

Jews, Monks, and Martyred Children: The Development of Ritual Murder Narratives in Twelfth and Thirteenth- Century England

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Abstract

This thesis will explore the emergence and development of the narrative that Jews ritually killed Christian children in twelfth and thirteenth century England. The role that these accusations played in ‘demonising’ Jews did not diminish during the following centuries but instead grew in popularity. The accusations that gave rise to these narratives have their origin in the specific social, cultural, and religious environment of twelfth century England. Historians have long treated the accusations of ritual murder as separate events and analysed them as such. However, the power of these accusations lies in their ability to be constructed as narratives and to spread through adaption into different communities and societies. This adaption is due to the ability that these narratives have to incorporate other narratives that are popular in different communities. Hagiographical elements, Marian tales, and biblical stories that manipulation of the innocence of children were incorporated into the narratives of ritual murder which served to elicit a specific emotive response and engagement with their audience. This development in the nature of the ritual murder narratives is a reflection of both English society and the changing nature of the Anglo-Jewish relationship during the central Middle Ages. This thesis will add to the evolving discussions surrounding the emergence of ritual murder and the subsequent spread of the blood libel accusation. By tracing the accusations back to their origin in England, and analysing how it evolved during the space of two centuries, an increasingly comprehensive understanding of the narratives can be constructed. By utilising hagiographical material, chronicle accounts, and literature created in post-expulsion England, this thesis aims to present a cohesive analysis of different narrative strands that were woven together to construct and develop the accusations of ritual murder.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of those who suffered due to these accusations and the rhetoric of hate and intolerance that was spread throughout medieval Europe. These narratives of hatred led to the persecution of many of Europe's Jewish communities and to the death of countless Jews.

May their memory be a blessing.

INTRODUCTION

FOUR and twenty bonny boys
Were playing at the ba,
And by it came him sweet Sir Hugh,
And he playd oer them a'.
He kickd the ba with his right foot,
And catchd it wi his knee,
And throuch-and-thro the Jew's window
He gard the bonny ba flee.¹

This extract from a nineteenth-century version of the death of 'little Saint Hugh of Lincoln' demonstrates the transcendent nature of anti-Semitic legends and the ability of a medieval narrative to develop and survive in different societies. It recounts the twelfth-century ritual murder allegation, to an audience far removed from those who witnessed the original accusation and indeed who composed the original ballad. Versions of this ballad can be found in England, Ireland, Scotland, Canada, and America. The many variations illustrate the way this particular ballad which spread the idea of ritual murder and blood libel, survived centuries, immigration, and indeed massive societal changes. Ballads, fairy tales, stories, and narratives have the power to influence society and in some cases to alter the way people perceive situations and individuals. The themes involved in the ritual murder allegations such as the brutal murders of children, a 'demonic' other, and callous torture are key to understanding how they became popularised. As Gillian Bennett has noted, "so potent are these images that once someone is suspected or accused of any of

¹ Jamieson's Popular Ballad I, 151, As taken down by the editor from Mrs Brown's recitation. F. J. Child, *English and Scottish Ballads*, vol. 3, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1864, p. 243.

these things for any reason, the accusation takes on a life of its own.”² The development of the narratives of ritual murder, which had the ability to survive societal change and be adapted by different communities, will be the focus of this thesis.

This thesis will seek to explore the development of ritual murder, by examining the way in which the narratives were constructed and subsequently adapted around allegations in England during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The term ritual murder refers to the belief that Jews kidnapped, and then killed Christian children as part of ‘nefarious’ religious rituals. These murders were believed to have been constructed in a way that mimicked and mocked the death of Christ. During the High Middle Ages, the allegations of the ritual murder spread throughout Europe and developed into accusations of blood libel and host desecration. Host desecration and blood libel took hold in continental Europe during the twelfth century and developed their narrative variations. However, in England, the accusations remained firmly within the ritual murder tradition, and it is this specific narrative that this thesis will seek to explore and to understand how it took hold in English society.

This thesis will argue for a new exploration of ritual murder narratives in medieval England which will seek to understand the developments of the accusations as a whole rather than as individual events, or simply focusing on the few accounts that have survived with extensive documentation. In order to explore in depth an aspect of the narrative development, this discussion will focus on the allegations that occurred in England, beginning with the first case at Norwich in 1144 and ending with the accusation at

² G. Bennett, *Bodies: Sex Violence, Disease, and Death in Contemporary Legend*, Oxford, University Press of Mississippi, 2009, p. 250.

Northampton in 1279. This period in England saw a significant change in the development of narratives of ritual murder and allows the discussion to be contained within a specific geographic, social, and cultural landscape.

The accusations of ritual murder were constructed by Christian communities and imposed upon the minority Jewish community. Thus, these accusations are Christian and not Jewish narratives. Miri Rubin in her extensive look at medieval host desecration has described these types of narratives as ‘Gentile tales’, “the accusations of host desecration was both *history* and *story* and thus encompassed authority and universality while allowing space for individual participation and the working of fantasy.”³ These narratives will be the focus of this thesis rather than the alleged incidents themselves. This approach will allow an analysis of the language and structure as well as the other religious and cultural narratives that were incorporated into these ritual murder tales. Focusing on the narratives will provide an insight into the medieval communities and their perception of the Jewish minority that lived alongside them through analysing the way the specific narratives were constructed and disseminated. These accusations although they follow similar base structures were imbued with different narrative influences, which are products of the specific communities that appropriated the ritual murder accusations. Focusing on the accusations as ‘stand alone’ events allows for a breakdown of the factors that gave rise to this one allegation but not for a full analysis of where the accusation stands in the development of the ritual murder libel.

³ M. Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1999, p. 2.

The medieval Jewish presence in England can be framed between two specific dates. The Jewish presence began with their ability to create settlements in 1066 and ended with their expulsion on the orders of King Edward I in 1290. It was during this period that the accusations of ritual murder took place. However, the creation and developments of the narratives of ritual murder continued well after the Jewish expulsion and indeed into the Early Modern period. As the accusations in England became popularised, the records became limited and they were spread through folk narratives and tales rather than through written documentation. However, these accusations with only limited records are still incredibly important in understanding how and why the narratives developed, indeed those with limited references can offer as much to historians as the in-depth hagiographies or chronicle records of the more infamous cases. These accusations that we have limited references for are often bypassed or only mentioned in passing by historians, but they deserve a place in the history of ritual murder in England, as they are a key part of the broader picture of its development.

The accusations that are firmly recorded in medieval documents are the accusations most commonly examined by historians. The murder of William of Norwich in 1144, Harold of Gloucester murdered in 1168, Robert of Bury allegedly killed in 1181, the death of Adam of Bristol, which appears to have been committed in the late twelfth century, and the infamous murder of Hugh of Lincoln in 1255 are the cases most frequently considered by historians. Other accusation in medieval England took place in Winchester in 1192, 1225, and again in 1232, London in 1244, and Northampton in 1279. These accusations span 135 years and during this time, they changed significantly both in terms of their narrative construction and the way they spread throughout the population. Thus, in order

to understand the development of ritual murder accusations within England, every allegation needs to be included and explored.

The transmission of these narratives did not end with the Jewish expulsion in 1290, but continued to be recounted in ballads, poems, and plays one of the most important being the depiction in Chaucer's *Prioresses tale*. This continuation of these narratives post-expulsion indicates that the narratives themselves were indeed more powerful in creating anti-Jewish sentiment than the individual acts of murders. The removal of a Jewish presence did not stem the development of the accusation but simply sent it down a literary path. The approaches that historians and scholars in general take when exploring the accusations of ritual murder vary widely and these lead to tensions not only in the historiography itself but also with the wider social and political environment.

Historiographical Tensions

The study of Anglo-Jewish history is itself a testament to the changing nature of Christian-Jewish relations during the last century. During the late nineteenth century the first significant contribution to the study of medieval Anglo-Jewish history emerged, and along with this came the first exploration of ritual murder accusations. However, the historiography of medieval Anglo-Jewry in these early years focused on preserving surviving documents relating to this community and facilitating their publication for future research. This provided the groundwork for approaching the history of medieval Anglo-Jewry, which combined with the Jewish Historical Society of England to advance the understanding of this particular history. This 'heroic' age of Anglo-Jewish history ended in 1939 with the outbreak of war in Europe. Following the ravages of the Second World

War and the subsequent destruction of Europe's Jewish population, there was an aversion and an embarrassment attached to approaching England's Jewish heritage. The propaganda imagery used by the Nazi party to stir up anti-Semitism in Europe drew so heavily from the medieval foundations of these narratives that the emotive nature of the study of these narratives could not be divorced from the present political situation. The lack of post-World War Two discussions of ritual murder was part of a broader silence on Jewish history in Europe. The progression of time eventually led to historians once again being drawn into the study of Anglo-Jewish history.

In the 1970s and 1980s, historians began once again to consider the Jewish position in medieval England. However, the first comprehensive study of the Anglo-Jewish community, which was completed by H. G. Richardson in 1969, focused almost entirely on the economic and political presence of the Jewish community.⁴ Gavin Langmuir's critique of this work highlighted how it completely bypassed any social or cultural impact of the community or the day-to-day relations between Jews and Gentiles. The cultural turn in history provided a new way of exploring medieval Jewish history which managed to produce a complete history of this period that encompassed political, economic, social, and cultural issues rather than excluding them.

The study of ritual murder itself, in a form that would be considered academic, can be traced back to the late nineteenth century and this 'heroic age' of Anglo-Jewish history. The discovery of the hagiography of William of Norwich and its subsequent translation by

⁴ H. G. Richardson, *The English Jewry under Angevin Kings*, London, Tanner & Butler Ltd., 1960.

Jessop and James inspired one of the earliest examinations of the case of the first ritual murder victim in England.⁵ Joseph Jacobs work on both the case of William of Norwich and Hugh of Lincoln began the academic interest in the allegations of ritual murder. The historiography of ritual murder surfaced in late nineteenth century, but it was not until the late twentieth century that it really developed into a constructive discussion of the nature and origin of the accusations. This phase of the historiographical development significantly increased focus on the specific area of ritual murder but there were different approaches taken to exploring the accusations.

The discussion of ritual murder allegations in medieval England can be divided into three categories. Firstly, they are either discussed as part of the wider discourse on medieval Christian-Jewish relations, where they are often provided as passing examples of growing anti-Jewish hostility and as an element of the deteriorating relations. Secondly, they are discussed as part of a theological development or more commonly as part of medieval church history. The sanctity of the victims of ritual murder places this issue within discussions on the changing nature of sanctity and martyrdom in twelfth and thirteenth century England. The anti-Jewish polemical traditions, and anti-Jewish teaching are also discussed within theological history and the development of church history in medieval Europe. Thirdly, and most relevant to this thesis is the limited historiography that centers on the allegations of ritual murder as events and not as a secondary focus on a broader topic. However, ritual murder allegations in England have generally been explored by historians as separate and distinctive events rather than as a series of interlinked events that build upon each other. In Europe, the development of ritual murder and blood libel has

⁵ Thomas of Monmouth, *Life and Miracles of St William of Norwich*, Trans. A. Jessop and M. R. James, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1893.

been considered by Joshua Trachtenberg in his work, *The Devil and the Jews*.⁶ Ronnie Hsia has also introduced the link between Jews and magic in Germany during the Reformation.⁷ However, there is still a tendency to explore the cases of ritual murder and blood libel in isolation.

Gavin Langmuir's research on William of Norwich⁸ and Hugh of Lincoln⁹ still are key works into the history of both cases. A large part of Langmuir's discussion on William of Norwich centred on establishing where the accusation of ritual murder emerged from. Was it a hangover from antiquity, which had been spread by documents that have not survived, was it inspired by similar accusations in continental Europe, or was it an invention of the monk Thomas of Monmouth? Langmuir's conclusion was that the accusation originated in Norwich and that it was more than likely invented by Thomas of Monmouth.¹⁰ Israel Yuval's argument against Langmuir was based on the premise that crusader violence in Europe and heroic martyrdom had spread the idea that if Jews could kill their own children, they could also kill Christian children. Yuval also points to the death of a Christian in the city of Würzburg in 1147 as an inspiration for the events at Norwich. He argues that knowledge of this specific case could have reached Norwich by the time that Thomas of Monmouth was constructing his *Vita*.¹¹ John McCulloh goes a step

⁶ J. Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1943.

⁷ R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1988.

⁸ G. Langmuir, 'Thomas of Monmouth: Detector of Ritual Murder', *Speculum*, vol. 59, no. 4, 1984, pp. 820-846.

⁹ G. Langmuir, 'The Knights Tale of Young Hugh of Lincoln', *Speculum*, vol. 47, no. 3, 1972, pp. 459-482.

¹⁰ Langmuir, 'Thomas of Monmouth: Detector of Ritual Murder', pp. 820-846.

¹¹ I. J. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Trans. B. Harshav and J. Chipman, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2005.

further than Yuval and argues that there was a reference to the murder of an English boy in a version of European Martyrology before Thomas constructed his *Vita*.¹² The inspiration and the origin of the *Vita* will never be able to be proved and the arguments provided by Langmuir, Yuval, and McCulloh are all convincing, but due to the nature of surviving sources, none can be conclusive in their assertions. However, this discussion around these arguments still dominates the research on ritual murder accusations in England. Moving towards an understanding of how ritual murder narratives developed does not require such an avid consideration of where they emerged, but rather a focus on how they developed as narrative constructions of specific medieval communities.

William of Norwich and Hugh of Lincoln remain the most infamous cases and there has been a significant amount of research into them. There has been research conducted into other accusations in England, but this has not been as extensive as the scholarship on the allegations at Norwich or Lincoln. Joe Hillaby has examined the murder of Harold of Gloucester, but focuses mainly on the event itself rather than its development as a narrative.¹³ Miri Rubin has looked at the unique case of Adam of Bristol and its relationship to the narrative of the 'Jewish boy' which spread throughout Europe and developed into a key part of the host desecration narratives.¹⁴ Robert Stacey has also explored the single manuscript which has survived containing the death of Adam of Bristol. His argument explored the possibility that the manuscript was actually a script for a performance that re-

¹² J. M. McCulloh, 'Jewish Ritual Murder: William of Norwich, Thomas of Monmouth, and the Early Dissemination of the Myth', *Speculum*, vol. 72, no. 3, 1997, pp. 698-740.

¹³ J. Hillaby, 'The Ritual-Child-Murder Accusations: Its Dissemination and Harold of Gloucester', *Jewish Historical Studies*, vol. 34, 1994, pp. 69-109.

¹⁴ Rubin, *Gentile Tales*.

enacted the death of Adam.¹⁵ Anthony Bale's examination of the murder of Robert of Bury in the political environment of twelfth-century monastic rivalry provides a great example of how the narratives were manipulated.¹⁶ Bale, has also explored the survival of the tale of Robert of Bury in the traditions of medieval writing and print production.¹⁷ The accusation of ritual murder in Winchester in 1192 has also been examined by Bale who has focused on the reasons for the chronicler Richard of Devizes recording the event as a third party observing the event.¹⁸ These scholars have provided a key starting point for understanding the context and the individual cases of ritual murder and will be examined closely throughout this thesis.

The most recent addition to the historiography of ritual murder was provided by E. M. Rose in her 2015 book, *The Murder of William of Norwich: The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Europe*.¹⁹ This monograph has added greatly to the discussion on medieval ritual murder allegations. Her approach focuses on the case of William of Norwich and four subsequent 'copycat' accusations at Gloucester, Blois, Bury St. Edmunds, and Paris. Rose does identify the other victims of ritual murder in the twelfth century and highlights the lack of scholarly work done on these individual cases. It is true that many accusations survived only as a name or a simple reference, but this thesis will

¹⁵ R. C. Stacey, 'Adam of Bristol' and Tales of Ritual Crucifixion in Medieval England', in P. Skinner (ed.), *Jews in Medieval Britain: Historical, Literary and Archaeological Perspectives*, Suffolk, Boydell Press, 2012, pp.1-15.

¹⁶ A. Bale, 'Fictions of Judaism in England before 1290', in, *The Jews in Medieval Britain: Historical, Literary and Archaeological Perspectives*, (ed) Patricia Skinner, Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2003.

¹⁷ A. Bale, *The Jew in the Medieval Book: English Antisemitisms, 1350-1500*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

¹⁸ A. Bale, 'Richard of Devizes and Fictions of Judaism', *Jewish Culture and History*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2000, pp. 55-72.

¹⁹ E. M. Rose, *The Murder of William of Norwich: The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Europe*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.

use these cases in order to examine how and why the narratives of ritual murder developed in England. Rose's discussion is also spread over two geographic areas, England, and France.

Rose's argument is framed within a period of rapid change that occurred during the high Middle Ages with rapid urbanisation, religious changes, and 'cultural flowering' which was accompanied by a crisis of lordship and authority. Rose also identifies the subject of her book being neither the elite nor the peasants, 'the principal actors are people of some substance, some education, and conventional piety'.²⁰ This highlights a key issue in the historiography of ritual murder, too often have discussions come solely from the elite or from the collective masses of the 'peasantry.' However, as this thesis will demonstrate the accusations of ritual murder affected every area of medieval society for they transitioned from the realm of the societal elite to the general population in the space of a generation. Arguably, this transition is key to understanding the development of the ritual murder narratives.

Rose's argument covers three main areas, the first being that "the accusation served to link the familiar contemporary provincial medieval landscape directly with the awesome holiness of the biblical story, to tie mundane existence to sanctified time and space."²¹ This link and the concept of the mundane and the sanctified provides new insight into the emergence of the ritual murder narratives and potentially for their popularisation in Christian society. She argues that ritual murder accusations were an efficient and practical tool used to extort funds from Jewish communities. This is undoubtedly true in the case of

²⁰ Rose, *The Murder of William of Norwich*, p. 7.

²¹ Rose, p. 235.

Hugh of Lincoln, however, it was a far more common occurrence in continental Europe than in England. As Rose's discussion is straddling both England and France, the differences in terms of this financial extortion are blurred. It was common in France, however in England, the financial exploitation was occurring without the need for ritual murder accusations to fuel them. Rose's third argument is that when the kings of England and France endorsed the accusations it became widely utilized by individuals and by groups as a way of controlling and in some cases expelling the Jews. However, the accusations were being utilised long before the King of England accepted them. The Bishop of Bury St. Edmunds used ritual murder as a justification for expelling the Jewish community in 1190, but the Crown did not officially recognise ritual murder until 1255. Rose states that her "subject is not eternal truths of the Christian-Jewish encounter, but one particular encounter – its creation, elaboration, interpretation, cultural construction, and its dissemination as an enduring narrative."²² This approach as one that focuses on the cultural significance and dissemination of ritual murder accusations, it is a key step forward in understanding how and why they developed in medieval Europe and indeed why they still persist today.

