reflects his desire to carry on the soul of Troy, without transmuting its image. This distinction holds the utmost importance because Aeneas’ Rome can only assume its imperial power through a genealogy that must exorcise its destructive past. As David Quint notes, “with its parade of replica Troys—each successively and more explicitly revealed to be a place of death—the fiction of Book 3 insists that this future can only be reached if the Trojans relinquish their past and its memories, if they can escape from a pattern of traumatic repetition.”\(^{102}\) This avoidance of repetition is an avoidance of architectural imitation, since deathly reconstructions of Troy cannot escape nostalgia of the previous model of Troy.

102. Quint, “Repetition and Ideology in the *Aeneid*,” in *Epic and Empire*, 61.
Instead of encouraging an evasion of the past, Guido emphasizes the instar and simultudinem of Troy and Rome, which effectively reproduce the destructive cycle of building new Troys that begins with Priam and continues with Aeneas. Guido amplifies the accuracy of the reproduction by identifying common characteristics of each city: division and contamination. The Xanthus, which divides Troy into two parts, not only provides sustenance, but also eliminates waste through subterraneous tunnels (48). By constructing the Tiber in a similar manner, Aeneas translates these same characteristics to Rome, which prove to contain more than architectural significance. The image of a city divided with sewers that force contamination underground becomes a metaphor for the divisive war councils and the secret treason of Antenor and Aeneas. This is a far cry from the copy of the Xanthus in Virgil’s Aeneid, which is described as a drying brook (arentem rivum [350]), a clear indication of its infertility and harbinger of Troy’s irreproducibility. Instead, Aeneas is called to the Tiber, which will transcend the image of the Xanthus and spawn imperial growth that cannot be achieved through the reproduction of a doomed city. By departing from Virgilian architecture and having Aeneas construct Rome based on this faulty model of Troy, Guido inscribes a destructive subtext into the image of Rome, one that would historically divide and conquer its imitations.

Clearly the Siege-poet and his readers would have received ample justification for connecting the fates of Troy and Rome from Guido or Clerk’s Trojan historiography, but would they have perceived the destruction of Jerusalem and its inhabitants to be prophetic for the fate of the Roman Empire? To answer this question, I have identified two interrogations of imperial propaganda that the Siege shares with the Destruction: the logic of the translatio imperii that requires the destruction of one empire in order to spawn the construction of another; and the synecdochic relationship between bodies and cities. In the same way that Clerk articulates the fall and rise of New Troys, the Siege-poet imagines the beginning of a Christian empire through the destruction of Jerusalem and the return of the soldiers to Rome. While the Siege-poet certainly asserts the power of the Roman Empire, he does so in a way that confounds stark differences between Romans and Jews, bodies and cities. The Siege-poet blurs distinctions through the accumulation of scenes that describe the destruction of bodies and the grief of the besieged. And just like its alliterative relative, the Destruction, the fate of the bodies and cities are intimately connected thematically and linguistically. The bodies of

103. “Hic etiam fluvius per meatus artificiose compositos et subterraneas caharactas per laentes ductus aquarem neccessaria fecunditate decurrens ciuitatem ipsam ordinates incursionibus mundabat, per quarum lauacrum congeste immunditie purgabantur.”
the besieged Jews are not only obliterated, but also liquidated in the same way as the city itself.

The most powerful example of the Siege-poet’s equation of the Jewish body to the city of Jerusalem occurs in the final days of the siege in a manner reminiscent of Aeneas and Antenor’s treasonous negotiations with the Greeks in the Destruction. As the starving Jews await their impending destruction, many resort to eating the only object of value they have left: their gold. After Titus accepts their surrender and cedes their passage out of Jerusalem, a few Roman soldiers realize that these Jews have hidden their treasure in their stomachs:

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

In their greed, the Romans liquidate the Jewish bodies’ gold, forcing a violent expectoration of wealth. This is the macabre antithesis of Maria’s cannibalism—instead of a return to the stomach, it is a withdrawal from it. Shortly afterwards, the Romans seek greater monetary extractions from the city itself, which “Telle couþe no tonge þe tresours þat þey founden” [no tongue could tell of the treasure they found] (1274). Despite the disclaimer, the Siege-poet describes the treasure the Romans pillage in great detail, emphasizing the Roman avarice and demonstrating a keen interest in the wealth of Jerusalem (1254–80). The special attention the Siege-poet gives to the gold of the Jews may have also been the result of the “bullionism” or drain of gold and silver bullion after 1350 as well as the famine and debts that Bolton Priory suffered in the early fourteenth century. In any case, these bullion fantasies intimately connect the fate of the bodies of the Jews with the city of Jerusalem in a manner undeniably similar to Aeneas and Antenor’s treason against Troy. For the money of the Greeks, they sacrifice the body of their king Priam and the great city that they had previously called their own.

Likewise, the Romans destroy and burn the city in a manner that mirrors not only their earlier mutilation and cremation of Caiaphas and the other

Jewish priests, but also the fall of Troy in Clerk’s *Destruction*. The Romans dismember the city, tearing down its “[p]elours” (1269) and “walles” (1282), and also burn every last vestige of the temple and town, reducing it to “pou-dere” (1284). This language recalls the torture and burning of the Jewish priests, who were eventually transformed into “browne askes” (720) and blown back into the city as “powdere” (722) for the inhabitants to drink. The reduction of the city to ashes is also found in the *Destruction* when the Greeks “[gr]ete palis of prise put into askys” (12009), a phrase that links the fate of the Troy and Jerusalem. As Malcolm Hebron notes, literary illustrations of the sieges of Troy and Jerusalem are often very similar because, “[a]t the heart of the vision of besieged Troy of Jerusalem is the idea of a purging experience, a painful rite of passage in which a great cultural or spiritual change is effected.”

For Clerk and the *Siege*-poet, purgation requires human casualties and a physical return to dust through burning and beating. In the *Siege*, Titus orders, “Doun bete þe bilde, brenne hit into grounde” [the buildings beaten down, burned to the ground] (1264) and Jerusalem is later “doun betyn and brent into blake erþe” [beaten down and burned into the black earth] (1292) just as Troy in the *Destruction* is “bete doun to the bare erthe” [beaten down into the bare earth] (12005). The linguistic and syntactic similarities between these descriptions reaffirm the relationship of dependence between the two poems, and also suggest a greater thematic similarity of a return to dust, which gestures towards the transience of these imperial endeavors. Not only do bodies assume their place in the ground in the listing of tombs at the end of the *Destruction*, but also the cities themselves take a residence in the earth, which prevents their imperial translation. Titus even punctuates the impossibility of translation by commanding that his soliders plow the ground and sow it with salt. After this is done he declares, “Now is þis stalwourþe stede distroied foreuere” [Now this stronghold is destroyed forever] (1294–96). By sowing the ground with salt and declaring that this city will never rise again, Titus both literally ensures that the Jews will no longer have a homeland and paradoxically sterilizes the salvific authority to be gained from it. Given the Roman heritage in Troy and the eternal nature of destruction proclaimed through the words “distroied foreuere,” the *Siege*-poet cleverly amplifies the language of the destruction of Troy to prophesy the doom to come for the Roman Empire.

Since the *Siege* shares the amplificatory rhetoric, corporeal didacticism, and historiographic perspective of the Guido-tradition, it is no surprise that it also promulgates the Trojan “plague of great destruction.” Yet, inasmuch as

this chapter seeks to identify the Siege-poet’s assimilation of Clerk’s alliterative style and Guido’s imperial pessimism, it must not be said that the Siege is despairingly “imitative.”¹⁰⁶ I would suggest, in the words of Michel Foucault, that a reading of Siege defies attempts to “distinguish the original from the repetitive” in its interweaving of theological and historical source material and unique embellishments.¹⁰⁷ As much as the Siege-poet focuses his efforts on the destruction of Jerusalem, he cleverly inserts accounts of the burning of Rome (900) and the casting of Vitellius’ body into the Tiber (948) that both reflect Rome’s complicity in the fall of Jerusalem and highlight the dangers of architectural imitatio.