Rose's contribution to the study of ritual murder narratives is significant and has provided a strong historiographical and methodological foundation for anyone considering the subject. However, her discussion is limited to five cases of ritual murder and only three of which occurred in England. This limitation excludes key accusations in the early phase of ritual murder narratives. The accusations of ritual murder in Winchester for example, which were repeated numerous times, provide an understanding of how the allegations

²² Rose, p. 11.

were accepted throughout different levels of society which cannot be explored through the case studies that Rose has used. As Jeffery Cohen has stated “Rose deliberately chose never to use the terms “anti-Semitism” and “anti-Judaism.” Yet the question remains whether faith, passion, and hate are not more a part of the story than she allows.”²³ Faith, passion, and hate are as this thesis will demonstrate key in both the origin of the accusations and in the narrative development. Specific literary traditions are woven into the narratives to invoke religious imagery, inspire maternal and paternal passion, and to reinforce the ‘otherness’ of the Jewish population. These emotive factors allowed the narratives to survive in the post-Expulsion environment in England. Cohen, ventures that if as Rose argued the accusations were not connected to emotions of hate or faith, “Readers may well be left wondering why the notion of a blood libel persisted so passionately, long after the Jews had been expelled from England.”²⁴ However, Rose’s monograph highlights the most recent work on ritual murder and one that has the possibility to change that way that historians approach the study of these medieval narratives.

Methodological Considerations

The nature of the ritual murder allegations themselves have provided historians with methodological problems to consider when approaching a study of these events. In England the sources that have survived which recount the ritual murder accusations cover hagiographies, legal documents, chronicles, poems, plays, and ballads. These sources provide different insights into the allegations but also pose a practical issue about how to collectively analyse sources of such a diverse nature. These are not sources that are often

²³ J. Cohen, ‘The Murder of William of Norwich: The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Europe by E. M. Rose (Review)’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2017, p. 411.

²⁴ Cohen, ‘The Murder of William of Norwich’, p. 411.

read together in a historical context as they cover both medieval writing of 'history', literary works, and folk narratives. As this thesis is concerned with understanding how a narrative was constructed and how it developed over the space of two centuries there needs to be an analysis of these different records in order to understand how ritual murder was considered and spread by different levels of society. Thus, hagiographies, legal documents, chronicles, and literary accounts must be utilised to show how the narrative of ritual murder developed and was reconstructed developed in these different historical sources.

Indeed, the many variations in the source types convey a sense of how the narratives spread throughout society and how they were adapted by different communities. Issues around the viability of medieval sources relating to ritual murder have long been discussed by historians. Ronnie Po-chia Hsia has voiced his concerns about the usefulness of sources from his period:

Sources... before the mid-fifteenth century are few and unreliable; the chronicles that recorded these cases are generally inaccurate, uncritical, and deeply biased as historical sources. Often only a few lines of information describe a purported ritual murder. The medieval chronicles depict a scenario far removed from the actual historical reality; beyond naming the alleged victims, perpetrators, motives for killing, dates, places, and punishments, they provide insufficient context for the analysis and interpretation of these persecutions. Beginning with the second half of the fifteenth century documentation becomes more abundant.²⁵

The concerns raised by Ronnie Po-chia Hsia are indeed important to consider when approaching medieval sources on ritual murder. However, there is no alternative way of attempting to understand the medieval origin and spread of the ritual murder allegations.

²⁵ Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, p. 4.

Darren O'Brien in his monograph *'The Pinnacle of Hatred'* has addressed the concerns raised by Hsia:

Although many of the sources for the early medieval period are, as he [Hsia] rightly points out, unreliable, biased, uncritical and scanty, they are quite simply, all we have to go on.

It is possible to discern socio-historical trends that are interwoven through the elements he enumerates: the alleged victims, perpetrators, motives, and so on.²⁶

O'Brien also argues that by the fifteenth century fundamental aspects of the ritual murder narratives have been formed:

The origins and formative stage of this particular variation of anti-Jewish allegation had ended. Only mutation would follow. If we wish to explore and unravel the origins and early development of the allegations, there is no alternative but to examine the "unreliable" sources dating from the twelfth to fourteenth century."²⁷

The sources in medieval England that document ritual murder accusations are often fragmented and pose analytical problems for historians. But quite simply they are all we have to go on if there is to be an understanding of this formative stage of the allegations. Historians often skip mentioning the accusations in England that are fragmented or have been lost, but they provide as much of an insight into the development of ritual murder as the fully developed hagiographies or chronicle accounts. This thesis will explore the development of ritual murder accusations in England by examining the fragmented sources on the same level as the well documented examples that have survived. These sources do straddle the barrier between fact and fiction but this thesis is concerned with the narratives and their structure rather than the argument as to whether these events actually took place. All sources used in this thesis have different considerations that must be taken into account when analysing them as part of the broader development of the accusations.

²⁶ D. O'Brien, *The Pinnacle of Hatred: The Blood Libel and the Jews*, Jerusalem, Hebrew University Magnes Press for the Vidal Sassoon International Centre for the Study of Anti-Semitism, 2011, p. 4.

²⁷ O'Brien, *The Pinnacle of Hatred*, p. 4.

The hagiographical accounts used in this thesis are connected with the death of William of Norwich. There are references to hagiographical works in relation to the deaths of Robert of Bury and Hugh of Lincoln but they have not survived. Hagiographical material provides historians with a unique understanding of the medieval mindset. Hagiographical works depict saints in a specific way, they inflate and exaggerating key virtues and miracles.²⁸ As Gabor Klaniczay has argued, “biblical models, stereotypical features, mythological accounts and idealised presentation prevail over historical accuracy and the intention to retain the memory of past events.”²⁹ Hagiographical accounts of ritual murders provide not only the constructed account of the murder but also an interpretation of events which was manipulated and used to highlight specific virtues deemed important. Although hagiographical works will not provide a detailed and factual account of the murder accusations they provide historians with a constructed narrative which played an incredibly important role in the development of the ritual murder accusations. The hagiographical accounts are also read in relation to other sources such as chronicle accounts.

Chronicle accounts of the events surrounding the accusations provide insight not only into the views that those writing the chronicles had, but also the extent to which the narratives had been disseminated and indeed accepted. Chronicles themselves are an important source when approaching issues in the Middle Ages. However, they do pose their own challenges which historians must grapple with in order to provide an accurate understanding of such sources. As Chris Given-Wilson has emphasised the importance of

²⁸ G. Klaniczay, ‘Hagiography and Historical Narrative’, in J. M. Bak & I. Jurković (ed.) *Chronicon Medieval Narrative Sources: A Chronological Guide with Introductory Essays*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2013, p. 111.

²⁹ Klaniczay, *Chronicon Medieval Narrative Sources*, p. 111.

understanding the ‘mental world of the late medieval chroniclers,’ and the intricate issues that would have surrounded the authors of such chronicles:³⁰

“How did they decide what to include and what to omit? How did they set about the task of amassing evidence, and what criteria did they use to evaluate it?... to what extent were they free to express their own views, rather than being constrained by corporate, political or religious pressures? What uses might their chronicles be put – and how did that affect what they wrote or how they wrote it?”³¹

Medieval chronicles do not provide completely objective accounts, instead, “They were opinionated, often deeply partisan, and intensely personal. Idiosyncrasy and anecdotes pervade their accounts.”³² These chronicles provide not only accounts of the narratives but are imbued with the personal feelings and opinion of those who wrote them. For this exploration of the construction and development of ritual narratives chronicles provide valuable insight into the medieval mindset and attitudes towards ritual murder allegations.

When exploring how the narratives of ritual murder were spreading throughout England, chronicle accounts demonstrate the views of those who not only encounter the accusations but the way that they chose to construct and develop them. An example of this which is often highlighted by historians of Anglo-Jewish history are the accounts provided by Matthew Paris in his *Chronica Majora*. Matthew Paris’s accounts are undoubtedly imbued with bias, in particular, his attitudes towards the Anglo-Jewry. However:

Against the doubts surrounding Matthew Paris’s reliability as a historical source, on the one hand, and the awareness of his biased approach towards Jews, on the other, stands

³⁰ C. Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England*, New York, A & C Black, 2004, p. ix.

³¹ Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, p. ix.

³² S. Dale, A. W. Lewin, D. J. Osheim, *Chronicling History: Chroniclers and Historians in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007, p. ix.

his importance in voicing the prevailing fears and expectations in thirteenth-century England; no less important was his influence in shaping the stereotype of Jews in the years to come.³³

Matthew Paris is an important chronicler to consider in approaching Anglo-Jewish history and despite his bias and questionable reliability he cannot be easily discounted. Matthew Paris's account of the death of Hugh of Lincoln, for example, contains specific information and the attitudes not only of the religious elite but also of the secular elite as well. Combining hagiographical material with chronicle accounts begins to add layers of understanding when considering how the ritual murder accusations spread and began to be popularised by society. However, other sources also point towards this growing popularisation, a key one being the legal accounts that have survived in public records.

The legal accounts of the accusations of ritual murder add another layer of possible analysis and one that is apparently separated from the church sanctioned hagiographies or chronicles. These legal accounts, however, are imbued with descriptive and literary language that both emphasises the cruelty of the events and the Jewish malevolence which was frequently exploited in these narratives. Instead of dismissing these literary flourishes this study will focus on the way that they were incorporated and more importantly why they were incorporated. Natalie Zemon Davis's work, *Fiction in the Archives*, provides a valuable starting point for approaching these literary legal accounts.³⁴ Moving away from the literary legal accounts towards the literary 'works of fiction' that emerged in the late twelfth century illustrates another layer in the popularisation of the ritual murder narratives.

³³ S. Menache, 'Matthew Paris's Attitudes towards Anglo-Jewry', *Journal of Medieval History*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1997, p. 141.

³⁴ N. Z. Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1987.

Literary accounts that incorporate elements or indeed appropriate the accusations of ritual murder take the events beyond the boundaries of the Jewish presence in medieval England and beyond the communities in which the accusations took place. It is through these literary accounts that an understanding of how the accusations spread and survived can be closely analysed. These literary accounts include the works of Chaucer, John Lydgate, Shakespeare, and Christopher Marlowe. Each approach the ritual murder accusations and each appropriates elements or the idea of ritual murder for their own means. Alongside this literary tradition is the ballad tradition which helped to spread the accusations of ritual murder throughout not only England but the British Isles in general. These literary sources provide examples of a continuation of construction that surrounded the accusations of ritual murder. The ballad accounts of ritual murder show numerous variations which, as they spread, incorporated different elements of the social and cultural environment, illustrating how the narrative became a popularised and notable legend.

When approaching such a wide variation of sources all related to the construction, legitimisation, and dissemination of the ritual murder accusations how to interpret and utilise these sources becomes a key methodological concern. While chronicles, hagiographies, legal archives, and literary accounts individually pose their own challenges, collectively they raise issues around continuity and what can be interpreted from analysing them. However, collectively analysing them will allow for the structure, themes, and elements of other narratives that are weaved into the allegations of ritual murder to be examined and for the development of them to be explored.

Chapter Outline

This thesis is divided into three sections which trace the development of the ritual murder accusations and the narratives that were created around them. The aim of this approach is to understand why they spread in England and specifically why they became popularised and indeed survived after the Jewish Expulsion. Exploring the accusations as narrative constructions which built upon each other and incorporated other narrative strands will provide a new understanding of the importance of ritual murder accusations in medieval society and the view of the minority Jewish community. However, these accusations and the narratives that followed them were first and foremost built upon the foundations of existing anti-Jewish polemics which existed from Antiquity.

The first chapter will explore the fundamental basis for the ritual murder accusation in England by examining the foundations from which it emerged. The theological basis for the Christian-Jewish relationship and the theoretical governing of relations between the two faiths was key in the development of the ritual murder narratives and gave a foundation from which it could be reproduced. The theological foundation combined with the medieval cult of saints created an environment where the death of a boy could become a commodity when he was transformed into a saint. Examining the construction of the *vita* created by Thomas of Monmouth and understanding of the elements of polemical tradition and medieval saintly culture can be explored. This role can also be seen as the accusation spread to Gloucester and also to France where the allegations were capitalised on and began to be manipulated by different groups in medieval society.

The second chapter will examine how the narratives of ritual murder were adapted and manipulated during the late twelfth century. Following the accusations at Norwich and Gloucester the narrative spread throughout England and France. At Bury St Edmunds the accusation of ritual murder was manipulated by the religious elite as part of the broader context of the deteriorating Christian-Jewish relationship. The Jewish position in England was deteriorating by the late twelfth century and narratives of ritual murder were used as both part of the anti-Jewish rhetoric and as a way of legitimising it. This changing relationship will be explored as it is key to understanding how the narratives transformed from the *vita* of Thomas of Monmouth to one that can be used to justify the expulsion of the Jews from a specific town. The accusation and narratives surrounding the death of Robert of Bury were manipulated in such a way by Bishop Sampson. The way that this narrative is adapted will be used to illustrate the changing nature of the narrative and its ability to be utilised for specific purposes. The accusations at Winchester provide a key case study that is often overlooked by historians, and is vital to understanding how the narratives took hold and were popularised in English society. The reoccurring accusations at Winchester, illustrate how the narratives were imbued with emotive motifs of motherhood, childhood innocence, and gender dichotomies. This development in the narratives is an element that is fundamental in understanding why they survived in England and how they managed to be incorporated into different communities.

The third chapter traces the development of the narratives during the thirteenth century. This development can be characterised by both ecclesiastical and secular performances. The narrative of ritual murder was incorporated into the *exempla* tradition and given a new platform from which it could spread. Being incorporated into this tradition is a key example of how the accusation transcended from an 'event' to a collective memory

that could conveniently be recounted to reinforce church doctrine. This use of ecclesiastical performance is one way which anti-Jewish legends were spread throughout Europe, but it was not the only way that ecclesiastical performances played an important role in the spread of the narrative in England. The alleged death of Adam of Bristol provides historians with a unique example of a complete narrative that has been constructed to reinforce doctrine and religious themes that were popular at the time it was produced. During the thirteenth century, the accusations of ritual murder were used as part of a broader secular performance that was played out between Henry III and Richard Earl of Cornwall. This secular performance is a further example of the ability of ritual murder narratives to be manipulated and moulded to specific situations. This manipulation also sees the narrative brought back to the societal 'elites' after transitioning through every level of society and becoming popularised by the masses. Examining these cases and the development that occurs allows for a new understanding of the accusations in England and subsequently in the broader context of medieval Europe.

This approach will argue for a new understanding of the importance of ritual murder allegations in medieval England. By examining the development of the narratives in England and exploring how they were manipulated and utilised by different groups, a broader understanding of the nature of ritual murder accusations and the medieval Christian-Jewish relationship can be found. When exploring the origin of ritual murder accusations, England is a vital case study which must be brought back into focus by historians if there is to be a comprehensive understanding of anti-Semitic legends.

Chapter One

William of Norwich: From Tanners Apprentice to Martyred Saint

Introduction

The origin of the ritual murder accusation in medieval England was a culmination of centuries of anti-Jewish preaching and sentiments. Since the rise of Christianity, there had been a hardening of attitudes towards Jewish communities. The two faiths although intrinsically linked by their origin had during Antiquity, and the early Middle Ages become two distinct and at times opposed religious groups. It was this environment and the religious differences that facilitated the rise of the ritual murder accusations.

This chapter will explore how these attitudes became engrained in society and how it laid the foundation from which the allegations of ritual murder could develop. This chapter will then build upon this foundation by exploring the specific creation and construction of the death of William of Norwich. The role of medieval concepts of sanctity and the religious environment of twelfth century East Anglia will also be explored. The hagiography constructed by Thomas of Monmouth sets out a framework which can be identified in the following centuries. Following the death of William, the narrative of ritual murder began to spread. The accusations at Gloucester illustrate how the narratives managed to incubate and survive in different social and religious contexts.

The exploration of Christian-Jewish relations and the tension between the two faiths is fundamental to understanding how the allegations of ritual murder emerged and why they were constructed in this way. An understanding of the way the narratives of ritual murder were constructed will be the focus of this chapter as it is through this understanding that the power of these allegations to be replicated and adapted in different communities can be seen.

From Josephus to Thomas of Monmouth

The Christian-Jewish relationship during the early Middle Ages was one built upon a theological understanding which sought to govern the interaction between the two faiths. It was this theological basis which gave rise to the allegations of ritual murder in medieval England. When the Jewish population arrived in England following the Norman conquest, they were not an 'unknown' group. Christianity had long preached on the role of Jews in Christian society, and it was this rhetoric which was picked up and used to help English society understand this new community in their midst. This section will examine the way that this anti-Jewish rhetoric was created and developed in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages by Christian writers. This rhetoric was incorporated into English society and is vital to understanding the emergence of the ritual murder accusations and for examining the way in which they were constructed.

Although the anti-Jewish church teaching was firmly based upon the belief that the Jews were responsible for the death of Christ, it was also heavily influenced by the

aftermath of the Jewish War and the subsequent Jewish diaspora. The Jewish rebellion in Judea against Roman rule that began in 66AD, continued until the destruction of the Temple in 70AD, the aftermath of this destruction led to the expulsion of the Jews from their lands.³⁵ Eusebius (c. 260-339) was an early historian of Christianity, who set the template for much later Christian historical writing and made a link between the Jew's rejection of Christ, and Vespasian and Titus's victory over the Jews and the destruction of the Temple. He argued that it was retribution for their denial of Christ, which highlighted the desire for early Christianity to move away from the Jewish tradition.³⁶ Eusebius believed that God had given the Jews forty years to realise that Christianity was the true faith and their temple was destroyed because they had not seen the truth.³⁷ The separation of Judaism and Christianity which Eusebius highlights in his works was reinforced when Christianity became the official religion of Rome. After this point, Christianity became an ever more powerful force, and it spread outward throughout Europe.³⁸ During this time, Christianity sought to separate itself from Judaism, and Judaism began to distance itself from Christianity.³⁹

³⁵ The siege Jerusalem and the aftermath of the destruction of the city can be found in: Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Trans. by G. A. Williamson, London, Penguin Books, 1970.

³⁶ 'In the first place it was decreed unworthy to observe that most sacred festival in accordance with the practice of the Jews; having sullied their own hands with a heinous crime, such blood stained men are as one might expect mentally blind... should be adjusted in such a way that nothing be held in common with that nation of parricides and Lord-Killers.' In Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, Introduction, translation and commentary by A. Cameron and S. G. Hall, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999, pp. 128-129.

³⁷ Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, p. 32.

³⁸ Yuval, p. 32.

³⁹ Christianity distanced itself from Jewish rituals and practices and established its own traditions and religious practices. Judaism in turn reacted against Christianity and Rabbinical Judaism in Yuval's view emerged out of Christianity. The Passover Seder is also highlighted by Yuval as being a reaction against Christianity. For more information, see; I. Yuval. 'Easter and Passover as Early Jewish-Christian Dialogue'. In, P. F. Bradshaw and L. A. Hoffman (ed.), *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1999, p. 99.

As Christianity spread throughout the Mediterranean and Europe, and the Christianisation of these lands increased, Jews increasingly became a non-Christian minority in these countries. Israel Yuval's conception of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity during late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages is an image of two brothers fighting for the others limelight. He compares it to the biblical rivalry between Jacob and Esau.⁴⁰ As Christianity became the dominant religion, Jews were only allowed to reside in Christian communities at the will of Christians and in service to them. Thus, the older brother Esau who is representative of Jews is now serving his younger brother Jacob a representation of all Christians.⁴¹ At this early point in the relationship Jews were being marked as those who had caused the death of Christ through their refusal to see the truth. This rhetoric served not only to create a villain out of the Jews but to create a boundary between Christianity and Judaism. Thus, it distinguished the limits of Christian theology by placing Judaism in opposition to Christian belief. Jews were believed to be inferior to Christians and condemned to a servile position in Christian society to be a reminder of the truth of Christianity and Christ's suffering and death.

In the late fourth century, John Chrysostom, who later became bishop of Constantinople, preached against Judaisers. This preaching was largely inspired by the festivals of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In Antioch, at this time Christians often celebrated these Jewish religious festivals alongside the Jews of Antioch.⁴² Over fourteen

⁴⁰ Yuval, pp. 3-10.

⁴¹ Yuval, pp. 33-38.

⁴² W. A. Meeks and R. I. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era*, Missoula, Scholars Press, 1978, p. 83.

months he preached eight sermons under the theme *Adversus Iudaeos*.⁴³ These sermons cast Jews not only as the killers of Christ but also as ones who have rejected him and the true faith:

Do not be surprised if I have called the Jews wretched. They are truly wretched and miserable for they have received many good things from God yet they have spurned them and violently cast them away.⁴⁴

Although his sermons formed part of a growing anti-Jewish rhetoric, they were also concerned with creating a distinction between Christianity and Judaism. Christians celebrating Jewish festivals undermined Christianity and the authority of the Church. The distinction between Christianity and Judaism was during the early centuries of Christianity often hard to discern. Thus, by preaching against the Jews, Chrysostom was also solidifying the boundaries of Christianity and ‘othering’ the Jewish population.

The defining intellectual contribution to the early Christian view of Jews was provided by Augustine of Hippo. Augustine in his fifth-century writings believed that Jews should be allowed to live and be tolerated in Christian society, as they were *Testimonium Veritatis* (‘witnesses to the truth’) of the Christian faith.⁴⁵ Although they should, according to Augustine, be allowed to reside in Christian society they should be in a lower and

⁴³Meeks and Wilken, *Jews and Christians*, p. 83.

⁴⁴ John Chrysostom. *Homily 1 Against the Jews*, *Patrologia Graeca* 48.843-856. In, Meeks and Wilken, p. 87.

⁴⁵ Augustine, *City of God* 18.46. In P. Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, New York, Doubleday, 2008.

inferior position to Christians.⁴⁶ This concept was also discussed earlier by Eusebius who informs his reader that Constantine:

Made a law that no Christian was to be a slave to Jews, on the ground that it was not right that those redeemed by the Saviour should be subjected by the yoke of bondage to the slayers of the Prophets and the murders of the Lord. If any were found in this condition, the one was to be set free, the other punished with a fine.⁴⁷

He continues and explains that Jews should be servile to Christians and never employ Christians. They must hold an inferior position in society which allowed Christians to be reminded of the truth of their faith and the triumph of Christianity. Augustine's teaching was encapsulated in the idea that; if Judaism ceased to exist, then Christians might cease to remember God's revelation and fall from their faith.⁴⁸ This conception of the servile nature of the Christian-Jewish relationship dictated the role that Jews were able to hold in medieval society. When this relationship was inverted there were often outbursts of violence or libels against the Jewish population. The violence served to right the inversion and restore the correct Christian-Jewish relationship.

The principle that Augustine set was incorporated into papal legislation by Pope Gregory I in 598. *Sicut Iudaeis* ruled that Jews should not be harmed as long as they stayed within the theological role that Christianity assigned to them.⁴⁹ Therefore as long as Jews

⁴⁶ The 'Jews as Jews' are servants of Christianity. "The unbelief of the Jews increases rather than lessens the authority of these books, for their blindness in itself foretold in them. They testify to the truth by their not understanding it." Augustine, *Against Faustus* 16.21. In Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*.

⁴⁷ In, *Eusebius, Life of Constantine*. 163.

⁴⁸ K. R. Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe*, London, Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 18.

⁴⁹ "Even as the Jews ought not to have the freedom to dare do in their synagogues more than the law permits them, so ought they not suffer curtailment of those [privileges] which have been conceded them... We desire, however, to place under the protection of this decree only those [Jews] who do not presume to

acted as a witness to the truth of Christianity and reminded Christians of Christ's suffering, they would not be harmed. They would also be afforded some protection from the Church. This concept remained in the medieval mind-set, and the Church during the Crusades often sought to protect the Jews from popular violence inspired by the Crusaders. Thus, the Jews became a protected group within Christian lands, although they were treated as inferior to Christianity and considered by some secular rulers to be their property. As Jewish expertise in moneylending and trade developed, secular leaders utilised the Jewish population to provide financial services. This role that Jews took on also meant that the individual rulers, as well as the church, had the incentive to protect the Jews during the early Middle Ages.

Although the theological approach to the Christian-Jewish relationship technically protected the Jewish population from state-directed violence, it set a precedence, not only defining the relationship but also the position of Jews as a reminder of Christ's suffering. The continuing rhetoric surrounding Jews as the crucifiers of Christ remained in the Christian imagination during the Middle Ages as it became a fully-fledged concept in the twelfth century. This construction of Jews as the murderers of Christ also influenced and, may have even led to, the accusations that Jews killed Christian children to re-enact and mock the Passion of Christ.

The twelfth century marked a change in society and religion, and this led to a hardening of attitudes towards Jews and groups considered to be the 'other' in medieval

plot against the Christian faith." *Papal Bull Sicut Judeis*. In, S. Grayzel, *The Papal Bull Sicut Judeis*, in, *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict: From Late Antiquity to the Reformation*, (ed) J. Cohen, New York, New York University Press, 1991, p. 232.

communities. This change in societal life was rapid during the middle of the twelfth century.⁵⁰ The Catholic Church was being threatened by heresy from within and also from the populace, and there was an increasing move among societal elites that questioned the authority of the church.⁵¹ The Crusades had awakened Europe to the growing Islamic world just outside its borders, and this world with its vast resources established it as a viable threat to western Christendom.⁵² This external threat also brought the focus of Christian society back to the internal dangers of non-Christian communities living in their midst which Christian society could control in a way that the Muslim world could not be controlled.⁵³ This internal 'threat' of heresy increased the focus on the Jewish communities within Christianity who were openly practising a different religion.⁵⁴ This internal threat was explored by R.I. Moore who labelled Jews, lepers, and heretics under this banner.⁵⁵ Chazan, challenges this idea and argues that heretics provided a realistic challenge to the established Church. This insecurity or sense of insecurity that society and the church were feeling focused attention on the minority groups within Christian society and one of the key groups targeted was Jews.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ R. I. Moore, 'Heresy, Repression and Social Change in the age of Gregorian Reform', In S. L. Waugh and P. D. Diehl (ed.), *Christendom and its discontents: Exclusion, Persecution, and Rebellion, 1000-1500*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 19.

⁵¹ Moore, 'Heresy, Repression and Social Change,' p. 19.

⁵² R. Chazan, 'The Deteriorating Image of the Jews: Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries,' in, S. L. Waugh and P. D. Diehl (ed.), *Christendom and its Discontents: Exclusion, Persecution, and Rebellion, 1000-1500*, Cambridge, Cambridge University press, p. 229.

⁵³ Chazan, 'The Deteriorating Image of the Jews', p. 229.

⁵⁴ For more information on the role of the Muslim world on the lives of Jews in Medieval Europe see; J. Cohen, 'The Muslim Connection: On the Changing Role of the Jew in High Medieval Theology', In J. Cohen (ed.), *From Witness to Witchcraft: Jews and Judaism in Medieval Christian Thought*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1996, pp. 141-162.

⁵⁵ Chazan, p. 230.

⁵⁶ Chazan, p. 230.

Hostility towards Jewish moneylenders and other Jewish behaviours contributed to the change in perception of the Jews during the twelfth century. Ultimately there was a crucial shift in the collective psyche of the Christian community which occurred in a society that was undergoing a rapid change in both religion and political environment.⁵⁷ The long history of Christian thinking about the Jews and the correct position of the Jews within Christian society provided the framework which, when Europe was undergoing rapid change with heightened religious anxieties, would lead to attention being brought back, but not exclusively, to the Jewish population of Europe.⁵⁸

The early medieval period saw an increased focus on the crucifixion and suffering of Christ which enhanced the supposed 'malevolence' of those who were deemed responsible for his death. It was this change in society and religious tensions that gave rise to the first accusation of ritual murder in medieval Europe. The increased focus on the Jewish 'other', combined with an emphasis being placed on the Jews as the killers of Christ, led to the emergence of accusations of ritual murder. These accusations were either preserved from Antiquity, invented, or inspired by events from the continent but that remerged in this particular period of societal flux and religious tensions. The defining characteristic of the Christian-Jewish relationship during the Medieval period harks back to the labelling of the Jews as the killers of Christ. The concept of Jewish guilt and culpability of the death of Christ underpinned Augustine's *Testimonium Veritatis*. The Christian conception of Jewish disbelief in Christ was the basis for governing the

⁵⁷ Chazan, p. 231.

⁵⁸ Chazan, p. 232.

Christian-Jewish relationship and for the medieval anti-Jewish polemic that emerged.⁵⁹ In the early Middle Ages, the tradition of Jewish ignorance at the death of Christ was the main strand of the discussion on the concept of Jewish guilt. They had not killed Christ on purpose, rather they had simply not seen the truth. However, the thirteenth century saw the idea on intentionality emerge as the main strand of the polemic where the Jews had seen the truth and had killed Christ out of spite or envy.

In 1938 Cecil Roth argued that the Western Christian view of the Jew in the Middle Ages was not of an infidel who could not see the truth of Christianity but of a group who had known the truth but had deliberately rejected it.⁶⁰ Jeremy Cohen built on this thesis and argued that this change in theology about the Jews as the killers of Christ came in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries with a new stance taken towards the Jews by the Franciscans and Dominicans. Cohen also points out that the evidence that Roth provides mainly dates from after 1200.⁶¹ The thirteenth century witnessed an ideological change facilitated by the Franciscan and Dominican Friars which counteracted the former Augustinian policy of toleration.⁶² However, the accusations of ritual murder in the twelfth century are a key example of this change in attitude manifested without a dependence on the anti-Jewish theology that emerged in the thirteenth century. Thus, the accusations

⁵⁹ J. Cohen, 'The Jews as the Killers of Christ in the Latin Tradition: From Augustine to the Friars', *Traditio*, vol. 39, 1983, p. 2.

⁶⁰ C. Roth, 'The Medieval Conception of the Jew,' in, I Davidson (ed.), *Essays and Studies in Memory of Linda R. Miller*, New York, 1938, p. 176.

⁶¹ Cohen, 'The Jews as the Killers of Christ,' p. 1.

⁶² This will be discussed further in Chapter Two in relation to ritual murder accusations of the thirteenth century.

provide an insight into the early manifestations of a changing attitude towards the Jews based on an overarching changing concept that had not been fully developed.

The accusations of ritual murder were not a spontaneous and isolated event or even a new emergence of a specific anti-Judaic sentiment. They were constructed in the broader context of an anti-Jewish polemic that reached back to the beginning of the Christian tradition and was revitalised and developed during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries. This tradition created the Jew as a servile member in a Christian society, who was tolerated to remind Christians of Christ's suffering and the truth of their faith. This relationship proved contentious, and the Crusading movements served as a catalyst for the deterioration of this relationship and heralded the hardening of Christian theological position towards the Jews. The narratives constructed around the accusations of ritual murder drew from this tradition that centred on Christ's suffering. Instead of being a figurative reminder they were actively reminding the Christian population of Christ's suffering through the kidnapping and murder of young children. The religious tension and polemics between the two faiths gave a legitimate ground for the emergence of the accusations of ritual murder.

A Martyred Child and a Hagiographical Tradition

The origin of ritual murder in England can be traced to events that allegedly occurred in the city of Norwich in 1144. This section will explore how the narrative was constructed around these events in a very specific way to emphasise the victim's sanctity

and to justify the shrine that was created around the boy. The construction of this narrative drew upon pre-existing anti-Jewish polemics, the cult of saints, and the importance of the medieval relic trade in order to structure a hagiography that would serve a key purpose. The accusation at Norwich and the narrative created around it laid a framework and a justification for further accusations in England, although, the shrine at Norwich was never fully accepted. Understanding this origin, and the construction at this early stage of the narrative development is a key foundation for understanding how it evolved in later centuries.

The Jewish community of Norwich allegedly murdered a skinner's apprentice named William in 1144. This accusation gave rise to a medieval narrative and spawned numerous subsequent allegations. The main documentation of this accusation is recorded in Thomas of Monmouth's *Vita et passio Willelmi Norwicensis*.⁶³ The construction of this *Vita* provides a basis for the understanding of what happened at Norwich and a template for further accusations which took place in other towns in England. The *Vita* was created around 1150, several years after the murder was alleged to have been committed.⁶⁴ The time between the event and the creation of the *Vita* has led to a key debate among scholars as to whether Thomas, who was not present in Norwich when the murder occurred, invented the accusation or was influenced by other allegations of a similar nature on the continent. There were accusations of a similar nature during Antiquity, but since the fifth

⁶³ For Latin Text and Translation see; Thomas of Monmouth, *Life and Miracles of St William of Norwich*. Trans. A. Jessop and M. R. James, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1893. For a recent English Translation see; Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*. Trans. Miri Rubin, London, Penguin, 2014.

⁶⁴ Rubin, "Introduction" in *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*. viii.

century, there have been no records or documentation of ritual murders to survive even if they did occur.⁶⁵

The death of William was construed in a way that implied both a crucifixion and a motive. The murder occurred at Easter, a time which resonated with the Christian population. The death is simply attributed to the Jews and it is stated that the boy was killed in mockery of the Passion of Christ.⁶⁶ The boy is convinced by a 'traitor' to travel with him to work, rather than celebrate Easter with his family.⁶⁷ The 'traitor' convinces the boy to go with him and seeks the mother's approval to take the child.⁶⁸ They are supposed to travel to the house of the Archdeacon of Norwich, but William is instead taken to the house of a Jew.⁶⁹ The boy is seized, humiliated and ropes are tied around his head that push on pressure points, torturing the boy.⁷⁰ They shaved his head, and "wounded it with an infinite number of thorn pricks," which made the boy bleed and alluded to the crown of thorns that Christ wore.⁷¹ Members of the group then sentenced the boy to death in order to mock the 'Passion of the Cross'.⁷² They then placed William on a cross and they competed and argued about who was going to be the one to kill him.⁷³ William's right foot and hand then

⁶⁵Langmuir, "Thomas of Monmouth", p. 825.

⁶⁶Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, p. 17.

⁶⁷Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, pp. 14-15.

⁶⁸Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, pp. 14-15.

⁶⁹Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, p. 16.

⁷⁰Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, p. 16.

⁷¹Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, p. 17.

⁷²Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, p. 17.

⁷³ Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, p. 17.

were tied to the cross, only his left foot and hand were nailed in place in order to obscure the fact that it was Jews who had killed him.⁷⁴ They then stabbed the boy on the left side in the same way that Christ had been killed, this thrust pierced his heart and killed the boy.⁷⁵ The body continued to bleed and the Jews poured boiling water on his body to wash the wounds and to stop the flow of blood.⁷⁶ The description of the murder is short and concise and is an incredibly small part of the *Vita*. It serves to explain the boy's death and to set up the rest of the *Vita* which is dominated by the discussion of the miracles attributed to William.

The discovery of the body was followed by alleged miracles associated with the boy, and with the shrine that developed at his grave and this is the main focus of the rest of the *Vita*. Thomas focuses his attention on legitimizing the sanctity of William, but he also had to establish the reason and a motive for the murder. The murder was constructed by Thomas as a way of mocking the Passion of Christ but he also had to legitimize the fact that it occurred when it did in the calendar and this in turn emphasized the motive of the murder. The murder of William occurred during the Easter festivities, which in 1144 coincided with the Jewish festival of Passover.⁷⁷ This provided not only the basis for the accusations of ritual murder but also a causal link between Jewish religious practices, which were not fully understood by the Christian community, and the murder of the boy.

⁷⁴ Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, p. 17.

⁷⁵ Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, pp. 17-18.

⁷⁶ Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, p. 18.

⁷⁷ The boy was chosen by the Jewish community at the beginning of the Lent season, and he was 'abducted' on the Monday after Palm Sunday, and killed after the Passover services at the synagogue which in 1144 would have been the 21st March. Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, pp. 13-17.

The religious festival was the motive for the murder of William.⁷⁸ This tendency for the murders of the child martyrs to occur during the celebration of Passover or Purim, which was often at the same time as Lent or Easter, allowed for a viable motive for the murder to be facilitated and to spread. By the mid thirteenth century the myth that Jews ritually killed Christian children, had spread to such an extent that there was no longer a need to limit the accusations to the period of Lent and Easter. Accusations were made against the Jews at other times of the year and often had no correlation to Jewish religious practices. When bodies of children were found the Jewish community had become one of the first places that the family and surrounding community would turn.

As the accusations spread the Jews were no longer confined by the narrative to killing children at Easter. The narrative developed to involve a performance of the Passion of Christ which removed the need for the murders to be connected to the Easter celebration as a performance could be acted out at any time of the year. For this change in the narrative to occur there needed to be a change in audience from the religious elite to the general population, and a development in the concept of medieval performances of the murders. This reenactment removed the need to limit the accusations to Lent and Easter. It also opened up the Jewish community to greater persecution, and allowed for the deaths of many children during the twelfth and thirteenth century to be blamed on the Jewish community in England.

⁷⁸ Thomas explains how the Jews needed to obtain William as “their *pascha* [Passover] approached in three days.” In 1144 Passover began with the sundown of 20th March and lasted until sundown on the 27th. Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, p. 14.

The construction of William's 'saintly life' was carefully created by Thomas to ensure the success of a martyr saint, and to legitimize the cult that arose around the dead boy. The Middle Ages saw a renewed interest in the cult of saints, which played an ever increasing role in Christian worship and religious life.⁷⁹ Saints also provided a revenue for religious houses, as they inspired pilgrimages and devotion. This in turn led to the house benefiting from the possession of the saint's body and relics. William was more than just a typical saint of this period, he was a martyred saint. William died for his faith at the hands of the 'infidel' Jews. In English society where, due to the fact it was a predominantly Christian population, and thus hard to die for your faith, martyr saints were a great commodity and were an image that the medieval church was incredibly familiar with.⁸⁰ The cult that Thomas created was supported by the Bishop of Norwich William de Turbeville, who also saw the financial value of a cult which would be publicised by miracles and be a benefit to his church and clergy.⁸¹ However, there were some objections to the establishment of this cult. John de Chesney who was the Sherriff and represented the King's interests in Norwich recognized the anti-Judaic undertones of the cult.⁸² He understood that it could trigger a backlash against the Jewish community who were under the King's protection and effectively belonged to the Crown, and as a sheriff it was his job to protect the Jews.⁸³

⁷⁹ A. Vauchez, "Saints and Pilgrimages: New and Old." In M. Rubin and W. Simons (ed.) *Cambridge History of Christianity: Christianity in Western Europe c. 1100-c. 1500 Vol. 4*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 324.