Especially instructive is the Siege-poet’s connotative use of the name Sir Sabyn, which appears throughout the narrative as a name that refers to two separate characters. The first “Sir Sabyn” is Titus Flavius Sabinus, Vespasian’s brother, who meets his end at the hands of the emperor Vitellius.¹⁰⁸ This murder incites the fraternal vengeance of Vespasian, who tortures and executes Vitellius by dragging him through the streets of Rome, disemboweling him, and then casting him screaming into the Tiber (939–48). As a conclusion to Vitellius’ imperial life, the Siege-poet remarks,

Seuen monþes þis [segge]  hadde septre on hande,
And þus loste he þe lyf for his luþer dedes.
Anóther segge was to seke þat septre schold haue,
For alle þis grete ben gon and neuer agayn tournen. (949–52)

[Seven months this man held the scepter in his hand, and thus lost his life for his terrible deeds. Another man was to seek that scepter, because all the great men were gone and never again returned.]

While the passage suggests that another “segge” would seek the throne, it is clear that any “grete” possibilities have left the scene. This skeptical tone is accentuated by the brevity of Vitellius’ reign, a mere seven months, which suggests that periods of peace will be brief. Moreover, the circumstances of Vitellius’ death provide a linguistic structure for the second “Sir Sabyn,” who appears shortly afterwards as the Syrian advisor to Vespasian who advises him to rule by proxy. The conflation of the two Sabyns is marked not only by their closeness to Vespasian, but also by their violent deaths and the numero-

¹⁰⁸. See Livingston’s note on line 939, *The Siege of Jerusalem*. 
logical instruction they provide about the interrelation between cities and bodies. As a kind of resurrected brother of Vespasian, the second Sir Sabyn shares Vitellius’ fate of being undone by the number seven: Vitellius dies in his seventh month as emperor and Sir Sabyn dies at the hands of the seventh warrior at the walls of Jerusalem (1202).

Furthermore, their corpses both inhabit architectural spaces, a river and a ditch, designed to keep contaminates from infecting inhabitants of the city. According to Guido, Aeneas constructed the Tiber in imitation of Troy’s Xanthus, but instead of revealing how the Tiber remains separate from the sewers, the Siege-poet figuratively connects Vitellius’ contamination of the famed Roman river with the diseased ditch and the stinking canal that carry poisoned air and water into Jerusalem.

\[\text{Suþ dommyn þe ditches with þe ded corses,} \\
\text{Crammen hit myd karayn þe kirnel[e]s alle vnder,} \\
\text{þat þe styne of þe ste[w]e myþt strike over þe walles} \\
\text{To coþe þe corsed folke þat hem kepe scholde.} \\
\text{þe cors of þe condit þat comen to toun} \\
\text{Stoppen, euereche a streem þer any str[and]e} \\
\text{With stockes and stones and stynekande bestes} \\
\text{þat þey no water myþt wynne þat weren enclosed. (685–92)}\]

[Then they choke the ditches with dead bodies, cram them with carrion under all the battlements, so that the stench from that vapor might spread over the walls to infect the cursed folk who should defend them. The course of the canal, every stream where any current went, that came into the town they stop with sticks and stones and rotting beasts so that the inhabitants of the city cannot obtain any water.]

This image both invokes and transforms Guido’s illustration of the Xanthus so that the cleansing canal succumbs to the contamination of an imperial siege and enhances the evils and division that plague a city such as Rome. Moreover, the Siege-poet’s reference to the potential of the ditch to “coþe” the Jewish inhabitants is reminiscent of Guido’s suggestion that the \textit{translatio imperii} will infect (\textit{infecerit}) the New Trojan line (11). These scenes and references combine connotatively to conflate the fates of the conquerors and the conquered and recognize the infectious power of sovereignty. Together they create an image of a river flowing into the city of Rome with the floating bodies of the dead king Vitellius and Sir Sabyn and the other rotting corpses that accompany such imperial fantasies. The contamination of imperial currents
represents the course of the narrative in which dismembered bodies emerge in gruesome succession, confounding sovereign succession and dooming the birth of Christian imperialism to come. The Romans are now building their own *parvam Troiam* that is a contaminated imitation of the imagined empire of their ancestors.