⁸⁰ P. H. Wasyliw, *Martyrdom, Murder and Magic: Child Saints and their Cults in Medieval Europe*, New York, Peter Lang, 2008, p. 40.

⁸¹ R. C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England*, London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1997, p. 119.

⁸² C. Freeman, *Holy Bones Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2011, p. 91.

⁸³ The Jews in Medieval England were under the direct control of the Crown and at a local level it was the responsibility of the Sheriff, as the king's representative, to protect the Jews and to ensure the 'smooth

There is no record of any immediate backlashes against the Jewish community in Norwich but there were flash points of hostility in the following century.⁸⁴ Opponents to the cult argued that there was no exacting evidence that the Jews had murdered William and that the Bishop and Thomas could not set up a cult like this without the approval of a higher ecclesiastical authority.⁸⁵ Thomas had created a saint and a cult which benefited both his religious house and the Norwich community, while at the same time introducing the anti-Semitic myth of ritual murder into England. The *Vita* that he created was grounded in legitimizing the murder by the Jews based on religious tensions, and legitimizing the sanctity and the cult that developed around William's body.

The accusation at Norwich claimed that Jews kidnapped the boy William so that they could kill him in order to mimic the death of Christ. This mode of killing is significant as Thomas manipulated it and constructed his narrative of the events in such a way as to create a trope of martyrdom. The concept of martyrdom was by the medieval period well-constructed and developed in the Christian imagination. From the origins of Christianity, there was a tradition of martyrdom. Although there were earlier cases of 'martyrdom' in pagan society it was only with the early Christians that the conception of martyrdom was fully developed.⁸⁶ The early Christian preoccupation with glorifying those who died for

running' of all Jewish affairs in their areas. For more information, see R. Mundill, *The King's Jews: Money, Massacre and Exodus in Medieval England*, London, Continuum, 2010, pp. 43-65.

⁸⁴ There were attacks on the Jewish community in the 1230s, in 1234 they were accused of kidnapping a Christian child and circumcising him, and in 1279 there was a coin-clipping pogrom in the city. For more information on the Jewish community in Norwich see; V. D. Lipman, *The Jews of Medieval Norwich*, London, Jewish Historical Society of England, 1967.

⁸⁵ Freeman, *Holy Bones Holy Dust*, p. 91.

⁸⁶ For more information on the development of martyrdom in early Christianity see; G. W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

their faith was marginalised with the growth of Christian society as it became increasingly harder to die for the Christian faith in a Christian society. During the Middle Ages, martyrdom occupied a key position in religious devotion, not only did it create a saint and an inspiration for devotion, but also an example of what to aspire to in terms of religious devotion.

The Crusades provided one outlet where dying for the Christian faith was a common occurrence, but local saints who died for their faith were scarce during the twelfth century. There was a tradition of Christian martyrs in Islamic Spain but as the Muslims were pushed out of Iberia this was no longer a viable route for the creation of Martyrs.⁸⁷ Martyrdom was not simply an event that passed into obscurity within a few generations; it was incorporated into the collective memory of Christian society. The martyrdom of saints was celebrated and remembered in society for centuries after they died. This was facilitated by the development of shrines and the cult of relics and the relic trade that emerged during the early Middle Ages. These were also coupled with a distinct literature that captured and spread the stories of martyrdom, these tales or hagiographies became common during the middle ages. This hagiographic tradition of martyrdom and the narratives associated were what Thomas drew on when constructing his *Vita*, as the audience would need to be convinced that William was a martyr as the concept was well understood and disseminated. When constructing his *Vita*, Thomas not only had to prove the sanctity of the boy but also that he had died for his faith at the hands of the Jews.

⁸⁷ For more information on Christian Martyrs in Islamic Spain see; K. B. Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

The Middle Ages saw a revival of the concept of sanctity and there was a renewed interest in the cult of saints which was closely followed by an increase in the relic trade across Europe. The formation of the cult of saints built around the veneration of shrines, and pilgrimages to these shrines, occurred during the reign of Constantine and was largely ‘invented’ during this period.⁸⁸ In the late Empire the urban and episcopal cults that emerged began to serve the political and territorial ambitions of their creators and patrons.⁸⁹ During the late tenth century, there was a dramatic artistic and social expansion of the cult of saints.⁹⁰ Cults began to be enriched with textual traditions and new visual elements.⁹¹ Europe’s recovery following centuries of invasion saw an increase in lives and miracles of saints, as well as liturgies, churches, shrines and pilgrimages associated with them.⁹² The increasing importance of relics and shrines during the early Middle Ages was also linked to the increasing Christianisation of Western European society that occurred from the ninth century.⁹³ For it was only through this Christianisation that value and importance were placed on these relics, which led to their increase in prevalence in Christian society.⁹⁴ Saints and relics began to play an important role in this increasingly Christian society by providing examples of exemplary faith as well as central points of devotion in the shape of shrines containing relics of these saints.

⁸⁸ B. Abou-El-Haj, *The Medieval Cult of Saints: Formations and Transformations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 7.

⁸⁹ Abou-El-Haj, *The Medieval Cult of Saints*, p. 9.

⁹⁰ Abou-El-Haj, p. 13.

⁹¹ Abou-El-Haj, p. 13.

⁹² Abou-El-Haj, p. 13.

⁹³ P. J. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Theft of Relics in the Central Middle Ages*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1978, p. 17.

⁹⁴ Geary, *Furta Sacra*, p. 17.

During this period ecclesiastical institutions and secular leaders placed a great deal of importance on collecting relics and these collections became a signal and a symbol of piety and devotion.⁹⁵ Alongside regional mega shrines which attracted pilgrimages from vast areas, local cults and shrines began to attract small followings.⁹⁶ However, as the Papacy in the late twelfth century began to expand their authority over the cults of saints, and the canonization process, there were attempts by the episcopacy to monopolise the pilgrimages attached to local shrines.⁹⁷ By the twelfth century, the traditions of sainthood had been long established and had indeed seen a recent revival in devotion. This revival did, however, lead to tension between the local church control and the papal control of sainthood. This tension came to a head in the legislation promoted by Pope Innocent III at the Fourth Lateran Council which paved out new controls on the canonisation process.⁹⁸ It was during this period of revival and tension that the accusations of ritual murder emerged and were incorporated into local shrines and cults.

Thomas of Monmouth was writing in a tradition that to a certain extent dictated the way in which he constructed his hagiography of the martyrdom of William of Norwich. When constructing this *Vita*, Thomas was responding to existing traditions. His ardent defence of William's sanctity throughout the work points not only to the need to legitimise the cult but also to Thomas's understanding of the hagiographical tradition that gave rise to it. As well as engaging with the specific issue of martyrdom Thomas was also engaging with a wider and far broader category of sanctity and sainthood. The cult that emerged at

⁹⁵ C. W. Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*, New York, Zone Books, 2011, p. 132.

⁹⁶ Abou-El-Haj, p. 25.

⁹⁷ Abou-El-Haj, p. 25

⁹⁸For more information, see, J. Sayers, *Innocent III Leader of Europe 1198-1216*, London, Longman, 1994.

Norwich falls under Vauchez's conception of 'popular' sainthood. This conception covers little-known saints, whose fame spread only into their village or the immediate areas outside the village; these became regional saints rather than mega saints which inspired widespread pilgrimages from other areas in Europe.⁹⁹ Vauchez also defines this form of sainthood as being limited to the building of an oratory or chapel. However, although the early examples of sanctity associated with ritual murder fall into this category of popular sainthood, there was still a need to legitimise the claim for the victim's sanctity. This was created by using existing traditions and themes associated with sainthood and miracles. These traditions were important to the legitimisation of William's sanctity, for as Vivian Lipman has argued there was a widespread disbelief among some areas of the clergy concerning the story of Williams's martyrdom.¹⁰⁰ A key example of this disbelief was that the 'evidence' which Thomas provides to back up his claim was found through convenient recollection. Years after the boy had been treated as a martyr and after his death had been attributed to the Jews, the disbelief of the clergy led Thomas to continue providing evidence to back up his claim.¹⁰¹ Thomas was not only legitimising the sanctity of William to the general churchgoer, he was legitimising it to his fellow Benedictine and the local clergy.

William's death in 1144 provided Thomas, and the Benedictine monastery of Norwich, with a valuable commodity in the body of the dead boy. The trade in relics increased during the Middle Ages and followed closely the development in the concept of

⁹⁹ A. Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*. Trans. J. Birrell, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 147.

¹⁰⁰ Lipman, *The Jews of Medieval Norwich*, p. 53.

¹⁰¹ Lipman, p. 53.

sanctity and sainthood. The competition over relics and a monopoly on pilgrimage was a way of creating economic stability for monasteries and church institutions, who had suffered during the invasions of the ninth and tenth centuries.¹⁰² A key factor in the motivation to develop a new cult lay in the acquisition or ownership of relics. This possession of a popular saint or a local saint could be all that stood between a monastery's 'oblivion and survival'.¹⁰³ The ownership of the body would have inspired pilgrimages and provided a source of revenue. This was spurred by Thomas's creation of a hagiography and his description of miracles. His *Vita* was essentially a work of propaganda which sought to legitimise the boy's death and to create miracles around his death which would inspire people to pay homage to his shrine. Although no records or depictions of William's shrine exist, in fact, no shrines to child martyrs in England survived the Reformation, records of the shrine to Hugh of Lincoln have survived which show it to be an impressive structure and would have been a dominant point of veneration. Thomas created a local cult that never really spread outside Norwich or the local area. Yet the formula he created for sainthood was transplanted into other towns throughout England during the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The sanctity that was established around the murder of the Christian children by Jews was constructed carefully with specific strands woven together in order to legitimise the claim to sainthood. The rhetoric around sainthood had been established by the twelfth century and a tradition of martyrdom had been developing since the origin of Christianity. These two strands were the basis from which Thomas of Monmouth built up his case for William's sanctity. Into this foundation, the theological tradition of Jews as the killers of

¹⁰² Geary, p. 69.

¹⁰³ Geary, p. 69.

Christ was weaved as was the position of Jews in English society. However, as much as Thomas could link the concepts of sanctity, martyrdom, and anti-Jewish polemics he also had to connect with the specific context of the Christian-Jewish relationship in Norwich in the twelfth century. By drawing from these specific strands of narratives and traditions Thomas legitimised the motivation for the murder and for the sanctity of William of Norwich which was his ultimate objective in creating this accusation of ritual murder.

The Child Martyrs of Norwich and Gloucester

The first book of William's *Vita* established the fact that the boy was murdered by the Jewish community. However, the majority of the *Vita* focuses on establishing the boy's sanctity rather than vilifying the Jewish population. As he created the *Vita* and began to persuade his audience of William's sanctity, Thomas drew on different narratives to back up his claims. Thomas presented William as a child who had exhibited prior saintly merit, which satisfied the heightened societal expectations of saintly behaviour and also proved that he was not simply murdered: he was martyred.¹⁰⁴

The boy is shown to have had saintly virtues from when he was a small child:

Since he was overflowing with inner piety, whatever he was able to take away from his own food or to extract from his mother by his requests, he gave all away to the poor in secret if at any time he did not dare to do so openly.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Geary, p. 69.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, p. 12.

This saintly childhood is followed by his martyrdom and eventually by the many miracles that Thomas of Monmouth attributes to his relics. The daughter of Reginald of Warenne was brought to the shrine of St William at Norwich:

Finally, on the mother's advice, she was carried to Norwich to be cured by the merits of blessed William. When she arrived there and touched the tomb with an offering, divine pity immediately helped her, through the intercession of her glorious martyr William. At that moment, she got better and she who had arrived dying, returned home with her family restored to health.¹⁰⁶

The use of such miracles serves not only to legitimise the sanctity of the boy to other members of the clergy but also to raise the stature of the cult and to inspire pilgrimage and veneration of the shrine. However, the defining characteristic of William's sanctity remains the fact that he was martyred in order to mock the 'Passion of Christ.'

A key aspect of the ritual murder accusations was that they centred on the deaths of children. If the goal was to re-enact the death of Christ, why were children chosen to stand in the place of Christ rather than a man in his early thirties? These accusations contain very important glimpses into the role and function of childhood in the Middle Ages. Historians have long debated childhood in the medieval period and discussed many issues around the role of childhood and the relationship between children and parents. Philippe Ariès, a twentieth-century demographer, argued that parents living in such a climate of infant mortality had a very different attitude towards their children than a modern audience might expect.¹⁰⁷ His argument was built on the premise that as there was such a low

¹⁰⁶Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, p. 147.

¹⁰⁷ P. Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood, Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986.

expectation that infants would survive into adulthood parents invested little or no emotion in their children.¹⁰⁸ However, Ariès's argument was rebutted by many historians. The first historian to do this was the Israeli historian, Shulamit Shahar. She argued that a concept of childhood did exist in the medieval period, and parents invested emotionally and materially in their children.¹⁰⁹ Barbara Hanawalt continued this argument, and pointed out that medieval society had two stages that corresponded to childhood and adolescence. These two stages of childhood appeared in medical texts, scientific texts, and literary works.¹¹⁰ This point is underpinned by her argument that there were both formal and informal processes for marking the transition of individuals between the different stages of life.¹¹¹ Hanawalt also argues that by the late Middle Ages English society was obsessed with training and educating children to pass successfully onto adulthood and to succeed in that environment.¹¹² The conception of medieval childhood can be seen in the narratives of ritual murder which have survived and is key to understanding why it was children who were the victims rather than adults.

Thomas of Monmouth creates William's childhood by highlighting the key stages of medieval childhood. He first creates the scene by conveying the vision that led to his

¹⁰⁸ Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*.

¹⁰⁹ Although she does argue that the conception of childhood is different from the one understood by a modern audience, she points out that there was a modern conception and understanding of childhood that existed. For more information, see; S. Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, London, Routledge, 1990.

¹¹⁰ For an in-depth discussion of the stages of medieval childhood see; B. A. Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History*, Oxford, University of Oxford Press, 1993. For a more general discussion of childhood in relation to family life see; B. A. Hanawalt, *The Ties that Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986.

¹¹¹ Hanawalt, *The Ties that Bound*, p. 5-6.

¹¹² Hanawalt, p. 6.

mother discovering her pregnancy and then the birth of the boy. On the day of William's weaning he performed his first miracle and the boy's sanctity begins to be explored by Thomas.¹¹³ The love between mother and child is also focused on by Thomas and the dedication given to the boy's education:

The mother, of course, who loved the child greatly, educated him with the greatest of care,
and by her attentive education led him from infancy to the years of understanding.¹¹⁴

The love that was given to the boy, and described by Thomas, highlights the role of children in family life during the Middle Ages. This description follows Shahar's arguments on the role that intimacy and affection of childhood did play in the Middle Ages and Hanawalt's argument for distinct phases of childhood. As the boy came of age he transitioned into the next phase of his adolescence:

And so when he bloomed into such a venerable childhood and was already eight years
old, he was handed over by his parents to the skimmers, to learn the art of tanning.¹¹⁵

This transition came not only with a change from one stage of childhood to another but also with a change in geographic location.¹¹⁶ William moved from the countryside to the city and was away from his parents and family. However, when William was going with 'Judas,' he applied to his mother for permission to go to seek work with him. The way that

¹¹³ "A certain penitent – his arms in iron chains – entered, as if to beg for alms from those at table. After having eaten and delighted in his food, he took the little boy into his arms as if to admire him, and the boy in his childish innocence, fascinated by the iron chains, touched them with his little palms, and the chains suddenly cracked and broke apart." Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, p. 11.

¹¹⁴ Thomas of Monmouth, Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, p. 12.

¹¹⁵ Thomas of Monmouth, Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, p. 13.

¹¹⁶ "They lived a decent life in the countryside, abundantly supplied with all those things needed for living" When the boy came of age, "finally, he left the countryside, moved to the city and lived with a certain master, who was very well known for his skill. Rarely spending time in the countryside, and now used to the city, he made great efforts with industry in his chosen craft and reached the age of twelve." Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, p. 13.

his mother fought for him with the 'Judas' figure as a sheep would fight a wolf, and even when she conceded:

The mother's devotion was still not weakened, nor was her sense of foreboding of future evil easily allayed.¹¹⁷

This image of William's mother is linked to the figure of the Virgin Mary, both women lose their children to the 'Jews' and their sons are crucified. The Christian imagination placed the guilt of Christ's death on the Jews, rather than the Romans. Due to this, both mothers lose their children to the Jews actions in the same circumstances. By portraying William's mother in the same way as the Virgin Mary the parallel that Thomas of Monmouth is trying to create between the boy and Christ is further expanded.¹¹⁸

The relationship between mother and child that Thomas created was a reflection of societal attitudes towards children. This highlights the school of thought that although it was not a modern conception of childhood, there was a medieval conception of childhood evident in society. However, infant mortality was incredibly high during the Middle Ages and the reason that children were the victims of the murder may simply have been a coincidence. If Thomas of Monmouth had jumped upon the body of a dead child as it was easy to manipulate for his purpose, then it is simply a coincidence that the victim was a child. As this formula was transplanted into different cities the fact that the victims were children is simply a continuation of a tradition started at Norwich.

¹¹⁷Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, p. 15.

¹¹⁸ The image of the mother's devotion and devastation at the death of her son parallels the way the Virgin Mary is depicted in the Middle Ages. M. Rubin. *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009.

Harold of Gloucester was allegedly murdered in 1168 and began the pattern of child murders that spread throughout England and continental Europe during the Middle Ages. Within three years of the death of Harold the first accusation of ritual murder was made in France, at Blois in 1171. Joe Hillaby has argued that Thomas's *Vita* provided a frame work for popular fears of the Christian community be voiced in Harold's death, and that the monastic leaders, who were interested in creating saints and sources of revenue for their churches, utilized the situation for their own benefit.¹¹⁹ Like the case at Norwich, Harold's death is attributed to the Jews and occurred during the Easter/Passover festivals. However, at Gloucester there is another layer of religious tension in the narrative created around the death of Harold. There was a circumcision ritual taking place in the city at the time of the murder which plays on the religious fears of the town and creates another level of legitimization for the cult which is established.

The murder of Harold took place when there was a gathering of Jews in Gloucester for the circumcision of one of their members. On Saturday 18 March the body of a child was found in the River Severn.¹²⁰ The boy's hands and feet were tied and there were thorns that had been fastened to his head.¹²¹ The body also showed signs that it had been burned.¹²² Like the earlier murder of William, it was alleged that there was a conspiracy of

¹¹⁹ J. Hillaby, "The Ritual-Child-Murder Accusation: Its Dissemination and Harold of Gloucester," *Jewish Historical Studies*, vol. 34, 1996, p. 74.

¹²⁰ *Historia Monasterii Sancti Petri Gloucestriae*. Translated from the Gloucester Cathedral copy by W. Barber, 1988. In D. Welander, *The History, Art and Architecture of Gloucester Cathedral*, Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1991): 609.

¹²¹ *Historia Monasterii Sancti Petri Gloucestriae*, p. 609.

¹²² *Historia Monasterii Sancti Petri Gloucestriae*, p. 609.

Jews to murder the boy and that the murder was committed by the community as a whole rather than by an individual. The document records that ‘it was in the opinion of many’ that the Jews kidnapped the boy and kept him concealed until the brethren from throughout England were able to converge on Gloucester to conduct the sacrifice. In a contemporary report it is described that:

During a certain night, that of the preceding Friday, he was set before Jews who had gathered from all over England under the pretext of circumcising a boy at the celebration of a great festival according to the law. They pretended this rather craftily and also misled the citizens of Gloucester with such deceit. They tortured him with extreme cruelty.¹²³

No Christians were present to witness the murder nor did any Jew confess to the crime. Monks from Gloucester and the citizens of the city saw the wounds on the boy, the scars from the fire, the thorn marks on the head and the “liquid wax poured in his eyes” on the face of the boy.¹²⁴ Those who saw the body believed that the wounds had been inflicted in such a manner as to make him a martyr to Christ, and that he had been killed because he was without sin.¹²⁵ The body was taken in procession on 19 March to St. Peter's Abbey, and eventually buried in the chapel near the altar of St Edmund and St Edward King and Confessor.¹²⁶

The murder and the sanctity of Harold was legitimized through the association with the religious festivals and by the fact that he was murdered in order to mock the Passion of Christ. This served to justify the cult and also to establish Jewish guilt beyond reasonable

¹²³ *Historia Monasterii Sancti Petri Gloucestriae*, p. 609.

¹²⁴ *Historia Monasterii Sancti Petri Gloucestriae*, p. 609.

¹²⁵ *Historia Monasterii Sancti Petri Gloucestriae*, p. 610.

¹²⁶ *Historia Monasterii Sancti Petri Gloucestriae*, p. 610.

doubt. Unlike the *Vita* that Thomas of Monmouth created, the writer of this account provided a relatively straight forward account of the death of Harold and unlike Thomas did struggle to create or legitimise a cult. This demonstrates that the accusation made by the monks and the public, reached an audience who had knowledge that Jews allegedly committed crimes like this. Although there was still an emphasis on creating a saint for St Peters, it was not as urgent as in Norwich, and compared to the effort that Thomas and his Bishop put into convincing their religious group of the murder at the hands of the Jews, this accusation is believed more readily and with little goading. Unlike the accusation at Norwich, there is no surviving *Vita* and the main source for this murder comes from *Historia Monasterii Sancti Petri Gloucestriae*, and although there are other references to the death of Harold they are fleeting and more than likely derived from this history.

At this time the Jewish community in Gloucester was relatively new, and the ceremony and the gathering of Jews to celebrate a circumcision would have seemed unusual to the Christian community. Although this fear and these myths may have 'been on the air' in Gloucester as in Norwich twenty years earlier the main accusations of ritual murder against the Jewish community was made by monks from Benedictine monasteries who would have seen the benefit in a saint and a new financial revenue for their religious house. A key element in the accusation at Gloucester, is the reference to the circumcision that drew the Jews to the city in order that they could commit the murder. Circumcision rituals were not only just an initiation ritual into the Jewish faith during this period they were also one of the main symbols that demarked Jews and Christians.¹²⁷ To Christians of

¹²⁷ A. S. Abulafia, *Christian-Jewish Relations, 1000-1300: Jews in the Service of Medieval Christendom*, Harlow, Pearson, 2011, p. 176.

the Middle Ages the rite of circumcision was seen as a denial of Christ by reinforcing the Jewish covenant with God. Anna Sapir Abulafia has highlighted this issue and argued that the construction of the shrine may have emphasized the fragile Christian-Jewish relations of the time.¹²⁸ With a large group of Jews congregating for a ritual such as this, the procession of Christians that followed the body of Harold to the church where it was buried would have balanced out the Jewish ceremony.¹²⁹ However, as in Norwich there was no immediate violence against the Jewish community that we can determine and there was no secular repercussion against the Jewish community but simply an accusation and a cult of martyrdom that developed.

Following the allegation at Norwich and the narrative that was constructed surrounding the death of William, the concept of ritual murder became a fixture of English society. The narrative was constructed drawing upon the cult of saints and the pre-existing polemical tradition that established Jews as the crucifiers of Christ and an inferior minority in English society. As the narrative spread, Gloucester became the next centre to witness an allegation of ritual murder with a framework very similar to the accusation at Norwich. By this time the concept of ritual murder: the death of a child in a way that mimicked the death of Christ, and the saintly miracles attributed to their bodies had been established. It was this that during the late twelfth century developed into a popularised narrative that emerged and spread.

¹²⁸ Abulafia, *Christian-Jewish Relations*, p. 176.

¹²⁹ Abulafia, p. 176.

Conclusion.

The death of William of Norwich had the potential to pass without general notice if it was not for the efforts of Thomas of Monmouth. Taking the death of a boy and manipulating the narrative that was constructed around it allowed for a martyr to be created. Through this narrative the death of William became immortalised and it spawned allegations that spread throughout the Middle Ages and indeed into the Modern era. How this narrative was constructed is key to understanding why it became popular and also why it was able to be adapted by different communities. The history of Christian-Jewish relationship was incredibly important in determining the way that Thomas of Monmouth created and structured his *Vita*. It determined how he approached the death and how he constructed his defence of William's sanctity. The Christian-Jewish relationship and the theological teachings of the Church paved the way for the narratives of ritual murder to take place. The role of Jews as the killers of Christ had already been established and they were already in a disadvantaged position in English society which made them easy targets for libels. As the narrative spread to Gloucester the image of a tortured, and crucified child had been established. It was this image which was to capture audiences and horrify communities as the narrative took hold in English society during the late twelfth century.

Chapter Two

Robert of Bury and Twelfth Century Manipulations of the Narrative of Ritual

Murder

Introduction

The second half of the twelfth century witnessed a key development in the accusations of ritual murder. The accusations began to be manipulated by different groups to serve a specific purpose within that society. This led to a change in the way the accusations were received by society and also in how they were recorded and spread. This chapter will aim to trace how the accusations developed during the late twelfth century and how the narratives began to be adapted by different communities. This focus will explore how the deteriorating Jewish position influenced the narratives, how one specific allegation at Bury St Edmunds was manipulated, and finally how different themes were weaved into the accusations to enhance their emotive power and their vilification of Judaism. This approach will argue that the development of the narrative of ritual murder during the late twelfth century is key to understanding how legends survived as their adaption ensured that the accusations remained relevant to each community that witnessed the allegation.

The first section will examine the deteriorating position of the Jews in English society during the late twelfth century. Increasing intolerance and financial exploitation of the Jewish population led to the role they had in English society deteriorating, and outbreaks of violence and outright hostility against the community became common in the late twelfth century. The second section will explore the allegation of ritual murder that

occurred at Bury St Edmunds in the late twelfth century. This accusation is a pivotal one as it shows how the narratives could be utilised to exacerbate anti-Jewish feeling and eventually the expulsion of the Jewish community from the town. The focus on the thematic elements that are incorporated into the narratives of ritual murder during the late twelfth century. As the narratives spread throughout England, they were imbued with different literary strands that enhanced the emotional response elicited from the audience. This adaption allowed for the continued development of the narratives as they could be constructed in a way that was relevant and specific to each community.

The Deteriorating Anglo-Jewish Position in the Twelfth Century

As Chapter One has illustrated, ritual murder narratives were constructed and promoted to create cults of sanctity by individuals connected to specific religious houses. The religious elite constructed these narratives to serve a purpose that was located within the specific religious and economic environment of mid-twelfth century East Anglia. As the twelfth century the ‘understanding’ and dissemination of the allegation that Jews ritually killed Christian children spread outside of East Anglia and in doing so became popularised. This popularisation also led to the religious elite losing the control and authority that they had previously exerted over the narratives of ritual murder. This section will trace the spread of this accusation and the subsequent popularisation of the narratives. It will also consider the changing position of the Jewish community in medieval England and how ritual murder narratives played a part in this deteriorating relationship.

The legitimisation that characterised the first phase of the ritual murder accusations was conducted through written texts which were produced by religious houses and spread by religious networks. The *Vita* recorded by Thomas of Monmouth was more concerned with legitimising the accusation to his fellow monks than it was about creating an anti-Jewish legend that would be able to duplicate itself. The *Vita* devotes itself to establishing the miraculous nature of the saint's body and his ability to intercede and help those who came to him.¹³⁰ The passages of text which reinforced the boy's sanctity overshadow the passages which detail the death of William at the hands of the Jews.¹³¹ Thomas of Monmouth needed to convince not only his East Anglian religious community of William's sanctity but also the wider community, who would inspire pilgrimages and a source of financial revenue. The extent to which the cult inspired pilgrimage is debated by historians and the general conclusion is that it was limited.¹³² These texts provide us with a tangible, but not necessarily accurate, description of how the ritual murder accusations unfolded. More importantly, they show that the accusations were a top-down phenomenon. These texts were created in monasteries by the religious elite and recorded in Latin, not in the vernacular, and the limited number of copies that have survived suggests the narratives were contained within the religious elite who had indeed either reinvented or indeed invented them. As Chapter One has outlined, earlier anti-Jewish polemics were built into these accusations, and they were constructed in such a way as to legitimise the narratives

¹³⁰ Numerous accounts in the *Vita* highlight William's ability to cure and intercede. For example, "Of a Boy Cured of Dysentery", "Of a Certain Woman Who Was Cured of a Long-Standing Illness", "Of Sailors Freed at Sea", "Of a Poor Woman's Pig Who Was Cured." Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, pp. 98-99.

¹³¹ The *Vita* contains seven books that cover 77 folios. However only book one and two which covers only 28 folios (3ra – 31vb) detail the role of the Jews and the subsequent 'trial'. Thomas of Momouth, *Vita et Miraculi Sancti Willelmi Martyris Norwicensis*, Transcription of Cambridge Univerity Library Ms. Add. 3037, fols. 1-77r, by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

¹³² For a comprehensive discussion of the spread of the accusation in Norwich and the extent to which it was known in the city see: McCulloh, 'Jewish Ritual Murder', pp. 698-740.

within an existing tradition. However, as the accusations spread, the religious houses lost the control of the creation and dissemination of the narratives, they took on a life separate from this religious origin. This change in the instigators of the accusations led to a significant development in the nature of the narratives and also in the way in which they were transmitted.

During the late twelfth century the long and incredibly detailed hagiographies disappear, and the surviving accounts of later ritual murders come from chronicles, ballads, works of literature, legal records, and instructive texts for churches. The infamous death of Hugh of Lincoln was recorded in the chronicle of Matthew Paris, the Annals of Burton on Trent and the Annals of Waverly, as well as numerous other accounts in literature and folk legends. However, a *Vita* like that which legitimised the death of William of Norwich, was no longer needed as the concept of ritual murder was known and accepted. However, in order for this change and the subsequent popularisation to occur, the knowledge of the accusation needed to spread beyond the religious community of twelfth-century Norwich. Taking the accusation at Norwich in 1144 as a starting point, the myth of ritual murder spread outward with the help of 'enterprising monks' who moved between Benedictine houses and spread the tale. Examining this route of transmission allows for a greater understanding of medieval Christian-Jewish relations which is key to understanding why this narrative took hold and why communities utilised it as a tool to create a vilified 'other'.

The Benedictine Order was not an overtly anti-Semitic religious order compared to the Franciscans or the Dominicans. However, the Benedictine order did have a strong focus

and emphasis on textual traditions and production.¹³³ The Franciscan and the Dominican orders in comparison channelled resources towards affecting social change, which they hoped to bring about through preaching.¹³⁴ One specific area that they focused on to bring about social change was through the degradation of England's Jewry.¹³⁵ However, the emphasis that the Benedictine order placed on developing a hagiographic culture ensured the survival and the spread of the ritual murder accusations in England, which greatly added to the increasing anti-Jewish sentiment of the twelfth and thirteenth century. Anthony Bale has argued there is no reason why it was the Benedictines, not the mendicants, who spread the accusation despite the mendicants having a stronger anti-Jewish leaning. However, if the accusations of ritual murder were solely focused on developing a hagiographic narrative and a source of financial revenue for Benedictine houses, then the initial intent of the creation of the narratives was not purely anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic. It does, however, show that the accusations came from an elitist group who, while they were advertising the cults that they created, spread a trope, which inspired the next generation of allegations, which took on a different form and adapted different narratives to the myth of ritual murder. The promotion of these cults and the spread of the trope of ritual murder between Benedictine houses disseminated the format and the structure of the accusations. As the knowledge of the concept of ritual murder allegations spread, the authors of the various accounts no longer had to legitimise or explain why Jews killed Christian children: it was understood and believed.

¹³³ A. Bale, 'Fictions of Judaism in England before 1290', In P. Skinner (ed.), *The Jews in Medieval Britain: Historical, Literary and Archaeological Perspectives*, Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2003, p. 133.

¹³⁴ Bale, 'Fictions of Judaism in England before 1290,' p. 133.

¹³⁵ For more information on the role of the Dominicans and the Franciscans in anti-Jewish preaching see; J. Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews the Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism*, London, Cornell University Press, 1982.

The spread of the ritual murder accusations in medieval England also coincided with increased anti-Jewish sentiment and an increasing intolerance for England's Jewish community. Growing hostility towards England's Jewish community was spurred in part by increasing indebtedness to the Jewish community some of whom had become wealthy and incredibly influential through money lending. Following Richard I's coronation and leading up to his departure on crusade, there were numerous outbreaks of violence against the Jewish community. The Jewish quarter in London was burned to the ground. At York, the Jewish community fled rioters and took refuge in Clifford's Tower under Crown protection. The Jewish community was surrounded and with no way out chose to commit heroic martyrdom rather than fall at the hands of the crowd who were baying for Jewish blood. Ephraim of Bonn places the number who died during the York Massacre alone at 150. Following this outbreak of violence, the Exchequer of the Jews was established to regulate Jewish financial dealings and to allow the Crown to effectively tax Jewish financial dealings, which in turn exacerbated the dislike of the Jewish community. After this point, the Jewish position in English society deteriorated dramatically with legislation limiting their ability to conduct their business and to live freely in English society. The Jewish badge decreed by the Fourth Lateran Council was introduced, and curfews were increasingly put in place to limit Jewish movements.¹³⁶ Coin pogroms, claiming that Jews were debasing the currency, increased and outbreaks of targeted violence against the Jewish community became frequent occurrences.¹³⁷ This deterioration of the Jewish

¹³⁶ J. Tolan, 'The First Imposition of a Badge on European Jews: The English Royal Mandate of 1218', In D. Pratt, J. Hoover, J. Davies (ed.), *The Character of Christian-Muslim Encounter: Essays in Honour of David Thomas*, Chesworth, Liden, Brill.

¹³⁷ Mundill, *The King's Jews*, p. 2010.

position in English society occurred alongside the popularisation of ritual murder, and the two cannot be separated as they intertwined to exacerbate anti-Jewish feeling.

The extent to which ritual murder narratives spread throughout the twelfth century, and indeed outward from East Anglia, is often hard to ascertain tangibly. However, Winchester provides an example of the spread and development of the narrative into what Gavin Langmuir would categorise as ‘irrational fantasies.’ The first accusation of alleged ritual murder occurred in Winchester in 1192 and surrounded the death of a young French boy. The record of this accusation is provided by Richard Devizes, a Benedictine monk in his *Cronicon*.¹³⁸ This account is still recorded by the religious elite of society, but there is a key difference as the Benedictine house did not facilitate the accusation, and there was no effort on their part to create a cult. Devizes simply recorded the events as they apparently occurred and imbued them with his own ‘artistic licence’. The *Cronicon* does appear to be written for individuals familiar with the Winchester region and due to the allusions to the ‘upper echelons’ of monastic life, still to a religious elite.¹³⁹ The account of the accusation begins:

The Jews of Winchester, zealous, after the Jewish fashion, for the honour of their city (although what was done greatly lessened it), brought upon themselves, according to the testimony of many people, the widely known reputation of having made a martyr of a boy in Winchester.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ *Cronicon Richardi Divisensis de Tempore Regis Richardi Primi*, Trans. by J. T. Appleby, London, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963.

¹³⁹ A. Bale, ‘Richard of Devizes and Fictions of Judaism’, *Jewish Culture and History*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2000, pp. 56-57.

¹⁴⁰ *Cronicon Richardi Divisensis de Tempore Regis Richardi Primi*, p. 64.

By beginning in this manner, Devizes is establishing a general theme of hearsay or rumour, which is embedded in the narrative he weaves. It also highlights that the accusation did not come from within the Benedictine house or from the monks themselves, as was previously common with the first wave of ritual murder accusations.

As Devizes develops the narrative, elements point to the fantastical element of the boy's story. Nancy Partner's reading of this account of ritual murder asserts that Devizes did not 'express any sincere opinion' about the ritual murder but used the occasion to illustrate his amusement at the 'convention' that was the ritual murder literature.¹⁴¹ Partner has highlighted sections where she believes that Devizes is using specific figurative language, such as alliteration, to show how ludicrous the allegation of murder is.¹⁴² More importantly to the issue of popularisation, is Partner's argument that the accusation recorded by Devizes is creating a parallel or even a satiric parody with the *Vita* of William of Norwich.¹⁴³ William left the countryside to seek an apprentice in Norwich where he eventually did work for the Jews of Norwich. The victim at Winchester left France and travelled to England after being encouraged by a French Jew. Partner has also drawn a connection between the nightmares suffered by the boy who accuses the Winchester Jews of murder and the visions that abound in Thomas of Monmouth's *Vita*.¹⁴⁴ Partner's argument for Devize's allusion to William of Norwich is underpinned by her belief that

¹⁴¹ N. F. Partner, *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1977, pp. 176.

¹⁴² One phrase picked up by Partner is "Wherever these poor lads worked or ate away from each other by day, every night they slept together in the same bed in the same old hut of a poor old woman." Partner has argued that this section shows the exaggerated alliteration and use of diminutives used by Devizes to highlight the pathetic image that he is recording. Partner, *Serious Entertainments*, p. 177.

¹⁴³ Partner, p. 177.

¹⁴⁴ Partner, p. 178.

the *Vita* was ‘sufficiently’ known for the readers of his *Cronicon* to quickly register the connection and to recognise an allusion that was being attempted.¹⁴⁵ John McCulloh has argued that although Devize may have heard of the death of William of Norwich and the miracles attributed to him, it does not necessarily mean that he had a detailed knowledge of the *Vita* created by Thomas of Monmouth.¹⁴⁶ However, McCulloh’s argument is based on the fact that although Devizes may have read the *Vita* of William of Norwich, his audience would not have recognised the parody in his *Cronicon*.¹⁴⁷ If, as earlier stated, due to the allusion to the elite monastic circles included in the *Cronicon* it was targeted at an elite monastic audience there is a far higher chance that this group would know of or indeed have read Thomas’s *Vita*. However, the allegation at Winchester provided clear evidence of the spread of the accusation of ritual murder out of its original East Anglian context.

The parallels between the *Vita* constructed around the death of William of Norwich and the later accounts provided by Devize provides evidence that a specific narrative construction had spread throughout England. Devize was responding to a tradition that had been established and which he, as a Benedictine monk, would have known. Whether he was trying to turn the accusation at Winchester into a satire of the trope is not as important as the fact that he knew of it and understood it. This case at Winchester proves that the accusation was spreading throughout England during the late twelfth century, aided by the Benedictine network of religious houses and monasteries, and that the accusations were no longer coming from the religious elite themselves but from the general, if irrational, public.

¹⁴⁵ Partner, p. 178.

¹⁴⁶ McCulloh, p.712.

¹⁴⁷ McCulloh, p. 712.

Winchester did not have only one accusation of ritual murder; it witnessed multiple accusations during the thirteenth century. In 1225, there was another allegation in Winchester, but as the victim was found alive the charge floundered.¹⁴⁸ Later in the same year four Jews were accused of the murder of a man called William fitz Richard fitz Gervase, but only two were found culpable.¹⁴⁹ In 1232, Winchester was again the centre of another ritual murder accusation. The dismembered body of a year-old infant was discovered, its heart and eyes had been removed and it had also been castrated.¹⁵⁰ The infant's mother had fled Winchester, showing apparent guilt at the boy's death, but suspicion still fell on a Jew called Abraham Pinch.¹⁵¹ Pinch had been one of the Jews implicated in the 'murders' that had occurred in 1225.¹⁵² Nicholas Vincent has argued that the accusation in 1232 was part of the anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic changes that the Bishop of Winchester Peter des Roches instituted on his return from the crusades in 1231. It was also a tactic to raise money to pay for Henry III's attempt to move into the north of France, and can also be seen as also a symbol of des Roches' authority.¹⁵³ The event at Winchester illustrates not only the emergence of the ritual murder accusation outside of East Anglia but also how the accusations developed and were remoulded and manipulated into different situations.

¹⁴⁸ N. Vincent, 'Jews, Poitevins and the Bishop of Winchester, 1231-1234', in D. Wood (ed.), *Christianity and Judaism: Studies in Church History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 1992, pp. 119-132.

¹⁴⁹ Vincent, 'Jews, Poitevins and the Bishop of Winchester', pp. 119-132.

¹⁵⁰ Vincent, pp. 119-132.

¹⁵¹ Vincent, pp. 119-132.

¹⁵² Vincent, pp. 119-132.

¹⁵³ Vincent, pp. 119-132.

The use of the ritual murder trope to explain the missing child that turned up alive, and was - unusually - a girl, shows how the narrative was adapted and used to explain situations that occurred within Winchester society. The use of the narrative tradition to explain away what appears to be a straightforward case of infanticide offers a far darker reading of the Jewish position in Winchester. The mother appears to be the culprit in her child's murder and acts in a way that would for the medieval period confirm her guilt, but the community still places the blame on a Jew. These accusations illustrate a move away from the control that the religious elite exerted over the ritual murders and towards the popularisation of the narrative that was used by the public as a way of shifting blame on to a religious minority. This displacement onto a minority group also served another important role – a way of defining Christianity by vilifying Judaism.

Scholars seeking to understand the relationship between Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity and the Middle Ages have long been attracted to the concept of the “Parting of the Ways”.¹⁵⁴ This model argues that Christianity and Judaism are two paths that diverged from a single road and have never crossed or merged again.¹⁵⁵ However, this theory neither reflects the reality of the Christian-Jewish relationship or the history of interactions and exchanges between the two faiths. Both Christianity and Judaism were formed and shaped during the same era and due to close contacts between the two faiths they influenced and helped to define the other through their presence. Relations between

¹⁵⁴ For a detailed discussion of the ‘parting of the ways’ theory see: J. D. G. Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, London, SCM Press, 1991.

¹⁵⁵ A. Y. Reed and A. H. Becker, *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2003, p. 1.

the two faiths in the first century centred around who was the chosen people and who was rejected, who was Jacob and who was Esau.¹⁵⁶ This polemic reflects not only a continuing dialogue between the faiths, but also a process of self-definition where the ‘other’ religion categorised their rival as a persecutor and used this to create cohesion within their religion.¹⁵⁷ This counter model ‘the ways that never parted’ provides a way of examining the Christian-Jewish relationship and also for understanding the tensions between the two faiths in medieval England. However, how Christianity and Judaism defined themselves was intrinsically linked to the Christian-Jewish relationship and the proximity in which the two faiths were living during the Middle Ages.

During the medieval period, Jews and Christians were once again living in close proximity, and yet again the two faiths sought to define themselves in relation to the ‘other’. Geraldine Heng has argued that the treatment of England’s medieval Jews amounted to “de facto race making: producing phenomena, institutions, laws, and behaviour that deserve to be named as racial.”¹⁵⁸ Heng’s argument asserts that although the state and the church controlled Jewish lives in England, popular support for community narratives, namely ritual murder accusations, were in fact “fictions designed to authorise and arrange for community violence to Jews.”¹⁵⁹ Her analysis of the popularisation of ritual murder narratives and indeed their survival even after the Jewish expulsion claims that:

¹⁵⁶ Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ Yuval, p. 1.

¹⁵⁸ G. Heng, ‘England’s Dead Boys: Telling Tales of Christian-Jewish Relations Before and After the First European Expulsion of the Jews’, *MLN*, vol. 127, 2012, p. 58. See also: G. Heng, ‘The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages I: Race Studies, Modernity, and the Middle Ages,’ *Literature Compass*, vol. 8, no. 5, 2011, pp. 257-274; G. Heng, ‘The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages II: Locations of Medieval Race’, *Literature Compass*, vol. 8, no. 5, 2011, pp. 275-293.

¹⁵⁹ Heng, ‘England’s Dead Boys’ p. 58.

Stories of Jewish culpability continued to elicit human passions ranging from pathos and rage to indignant laughter, thus uniting and pulling together the English Christian community, whose collective identity, and devotional and corporate life were sustained by the repeated recall of the once-resident alien, in pious and recreational acts of solidarity.¹⁶⁰

Ritual murder narratives did provide a means of creating fictions that allowed for the vilification of the Jewish population in a way that was no longer based on economic tensions but on religious and arguably ethnic lines.

This change in the audience of the accusations was in part due to the way that they were received and interpreted by the general population. The perception and acceptance of these accusations are intrinsically linked to broader themes and concerns of medieval society. The Christian-Jewish relationship became strained in England during the late twelfth century, and outbreaks of violence and financial exploitation were becoming common. It was this backdrop upon which the ritual murder narratives became popularised and took hold in English society. This popularisation and the merging with folklore belief and other narrative strands changed the nature and the trope of ritual murder and increased the irrationality that comes through in the accusations. As popularisation of the narratives increased, their mode of transmission developed into an 'oral' tradition or a performance based narrative that transcended boundaries of literacy and indeed the religious elite. However, there was a far more sinister use for ritual murder accusations in medieval England. They began to be manipulated to justify Jewish persecution or to reify the Christian perception of the community. This manipulation is a key development in the

¹⁶⁰ Heng, p. 59.

narrative adaption and illustrates how the allegations began to be utilised in the late twelfth century.

Robert of Bury: The ‘Popularised’ and Manipulated Narrative of Ritual Murder

Just over ten years after the murder of Harold, another child Robert, was found dead in the town of Bury St Edmunds in 1181. Although only fragmentary records survive of his death, his cult survived in England until the Reformation and continued the tradition of child martyrs in the late twelfth century. Bury proved to be a tumultuous environment for Jews to reside, with outbreaks of hostility a frequent occurrence, and the jurisdiction over the Jewish population was a reason for tension between the Abbot of Bury and the Crown. This tension led to a standoff between the power of the Crown and the power of the Church and was played out over the expulsion of the Jews from the town, eight years after the accusation of ritual murder was said to have taken place.¹⁶¹ The outbreak of violence that followed the coronation of Richard I also led to the deaths of 57 Jews in Bury, this was used as a catalyst to facilitate the expulsion of the Jews from the town.¹⁶² By this time the Abbey was heavily in debt and Abbot Sampson used this outbreak of violence as a way to justify the expulsion of the Jewish community from the town.¹⁶³ However, despite

¹⁶¹ M. Widner, ‘Samson’s Touch and a Thin Red Line: Reading the Bodies of Saints and Jews in Bury St Edmunds’, *Journal of English and German Philology*, vol. 111, no. 3, 2012, p. 342.

¹⁶² A. Bale, ‘House Devil, Town Saint’ Anti-Semitism and Hagiography in Medieval Suffolk’, in S. Delany, *Chaucer and the Jews: Sources, Contexts, Meanings*, New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 187.

¹⁶³ Widner, ‘Samson’s Touch’, p. 343.

the complex history of the Jewish population in the town, the accusation of ritual murder provides insight into the cult of child martyrs and the role of the church in developing them.

Bury does provide another insight into the development of the cult of child martyrs for the continuation of the narratives and the change in audience. Before 1175 Bury had fallen under the authority of the bishop of Norwich, but Pope Alexander III gave the Abbey independence and Bury set about distancing itself from Norwich.¹⁶⁴ The discovery of a child martyr would emphasise the independence of Bury and create a new centre, or even a rival centre, for the veneration of child-martyrs killed by Jews. However, when you consider the expulsion of the Jews from Bury in 1190, and the lack of allusion to Jewish involvement, there are questions about whether the expulsion came first or if the ritual murder predated it. Did the murder pave the social conditions needed for the expulsion or was the murder a way of legitimising the continued expulsion of the Jews from Bury and justifying the Abbot's stance? The martyr cults provided a financial incentive for both Norwich and Gloucester but in Bury where there was already a profitable shrine which would have overshadowed the shrine of Robert.¹⁶⁵ Benedictine houses competing for saintly relics would have facilitated the rise of the martyr cults, and a dedicated following of monks to ensure that the shrine became established was needed for their success. However, in Bury where the Abbot clearly had a motive for expelling the Jews from his town, the accusation could have been pushed along not just for the benefit of a martyr cult but to serve his own ends. Thus, the ritual murder accusation began to be appropriated by individuals, and their development became a source of propaganda and anti-Jewish

¹⁶⁴ Bale, 'House Devil, Town Saint', p. 186.

¹⁶⁵ Bury also housed the shrine to St Edmund which was a popular destination of pilgrimage during the Middle Ages.

sentiment. This appropriation of the accusation and manipulation of the events required a general audience, in order for it to either legitimise the Abbots call to expel the Jews from the town, or to give credence to the fact that the Abbot had already expelled the Jews.

The historian and monk of Bury St Edmunds, Jocelin of Brakelond is the first reference to this accusation in Bury.¹⁶⁶ In his chronicle, he states “at this time the holy boy Robert suffered martyrdom and was buried in our church, and many signs and wonders were performed among the common folk, as I have set down elsewhere.”¹⁶⁷ This is the first record of the murder of Robert and hints at a shrine or potentially a chapel to the boy, but it provides no details on the accusation or if the Jews had been the alleged murders. The reference to ‘many signs and wonders’ would have been compiled in a hagiographic record, a collection of miracles attributed to him, or even potentially a *Vita* but if they did exist they have been lost. John Lydgate a monk who was admitted to the Benedictine Abbey at Bury in 1382, composed a poem dedicated to the life of Robert of Bury which appears in a late fifteenth century manuscript:

O blyssid Robert, Innocent and Virgyne,
Glourious marter, gracious & riht good,
To our prayer thyn eris doun Enclyne,
Wich on-to Crist offredyst thy chast blood,
Ageyns the thelewys were so wood,

¹⁶⁶ *Cronica Jocelini de Brakelonda de rebus gestis Samsonis Abbatis Monasterii Sancti Edmundi*. Trans. H. E. Butler, New York, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1949.

¹⁶⁷ “Eodem tempore fuit sanctus puer Robertus martirizatus, et in ecclesia nostra sepultus, et fiebant prodigia et signa multa in plebe, sicut alibi scripsimus.” *Cronica Jocelini de Brakelonda*, p. 16.

Lyk as thy story makyth mencyoun,
 Pray for alle tho, to crist that starff on rood,
 That do reuerence on-to thy passsioun.¹⁶⁸

In this work there is created an image of the boy Robert as a ‘stand in’ for the body of Christ. And the following verses follow the standard form of English ritual murder with the innocent boy being crucified and with him then becoming a saint through his martyrdom. In the final stanza of his poem, Lydgate links the narrative back to the shrine of the boy in Bury, and to its relationship with the even more powerful and patron saint of Bury, St Edmund.

Haue vpon Bury þi gracious remembraunce
 That has among hem a chapel & a shrine,
 With helpe of Edmund, preserve hem fro grevaunce¹⁶⁹

Although the shrine and Jocelin of Brakelond’s other works on Robert’s death have not survived, for later sources like Lydgate’s to have been created there must have been a significant shrine or understanding of the boy’s death circulating in Bury in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

In the fifteenth century, a drama originated in East Anglia called the Croxton ‘*Play of the Sacrament*.’¹⁷⁰ Although it is reenacting a host desecration that was alleged to have

¹⁶⁸ John Lydgate, ‘To St. Robert of Bury,’ In H. N. MacCracken (ed.) *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1911, p. 138.

¹⁶⁹ John Lydgate, ‘To St. Robert of Bury,’ p. 139.

¹⁷⁰ Croxton ‘*Play of the Sacrament*’, in G. Walker (ed.), *Medieval Drama: An Anthology*, Malden, Blackwell, 2000.

occurred in Aragon, and been performed in Rome, it has been argued that it alludes to the martyrdom of Robert of Bury.¹⁷¹ In this play, a Jew procures a host and they torture it and it then bleeds. The Jews then attempt to destroy it by throwing it in an oven but when the oven bursts open an image of a bloody boy appears to the Jews and tells them to change their ways.¹⁷² They then convert and urge others to convert through retelling their experiences. Like ritual murder, host desecration is portrayed as a way of torturing and crucifying Christ through an object that was thought to become his flesh. Lisa Lambert has argued that this play would have resonated with the Christian community in Bury during the fifteenth century.¹⁷³ She has asserted that the image of a bloody boy would have invoked the memory of Robert, the victim of ritual murder, which was an integral aspect of Bury's history.¹⁷⁴ There are records of singers paid to perform in a chapel of St Robert in the year 1520 and Lydgate also makes reference to this chapel. This allusion to an embodiment of the host in a bloody child could have invoked a memory within the community, and the play is also a key example of the development of anti-Semitic performance that evolved in the late Middle Ages. These accusations of ritual murder lasted long after the Jews were expelled and would have remained in the memory of the community through the shrines and performances.

The religious community in Bury St Edmunds was one that benefited from the accusation, not only financially through the possession of a saint - as they already had one

¹⁷¹ L. Lampert, 'The Once and Future Jew: The Croxton 'Play of the Sacrament' Little Robert of Bury and Historical Memory', *Jewish History*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2001, pp. 235-55.

¹⁷² "Here the ovyn must rve asunder and blede owt at þe cranys, and an image appere owt with wounds bledyng." *Croxton 'Play of the Sacrament'*, p. 228.

¹⁷³ Lampert, 'The Once and Future Jew', pp. 235-55.

¹⁷⁴ Lampert, p. 240.

of more importance than Robert - but through the religious cohesion that such an accusation brought. The cult of child martyrs in the twelfth century not only created revenue sources they also were “a way to construct a Christian group identity through the abjection of the Jewish ‘other’.”¹⁷⁵ Anthony Bale’s argument that the bodies of the boys should be considered as icons or a symbol of a version of the Christ child that is common in devotion during the Middle Ages.¹⁷⁶ In this interpretation, the boys become a symbol of Christian purity and a way of vilifying the ‘other’ in this case the Jews. Bale has also argued that the emphasis placed on creating devotion to the bodies of the martyrs of ritual murder was not a way to persecute England’s Jews but were a ‘way of crafting a devotional Christian polity.’¹⁷⁷ In Norwich, Gloucester and at Bury these devotional shrines were not the trigger of points of persecution of the Jewish community. However, as anti-Judaic sentiment increased in the thirteenth century the accusations of ritual murder increased in frequency. But it is important to remember that the accusations of ritual murder in England during the twelfth-century were not a byproduct of anti-Judaic feeling: the accusations were constructed to establish centres of pilgrimages, and promote religious cohesion, not to persecute Jews, as violence and widespread persecution generally did not follow the accusations.

The early accusations were textually based narratives designed to legitimize the cults that emerged, but during the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the accusations changed from a textually based to one that was more accessible to the general public in terms of a folk tale, ballads, images, and performances. With the accusation at Bury, there

¹⁷⁵ Widner, p. 347.

¹⁷⁶ Bale, ‘Fictions of Judaism’, p. 132.

¹⁷⁷ Bale, pp. 132-3.

is a change from the murders being used to justify shrines and pilgrimages to being used for a specific purpose: to create a cohesive Christian polity and a Jewish 'other'. In order to create this, the accusation had to be spread to the general population, unlike earlier accusations which are circulated mainly within the religious elite and the local community. As the audience changed so did the mode of transmission. In the late twelfth century the accusations developed into popular narratives and with this came the transition to a performance rather than a purely textual narrative. One of the clearest examples of the narrative development that these accusations underwent can be seen in the way childhood innocence, gender, and indeed the rhetoric around motherhood became key elements in the tales.

Motherhood, Gender, and Childhood Innocence: The Demonization of the Jewish 'Other'

As narratives of ritual murder spread during the late twelfth century, they had other religious and folk strands woven into them. This allowed for the narratives to be adapted to suit different localities and remain 'up-to-date.' However, these different strands were also a way that the 'malevolence' of the Jewish murderer could be emphasised. Marian tales, and biblical stories that emphasised the bond of motherhood, issues of femininity and masculinity, and above all the innocence and vulnerability of children were added to the narratives of ritual murder. This section will examine how during the late twelfth century these strands were utilised within the ritual murder narratives and how they succeeded in spreading the allegation in a way that the religious elite could not.

The incorporation of the Virgin Mary into the narratives allowed for many themes to be developed, the most important being the role of motherhood. Collections of Marian tales or miracles of the Virgin, whether they be in Latin or the vernacular languages, will in all likelihood contain a number of narratives that demonstrate violence against Jews. The Latin collections of Marian legends that were created in England during the twelfth and thirteenth century, where they arguably had their origin, became the ‘source books’ for later medieval collections of these legends in vernacular languages.¹⁷⁸ Latin collections centred on the conversion of the Jewish population following the illustration of Mary’s power and her ability to perform miracles.¹⁷⁹ Later vernacular versions of the legends were aimed at a broader audience than earlier Latin collections and rather than offering resolutions to the presence of the Jewish population, they offered violence and ‘bloody’ endings.¹⁸⁰ Miri Rubin’s analysis of the *Miracles de Nostre Dame* compiled by the Benedictine monk Gautier of Coinci (1177-1236) highlights this change. Not only was he writing in French instead of Latin, making it far more accessible to a lay audience, but he also offered a commentary on the miracles and his opinion on their place in French society.

Gautier’s treatment of the Jews in these legends was far harsher than previous authors, and he went as far to criticise the royal policy towards the Jews in medieval France. A key example of this is evident in one of the most infamous Marian tales of child murder, which is recounted in *de l’enfant resuscite qui chantoit Gaud Maria* (‘of the

¹⁷⁸Boyarin, ‘Anti-Jewish Parody around Miracles of the Virgin?’, p. 380.

¹⁷⁹Rubin, *Mother of God*, p. 229.

¹⁸⁰Rubin, p. 229.

resuscitated boy who sang Gaude Maria'). A boy walking home from school passes through a Jewish area singing a hymn to Mary. The boy is then set upon by a Jew who cuts his throat; miraculously the boy still continues to sing despite his severed throat. Due to the singing, the body is discovered, and the Jewish community is punished:

Then there was a great tumult
And a hue and cry in many places.

'up and at the Jews, up and at the Jews
who have stolen our little clerk from us.'

Clerics and lay people come together
And quickly pushed their way into the Jews' place:

They trip up and knock down the Jews,

They beat them and roll them around.¹⁸¹

During this time Mary became more active in the role that she plays in the miracle narratives. She displays sovereignty and she fights the devil, moving beyond the traditional roles of saints and relics, and becomes a 'liberator of souls'.¹⁸² This change in the way that Mary was depicted in the Marian legends and as they evolved. This evolution can be seen in the way that she is incorporated into accusations of ritual murder in England.

¹⁸¹ 'Adonti I ot tumulte grant
Et escriee en mout de liuz:
'Or as gius! Or as giuz,
Qui no clercon noz ont emble!
Et cler et lai sont assamble,
Chiez les gius mout tost s'enbatent;
Giuz trebuchent et abatent,
Giuz batent et gius roillent'
Gautier de Coinci, *Les Miracles de Nostre Dame IV*. English translation found in Rubin, p. 232.

¹⁸² Rubin, pp. 232-233.

The framework of the ritual murder narrative that was established in England after 1144, gave a basic framework for the accusations: a child is lost or kidnapped, brutally killed in a way that invokes the memory of the crucifixion, and is subsequently mourned by a devoted mother. However, the incorporation of Marian miracle tales into the ritual murder accusations allowed for specific areas in the original narratives to be highlighted and expanded on. The *Vita* created by Thomas of Monmouth contains limited references to the Virgin Mary but rather places emphasis on William's sanctity and ability to perform miracles rather than on Mary's ability to intercede. The narrative of the ritual murder of Adam of Bristol that survives contains numerous imagery and references associated with the Virgin Mary. The Jew Samuel argues that he must kill the boy Adam not only because of hatred towards Christ but also out of direct hatred for the Virgin Mary who he describes as "a most base whore."¹⁸³ Adam soon after begins to invoke the Virgin Mary; this imagery begins as the boy realises that his captor is a Jew:

When the boy understood this man to be a Jew, he said to himself: "woe, woe, I am dead, for he is a Jew." And he added in his heart, saying: "Have mercy on me, Holy Mary, that I might not die."¹⁸⁴

As Adam is being tortured, a deep voice speaking in Hebrew comes from the boy and orders them to desist in their torture; the voice claims to be God. Samuel's wife asks for permission to speak to the boy and to find out what happened when he was burning in the fire, and the voice came from him. The boy responds to her saying:

¹⁸³ *The Passion of Adam of Bristol*, British Library, Harleian MS. 957, no 7. Translated from Latin by Robert C. Stacey, (Unpublished) Fol. 20r, p. 6.

¹⁸⁴ *The Passion of Adam of Bristol*, Fol. 20r, p. 5.

When you placed me next to the great fire, an exceedingly beautiful lady came to me and sat between me and the fire, and said in the English language, kissing me for as long as I was next to the fire: “son, this night you will come to your father and mother and you will rejoice with them.”¹⁸⁵

However, in this tale the Jewish murderers are not punished, neither are they converted through the works of the Virgin Mary. Mary seems either unwilling or even unable to bring about conversion. When reading it the context of the Jewish expulsion this appears to be a cautionary tale: it questions the efficacy of conversion and the role of a Jewish presence in Christian England.¹⁸⁶ In this way, the construction of the narratives around the alleged case of ritual murder was a social commentary on the continuing Jewish role in English society.

The image of the Virgin Mary allows for a discussion around the role of motherhood and societal issues around the raising and care of children. The figure of the mourning mother searching for her son is quickly introduced as a third key figure in the accusations of ritual murder.¹⁸⁷ At Winchester in 1192, there is a rare change in this structure with the voice of mourning coming from a boy who worked with the victim. The image of the maternal mother who is vainly searching for her beloved son characterises the Christian family, and the feminine love is key to understanding familial pietas which were exemplified by the Holy family. In contrast to this, the Jews in the narratives of ritual murder are depicted as male, and the murders are committed either by a group of men or by one man. However, they are not just depicted as male; they are depicted as

¹⁸⁵ *The Passion of Adam of Bristol*, Fol. 21v, p. 11.

¹⁸⁶ H. James, ‘The Limits of Conversion: Ritual Murder and the Virgin Mary in the account of Adam of Bristol,’ *Journal of Medieval History*, vol. 33, 2007, pp. 43-59.

¹⁸⁷ MacLehose, “*A Tender Age*”, p. 131.

‘hypermasculine.’ The ‘hypermasculinity’ of the Jews depicted in the accusations of ritual murder can be seen throughout the development of the narratives in England and the sadistic nature of the tortures inflicted on the children increases. Matthew Biberman has argued that the figure of the Jew-devil that is present in the medieval depiction of Jews is the antithesis of the effeminate male Jew that emerges during the Renaissance.¹⁸⁸

The ‘hypermasculinity’ of male Jews in these narratives emphasises the devil-Jew of the medieval imagination, which is also exemplified through the increased violence and apparent sadism shown in the deaths of the victims. These events are centred on male Jews, and when female Jews are mentioned they are seldom ever named. In the account of Adam of Bristol, two women play key roles and yet we never learn their names, the narrative centres around the Jew Samuel. In the folk ballads that surround Hugh of Lincoln’s death, a Jewess coaxes a child inside the Jew’s house where she then kills him. This image is antithetical to the ideas of femininity and motherhood that were circulating in Western Christian society. Biberman has argued that in these narratives the Jewish women act not as independent agents but as extensions of the male Jew.¹⁸⁹ She is simply an instrument through which the male Jew can achieve the surprise that he needs to kill the child.¹⁹⁰ Jews and Christians are, due to the medieval polemic around the two faiths, held as opposing religions. Adding an element of gender differences between the two faiths not only highlights this difference but allows for emphasis to be placed on the maternal mother

¹⁸⁸ Biberman provides an alternative thesis to the conflation of Judaism with femininity and argues that it is “better understood as a distinct historical and psychological phenomenon, one that emerged in European culture during the Renaissance and then gradually acquired only the status of mythic truth.” M. Biberman, *Masculinity, Anti-Semitism and Early Modern English Literature: From the Satanic to the Effeminate Jew*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004, pp. 1-46.

¹⁸⁹ Biberman, *Masculinity, Anti-Semitism and Early Modern English Literature*, p. 28.

¹⁹⁰ Biberman, p. 28.

figure and the demonization of the male Jews who inflicted the cruel tortures. The use of gender in the narratives of ritual murder illustrates an attempt to create an emotional response, which emphasised the Jewish 'malevolence' in the accusations.

The gendering of the ritual murder narratives allows for the dualistic nature of the premise of the allegations to be illustrated clearly.¹⁹¹ This premise is that forces of good, the mother and the Christian community, and forces of evil, the Jewish community, contend for the body and soul of the child. This battle between good and evil can be seen in the extended metaphor in Thomas of Monmouth's *Vita* over the meeting between the Jewish messenger and William's mother, Elviva.¹⁹² This encounter is presented by Thomas as a wolf and a sheep fighting over a lamb:

The mother resisted, her gut feeling warning her, fearing for her son with a maternal instinct. Now the traitor, and then the mother; he begs and she refuses. He begs in order to destroy the boy; she refuses lest she may lose him... between her and him, as between a sheep and a wolf, who first would you think the strongest, in the fight over a third? The lamb was in the middle, the sheep on one side, the wolf on the other. The wolf stands in order to tear and devour; the sheep stands forth to rescue and save.¹⁹³

The dichotomies created in this passage between the mother's protection and the Jewish messenger's violence creates a clear and concise division between the forces of good and evil. This battle produces no clear winner until the Jewish Messenger offers Elviva money to let the boy go with him. Her maternal protectiveness is eventually won over by the money that the Messenger offers, which portrays her in a negative light. William

¹⁹¹ MacLehose, p. 132.

¹⁹² MacLehose, p. 132.

¹⁹³ Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, p. 15.

Maclehose has argued that this failing is attributed by Thomas to a general conflict in the narrative – the loving mother and the sinning woman – she is both Mary and Eve.¹⁹⁴ This portrayal of the victim's mother is complex and is simplified or simply does not appear in later narratives around ritual murder. The mother is from then on portrayed in a positive light mourning for her lost child rather than as a sinner. In many of the later narratives when the mother is shown, she is only introduced after the child disappears. The figure of the mourning mother fulfils the role of spreading the accusations of ritual murder through an emotional appeal.¹⁹⁵

The focus on the child victim and his mother parallels tendencies to humanise the figures of Christ and his mother that began to appear from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.¹⁹⁶ The focus on the Virgin Mary's humanity emphasised two specific events in her life: her giving birth to Jesus and nurturing the child, and her eventual mourning of him at the cross.¹⁹⁷ The depiction of Christian women in the accusations of ritual murder blur the two focal points of Mary's life as a nurturing mother and a mourner so that the mothers in the narratives assume both of the roles.¹⁹⁸ The use of imagery associated with the Holy family in the accusations of ritual murder highlights an overlooked but key aspect of the narratives: the close relationship between family life and religion in medieval England.¹⁹⁹ The Christian families are depicted as pious and following the examples set by the holy

¹⁹⁴ MacLehose, p. 132.

¹⁹⁵ MacLehose, p. 133.

¹⁹⁶ MacLehose, p. 108.

¹⁹⁷ MacLehose, p. 109.

¹⁹⁸ MacLehose, p. 109.

¹⁹⁹ MacLehose, p. 109.

family. The Jewish families in these narratives are depicted as pitiless, loveless and impious.²⁰⁰ This theme is developed in the narratives by contrasting the maternal plea of the child's mother against the masculine violence and callousness conveyed by the Jewish murderer.

This creation of an emotional maternal plea is one that is constructed to appeal to a general population who understand the meaning of loss. The Anglo-Norman ballad "Hugo de Lincolnia" creates an image of a desperate and maternal mother searching for her lost child:

Surely no sooner than the child [...] taken away
Than his mother knew
That her child was lost:
She went searching for him in many places.
She went crying out all evening long
Until the ringing of curfew:
"I have lost my dear child
Whom I have always loved so much."²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ MacLehose, p. 110.

²⁰¹ "Ja plus tost emble ne fu
Que la mere ne fu aparceu
Que l'enfant fu perdu:
Ele ala querant en meint liu.
Tute la vespre ele ala criant
Desqu'a l'ure de corfeu sonant:
"Perdi ai mon cher enfant
Qui jo tuz jurz ai ame tant."

Hugo de Lincolnia, Bibliothèque nationale de France MS fr. 902. Fol. 135r, lines 9-16. Transcription and Translation in, R. Dahood, 'The Anglo-Norman "Hugo de Lincolnia": A Critical Edition and Translation from the Unique Text in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France MS. Fr, 902,' *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2014, p. 1-36.

The language of loss and mourning that is created in these narratives reaches back to a tradition that predates Christianity but holds an important significance within medieval Christian piety. The image of biblical women crying and mourning for their children creates a link to the situation in these ritual murder narratives with the mothers seeking and mourning their children who have died in order to re-enact Christ's Passion. The biblical image of Rachel in the desert crying for her children invokes maternal emotions and fears. The image of Rachel was repeated when referencing the mothers from the massacre of the Innocents and indeed, the Virgin Mary herself searching for Jesus when he was lost at the Temple. The image of a maternal, mourning mother becomes a staple for ritual murder narratives in England where it is used as a specific technique to elicit an emotional response from the audience. This response served not only to enhance the gendered approach that these later accusations take but also served to highlight the malevolence and cruelty of the Jewish men who through killing the child caused her this loss and distress.

Imbuing the narratives of ritual murder with specific details to elicit a response allows the accusations to resonate within a specific social context. These accusations are created with a specific audience in mind. In England, these accusations play on the Marian tales, gender, the roles of good and evil, and create a language of loss and mourning to which communities can relate. In continental Europe, the accusations were imbued with local folktales and fears around blood and disease in order for the narratives of ritual murder or blood libels to carry a specific meaning in that society. These specific details reinforce the distinctions and boundaries between Christianity and Judaism by playing on these emotional responses. However, there is a darker and altogether more malevolent undercurrent to these accusations. The accusations highlighted societal attitudes towards the unnatural death of children and the inherent vulnerability of children and infants in

medieval England. The development of the narratives around ritual murder incorporated changing attitudes of society and religion, which allowed the narratives to be readapted and appropriated by society. Cultural anxieties around the Christian-Jewish relationship, the role of women and children, and issues around gender played out in popularisation and development of the accusations of ritual murder. These anxieties can be seen in the way that the narratives incorporated different tales, beliefs, and folk traditions. Breaking down the components of the ritual murder accusations allows for an understanding of how and why specific elements were incorporated thereby allowing for a greater understanding of the society from which they developed. Narratives of ritual murder are imbued with specific details, in order to elicit a specific response from society.

Conclusion

The twelfth century witnessed an increase in ritual murder accusations, not only in England but across Europe as well. In England, this coincided with a significant change in the nature of the ritual murder accusations and the way that they were constructed and recorded. Although the first phase of the allegations in England had been characterised by legitimisation and controlled by the religious elite in order to facilitate the creation of a cult of sanctity, the accusations became popularised and were no longer solely controlled or indeed contained by the religious elites.

The narratives of ritual murder were now spreading and becoming known by a society who was now responsible for making the allegations against the Jewish

communities. The textual tradition that had given rise to the early accusations and subsequently fuelled the narrative spread had changed to an oral tradition. This allowed the narrative to spread, throughout communities and it loosened the control that had previously been exercised by the religious elites. Ritual murder was importantly utilised in order to create or erect boundaries between Christianity and Judaism. These boundaries became increasingly important as the twelfth century developed as Jews had been residing in England for over a century and societal hostility was beginning to spread.

However, ritual murder as a myth had developed within a specific social, religious, and economic situation and thus in order to survive in a changing society the accusations had to adapt and flow with these changing times. As the accusations became popularised they were influenced and began to incorporate elements from other tales and narrative strands. A key narrative strand that was drawn from in England was Marian tales, which coincided with the rise in the popularity of the cult of the Virgin Mary. In Europe, other narratives around magic, witchcraft and blood were incorporated and led to the development of a specific strand of ritual murder, which, we term blood libel or blood accusation. The merging of different narratives ensured the survival of the accusations of ritual murder and the popularisation of an allegation, which, if it had remained controlled and facilitated by the religious elite, could well have disappeared from history.

Chapter Three

Ecclesiastical and Secular Performance as a Manipulation of the Ritual Murder

Narratives

Introduction

The manipulation of the ritual murder accusations had, by the thirteenth century, lead to a new form of the narrative. This new form was characterised by performance, which took the accusations to a new level and increased their circulation. Rather than being confined to hagiographical texts which were kept alive in monasteries, these accusations became part of a wider performance and were projected outwards. The role of performance in shaping the narratives of ritual murder in England is vitally important to understanding how it developed and how it gained further popularisation and notoriety in the thirteenth century.

This chapter will explore the way narratives of ritual murder were incorporated into three different but important performances. The first section will explore the nature of medieval religious *exempla* and the way that they incorporated ritual murder narratives into their repertoire. The incorporation of anti-Jewish ritual murder narratives in *exempla* was used as part of the general anti-Jewish tradition which sought to emphasise Christianity and to vilify the Jewish population and their role as the deniers and crucifiers of Christ. This form of performance was acted out from church pulpits and gave allegations a life and longevity which stretched far beyond the reach of the initial events. The second sections will examine the '*Passion of Adam of Bristol*', which is preserved in the British

Library. This manuscript describes the death of the boy Adam, but in such a way as to point towards it being a script of performance. This section will also examine Robert Stacey's argument for the performance elements but will also explore it about the broader role of performance in disseminating and broadcasting the narratives of ritual murder. The third section will move away from the concept of religious performance and will examine the role of secular performance in the survival and dissemination of the ritual murder accusations. The death of Hugh of Lincoln was taken up and used in the political exchange between Henry III and Richard Earl of Cornwall. The use of Hugh as part of a political performance did not end with the executions of members of the Jewish community. The tale of Hugh continued to be spread through ballads, poems and was immortalised by Chaucer. The importance of performance in the survival and dissemination of the narratives in thirteenth century England highlights a change from the accusation created by Thomas of Monmouth and importantly the way it could be manipulated by different authors, poets, the religious, and the secular elite.

Religious Performance and the development of *Exempla*

The role that the Church played in facilitating the development of anti-Semitic legends is key to understanding the way that ritual murder took hold in society. The Church had a stage from which it could spread theological concepts and teach the masses. This stage, or pulpit, was also a way which anti-Semitic narratives could be spread. Incorporating themes of Jewish malevolence, host desecration, and their role as the crucifiers of Christ spread narratives that would lay the ground work from which ritual murder accusations could flourish. This chapter will explore the way that ecclesiastical

performance played a role in the dissemination of ritual murder narratives and how during the thirteenth century it influenced the development of the accusations.

Literary traditions played an important role in the dissemination of anti-Semitic discourses during the medieval period. These traditions were incredibly important in recording the accusations of ritual murder in medieval England. Anthony Bale has argued that ritual murder should be viewed as an 'event' that was textually generated, or even a 'non-event,' as they really were only events after they had been constructed and written.²⁰² Bale argues against the traditional approach, which viewed ritual murders as a historical event, or crime, with victims and perpetrators or alleged perpetrators.²⁰³ The argument for a textually generated accusation of ritual murder can indeed be seen in the narratives around the death of William of Norwich. Williams's murder was, as Chapter One illustrated, constructed by Thomas of Monmouth specifically in order to create a saint for his religious house. Thus the textual narrative was carefully formed in order to legitimise and to preserve the belief of ritual murder of Christian children. The claim of ritual murder at Bury St Edmunds can be read as a response or potentially a counter balance to the cult of William at Norwich.²⁰⁴ These events were created and textually constructed in for specific reasons. Although they were no longer used to legitimise cults of sanctity, they were still utilised by their authors and society more generally spread ideological concerns about the Jewish presence in England. In order for this to be effective, the mode of transmission that was chosen by the authors or creators of the specific accusations was

²⁰² Bale, 'Fictions of Judaism', p. 131.

²⁰³ Bale, p. 131.

²⁰⁴ Bale, p. 131.

vital to their success. The use of performance or drama to spread this narrative capitalised on societal developments where theatricality was becoming more prevalent and an increasingly popular form of entertainment. However, these performances were not always in the same vein of dramas that were enacted in front of large crowds or specially put on by a theatre company which became common during the Early Modern period. Church services were occasions where ideological and theological concerns were shared and cultivated in a way that can be read as a distinct form of medieval performance.

Historians of performance have long neglected the stage that was provided by the local parish churches.²⁰⁵ Early drama and theatre emerged out of religious drama. Religious performance gave rise to the mystery plays, miracle plays, and morality plays, which rose to prominence in late medieval England. Considering the fact that narratives of ritual murder were so closely connected with issues of theology and religious practice they are already associated with the arena of the parish church. By exploring the connection between the public sphere of religious performance and anti-Jewish narratives, the broader changes in Christian-Jewish relations can also be traced. Twelfth-century changes in popular Christian piety gave rise to the accusations of ritual murder and as the popular piety developed so did the accusations which were in turn fed by the *exempla* tradition.²⁰⁶ *Homiletic exempla* were instructive sermon stories that helped to revitalise medieval preaching.²⁰⁷ They played an important role in reinforcing doctrinal matters both to clerical

²⁰⁵ J. M. Wasson, 'The English Church as Theatrical Space', in, J. D. Cox and D. S. Kastan (ed.), *A New History of Early English Drama*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1997, p. 25.

²⁰⁶ Bale, p. 132.

²⁰⁷ J. Young-Gregg, *Devils, Women and Jews: Reflections of the Other in Medieval Sermon Stories*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1997, p. 3.

audiences in Latin, and to lay audiences in the vernacular, with illustrations that provided instruction and installed the societal norms of Western European Christian belief to a largely illiterate audience.²⁰⁸ Popular themes in the *exempla* were women, the devil, and Jews who were characterised by disobedience, pride, and carnality.²⁰⁹ The theological engineering of the Christian Church placed the Jews in the role of the disenfranchised ‘other’, who were allowed to reside within Christian society due to their continued ‘servitude.’ The *exempla* tradition had emphasised anti-Jewish motifs and themes since Roman times, and these themes were reinforced during the Middle Ages where they became more violent and began to portray Jews as actively assaulting Christianity.²¹⁰

One of the most infamous examples of medieval *exempla* that were incorporated into ritual murder narratives was ‘*The Jew of Bourges*.’²¹¹ In this *exempla* a Jewish boy enters into a church with friends and consumes the consecrated host, his father becomes so enraged at this news that he throws the boy into a furnace. The boy is discovered, unharmed, by his mother and others and the father is thrown into the furnace where he dies. The boy then recounts how he was saved by the woman from the church, who wrapped him with her cloth so that he would not burn. The miraculous survival of the boy converted many Jews including the boy’s mother.²¹² This particular tale is of Greek origin and can be traced to the writings of Evagrius Scholasticus of Antioch (c. 536-600). The tale eventually spread westward and was introduced to Western Europe by Gregory of Tours

²⁰⁸ Young-Gregg, *Devils, Women and Jews*, p. 3.

²⁰⁹ Young-Gregg, p. 19.

²¹⁰ Young-Gregg, pp. 179-180.

²¹¹ For more information on ‘The Jew of Bourges’ see: Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales*.

²¹² Young-Gregg, p. 232.

(d.595) who included a version of the narrative in his *De gloria martyrum*.²¹³ This version served not only as an *exempla* that gave instruction and installed themes of church doctrine but also incorporated anti-Jewish sentiments that during the early medieval period were becoming increasingly popular. During the medieval period, the tale of ‘*The Jew of Bourges*’ was incorporated into Marian miracle tales and also into narratives of ritual murder and host desecration from the thirteenth century onwards.

Although the accusation of ritual murder was not a by-product of these *exempla*, strands of imagery that developed in the narratives of ritual murders can be traced to a specific origin in the *exempla* tales that circulated in medieval Europe. In the same way that in *exempla* the Jews are imagined to abuse or violate Christian symbols, the Jews in ritual murder accusations are believed to abuse the child’s body.²¹⁴ Bale has argued that these ritual murder allegations and the anti-Jewish *exemplas* that increased in popularity during the twelfth and thirteenth century were a way of ‘crafting a devotional Christian polity’ not simply as a way to persecute the Jews of medieval England.²¹⁵ However, the narratives (or fictions as Bale calls them) constructed around the allegations were a form of anti-Jewish persecution.²¹⁶ Ritual murder accusations and anti-Jewish preaching increased during the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries and this led to an increased popularisation of the belief that Jews harmed Christian children and were intent on subverting Christianity through their practices.

²¹³ Rubin. *Gentile Tales*, p. 8.

²¹⁴ L. Sinanoglou, ‘The Christ Child as Sacrifice: A Medieval Tradition and the Corpus Christi Plays,’ *Speculum*, vol. 48, no. 3, 1973, pp. 491-509.

²¹⁵ Bale, p. 133.

²¹⁶ Bale, p. 133.

The popularisation that came through preaching and the spread of the ritual murder allegations was due to a specific change in audience. Thomas of Monmouth had focused on legitimising his claim that the Jews murdered William of Norwich to the religious elite of the Benedictine house where he lived. As the accusations spread this legitimisation was no longer the aim or the purpose for ritual murder accusations. The accusations were used in the same way as *exempla* were used to illustrate issues of doctrine, and this popularisation was, in turn, a way of creating a cohesive sense of Christian identity by reinforcing the 'Jewish otherness' and their alleged attack on the Christian religion. Due to this now being the purpose of the ritual murder accusations that emerged in the late twelfth century, the way that the allegations were recorded changed. The comprehensive *Vita* that accompanied William of Norwich's death was no longer seen. Although there are references to a *Vita* which allegedly accompanied the death of Robert of Bury, it has not survived. The change in the aim of the accusations led to a move away from this textual tradition of legitimisation towards an oral tradition that came in the form of preaching, folklore narratives, and plays.

The role of theatre and performance in medieval society is increasingly becoming an area that attracts new research and inspires new interpretations of phenomenon associated with understanding the medieval world. One of these areas is the link between performance and the facilitation and spread of anti-Jewish sentiment. Michael Jones in his study on anti-Judaism and medieval theatricality asserted that theatricality and drama were used as a way of erecting boundaries between Christianity and Judaism.²¹⁷ Medieval

²¹⁷ M. Jones, 'The Place of Jews: Anti-Judaism and Theatricality in Medieval Culture', *Exemplaria*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2000, pp. 327-357.

theatrically can be considered as one of the main ways that a culture can define itself by first defining the ‘other’, and to subsequently police these boundaries created between the constructed ‘us’ and ‘them’.”²¹⁸ Storytelling and dramatic performances are exercises in assigning specific roles to individuals or groups and ensuring justice through a demonstration of good and evil.²¹⁹ Within specific societies, these stories could be utilised to galvanise a community through affirming collective ideologies and providing numerous different roles to be played.²²⁰ As medieval theatricality developed the creation of ‘self’ and ‘other’ became the central preoccupation of many dramatists and there was generally a special role reserved for Jews and the tortures of the Christian body if not Christ himself. In the ‘*Passion Play II*’ Herod as a representation of the ‘Jew’ proclaims:

On gebbyts with cheynes I shall hangyn him heye,

And with wilde hors tho traitorys shal I drawe!

To kille a thowsand Cristyn, I gif no a hawe.

To se hem hangyn or brent to me is very plesauns –

To drivyn hem into doongenys, dragonys to knawe

And to rend here flesche and bonys, onto here sustenauns!²²¹

The malice that is shown by Herod in this passage is repeated throughout medieval dramas which reinforce the evil nature of the ‘Jews’ and use this image to create an ‘other’ through which Christianity can define itself. However, the connection between ritual murder

²¹⁸ Jones, *Exemplaria*, pp. 327-8.

²¹⁹ Jones, p. 343.

²²⁰ Jones, p. 343.

²²¹ *Passion Play II* (N Town) Lines 11-16. Transcribed in, D. M Bevington, *Medieval Drama*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1975, p. 521.

accusations and medieval performance is an area that has attracted limited scholarly interest. Therefore, exploring the Early Modern connections will provide not only a case study of how the narratives of ritual murder continued to spread but also a methodological approach for how to explore the medieval origins.

The association between Early Modern drama and anti-Semitic themes is well established in works of theatre. Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and Christopher Marlow's *The Jew of Malta* being prominent examples of this genre. James Shapiro's 1996 study on what Shakespeare and his contemporaries thought of Jews in Elizabethan England, provides an excellent insight into the way that ritual murder was ingrained in society.²²² The perceived malevolence of Jews was a common theme in Elizabethan drama with one of the most infamous examples appearing in the Jew of Malta when Barabbas:

I walk abroad o' nights,

And kill sick people groaning under walls;

Sometimes I get about and poison wells²²³

Despite no Jews residing in England during this period, these dramas still create an image of a Jew who poisons, murders and is not only a political threat but also an 'economic parasite'.²²⁴ These tales highlighted how Jews were undermining Christian authority and secretly conspiring to threaten society.²²⁵ However, it was not simply these general

²²² J. Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996.

²²³ Christopher Marlow, *The Jew of Malta*. Act II, Scene III, lines 173-175. J. R. Siemon (ed.), London, Mathuen Drama, 2009, pp. 52-53.

²²⁴ Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, p. 93.

²²⁵ Shapiro, p. 96.

accusations that were reimagined in Elizabethan and Early Modern society, narratives of ritual murder continued to be recycled in literature and drama. Historians writing in the Early Modern period began to recount and circulate examples of these narratives, such as Samuel Purchas in 1626:

One cruel and (to speak the properest phrase) Jewish crime was usual amongst them every year towards Easter, though it were not always known... to steal a young boy, circumcise him, and after a solemn judgement, making one of their own nation a Pilate, to crucify him out of their devilish malice to Christ and Christians.²²⁶

These narratives were reflected in dramas that circulated this trope to English society despite the absence of a resident Jewish presence. Shapiro believes that this act of storytelling, and by default drama, have consequences for how a culture, or religion, imagines itself while in the act of imagining other cultures, or religions.²²⁷ These narratives of ritual murder and by extension of Jewish ‘malice’ served to reinforce the cohesion of Christian society and Christian values by vilifying the ‘virtual’ Jewish presence.

However, when considering the role of performance in the accusations of ritual murder in medieval England the literature is significantly limited. Therefore, examining the later links between performance and anti-Judaism provide not only a methodological approach but also a greater understanding of the way anti-Jewish legends were created and spread. The French play *Mistere de la Sainte Hostie*, penned in the late fifteenth century follows a Christian widow who murders her child and is then burn at the stake for this

²²⁶ Samuel Purchas, 1626. Quoted in, Shapiro, p. 89.

²²⁷ Shapiro, p. 91.

crime. She however also confesses to another crime, and admits that she aided and abetted a Jew who tortured the sacred host:

I have done something even worse;
And have a much greater offense on my conscience.
To tell the truth, it was seven years ago
That I was to receive my saviour
On Easter day.
To my detriment, I sold
The sacred host to a false Jew
Who was burned at the stake in Paris.²²⁸

This play conflates ritual murder and host desecration and as Jody Enders has argued this allows for scholars “to track the propagations by the theatre of a horrifying twist on two stands of anti-Semitic legendry.”²²⁹ Plays such as this reinforced fears and folklore traditions and inflamed societal tensions as the performance ‘raised the dead’ as it retold the accusation.²³⁰ As this performance conflates two fears that society has regarding Jews it provides a disturbing insight into how drama can make history and why the study of the

²²⁸ “J’ay bien fait plus grande folie:

Et plus grand crime et offence

Qui me remet en conscience.

Sept ans a [pour dire voir]

Que je devoie recevoir

Au jour de Pasque mon Sauveur:

La sainte hostie par Malheur

Ay vendu a un faux juif

Qui a est brusel a Paris.”

Le Mistere de la Sainte Hostie, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Reserve Yf 2915 (Paris, n.d), fols. 34v-35r. English Translation in, J. Enders, ‘Theatre Makes History: Ritual Murder by Proxy in the “Mistere de la Sainte hostie”’, *Speculum*, vol. 79, no. 4, 2004, p. 991.

²²⁹ Enders, *Speculum*, p. 992

²³⁰ Enders, p. 1016.

history of theatre and performance must be understood by anyone who is interested in the 'formation of a persecuting society'.²³¹ The influence that this play had on contemporary events in France and other accusations of infanticide and host desecration show the importance that drama has in influencing society and the collective imagination of the population. The performance was a catalyst for ensuring the survival and dissemination of narratives of host desecration and ritual murder accusations which in turn 'created history'.

Performance and theatricality were used as a way of spreading the narratives of ritual murder throughout England. The narratives were used as a way of uniting Christianity by defining the boundaries between Judaism and Christianity. During the Middle Ages performance and drama became a way of emphasising social ideals and reinforcing social cohesion, first through preaching and performance in local parishes and later through scripted and dramatic re-enactments. During the Early Modern period, these narratives of ritual murder and host desecration were recycled in order to once again reinforce the distinction between Christianity and Judaism. Although performance was a way of popularising these boundaries, themes that developed within the narratives themselves also emphasised and highlighted these distinctions between the two faiths.

Adam of Bristol a 'Staged' Performance?

During the thirteenth century as the transmission of ritual murder increased, narratives developed into a performance, and the case of Adam of Bristol highlights a key

²³¹ Enders, p. 992.

change in this evolution. This case straddles the category of ritual murder and Marian tales, but it was also created as a performance which ensured that it could be delivered to a larger audience that could have previously read hagiographies. There is only one surviving manuscript which details the narrative of Adam of Bristol, and that is in a volume of other ‘typical monastic texts’ which were bound together at some point during the early fourteenth century.²³² The murder of Adam of Bristol is unlike the other accounts of ritual murder discussed, as it is so detailed and elaborate, and incorporates many different elements in its construction. Despite this, it is still relatively understudied for such a rich source on the development of ritual murder accusations.

The narrative of the death of Adam of Bristol is found in the Harley Collection located at the British Library, and although it was written c. 1280, it refers back to the reign of Henry II (1154-98).²³³ This account is a key example of how the ritual murder narratives were adapted and incorporated with Marian tales and also the way that performance was weaved into the allegations. The manuscript starts with an address by God:

“Hear, O islands, and give heed, people from far away.” Thus says the lord God. “I, the only begotten son, who speaks to the entire world through the strength of my arm, hear men of Judah, hear, rebels and unbelievers, with pity and great compassion, what the Jews have done to me in idolatrous and garrulous England.”²³⁴

²³² R. Stacey, ‘Adam of Bristol’ and Tales of Ritual Crucifixion in Medieval England”, B. Weiler, J. Burton, and P. Schofield (ed.), *Thirteenth Century England XI*, Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 2007, p. 8.

²³³ H. J. Hames, ‘The Limits of Conversion: Ritual Murder and the Virgin Mary in the Account of Adam of Bristol’, *Journal of Medieval History*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2012, p.44.

²³⁴ *The Passion of Adam of Bristol*, Folio 19r.

Samuel had gone to town with his son when they had come across a Christian boy, and under the pretence that he was a Christian Samuel and his son convinced the boy to accompany them back to their house. Samuel describes how the events unfolded:

It happened that one day when my young son, having left the house, went into the city he found himself a certain boy and he said to him, as I had previously taught him, "Come home with me so that we can play together and my mother will give you lots of apples."²³⁵

Samuel is careful to disguise the boy's entrance to his house and to ensure that no one has seen him. The narrative also reveals that previously the Jew Samuel has crucified three other boys:

And the father and son went out, and they prepared a cross in their privy, in which, the year before, he had crucified three boys, two born and raised within the walls of the city and the third from the parish of St Mary of Bedminster, whom the same Jew, amazingly, had murdered by various punishments unheard of throughout the ages, nailing them to the cross.²³⁶

When Samuel is out of the room his wife asks the boy his name, and the boy divulges his name and the parish that he hails from and information on his family.²³⁷ The boy reveals that he is from the parish of St Mary of Redcliff, and his father is called William of Wales. This gives a geographic link to the local community of Bristol and to the events that transpire.

²³⁵ *The Passion of Adam of Bristol*, Folio 19r.

²³⁶ *The Passion of Adam of Bristol*, Folio 20r.

²³⁷ *The Passion of Adam of Bristol*, Folio 19v.

A cross is prepared in the Jews outhouse by Samuel and his son, in the same place where the three other boys had been killed.²³⁸ As the torture and crucifixion of the boy begin, Samuel refers to him as Christ and God and mocks him and asks him to come down off the cross so that the Jews could believe in him.²³⁹ Samuel's wife cuts the child's nose and lips off with a bread knife, and they offer him a bitter drink which the boy can barely consume.²⁴⁰ The son then stabs Adam in the face. They remove Adam from the cross and stamp on his body.²⁴¹ The Jews then proceed to roast Adam over a spit at which point as the boy becomes unconscious a voice comes from him throat speaking in Hebrew, saying:

“Samuel, why do you burn me all night? I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, whom for the fourth time now you have affixed to the cross, and still you burn me. Desist, wretch, desist! It is God whom you persecute.”²⁴²

The Jewish family are shocked and they quarrel about whether it was God or simply a phantasm.²⁴³ When Adam was released from the cross he was unconscious, but Samuel decides to put him back on the cross, this time using nails instead of rope.

During this ordeal Adam regained consciousness and the Jewish woman asked him what had happened when he was in the fire:

²³⁸ *The Passion of Adam of Bristol*, Folio 20r.

²³⁹ *The Passion of Adam of Bristol*, Folio 20v.

²⁴⁰ *The Passion of Adam of Bristol*, Folio 20v.

²⁴¹ *The Passion of Adam of Bristol*, Folio 20v.

²⁴² *The Passion of Adam of Bristol*, Folio 21r.

²⁴³ “The Samuel, marvelling at what lay beyond his understanding, said: “Not one single person in this entire town knows how to deliver a sermon in our Hebrew language, and this little boy, almost lifeless, roasted in the fire, said this with his cut-off lips. This [boy] has in no way spoken. Perhaps it was a phantasm.” *The Passion of Adam of Bristol*, Folio 21r.

When you place me next to the fire, an exceedingly beautiful lady came to me and sat between me and the fire, and said in the English language, kissing me for as long as I was next to the fire: “Son, this night you will come to your father and mother and you will rejoice with them.”... “I saw on my right a boy kissing the wounds of my hands and feet and saying to me, ‘You are my beloved brother.’”²⁴⁴

The Jewish woman asks who the boy was and a voice comes from Adam’s throat again and declares ‘Jesus Christ the Nazarene is my name.’²⁴⁵ Instead of accepting that the voice is from God, Samuel challenges him:

“If he is God as the Christians say, why does he not heal the wounds of the boy, snatching him from our hands?” And Samuel added: “If this boy Jesus whom the Christian sees should come to me, I will affix him to the cross and punish him.”²⁴⁶

Samuel stabs the boy through the heart and he dies, at this point the voice of a thousand angels is heard by the murderers. Samuel’s wife and son are terrified and express their desire to convert to Christianity at which time they are killed by Samuel in his anger.²⁴⁷ Samuel buries Adam’s body under the outhouse and places the objects of the boy’s torture in the grave as well.²⁴⁸ The next morning when Samuel attempts to enter the outhouse, he encounters an angel with a sword standing guard over the boy’s grave.²⁴⁹ At this point Samuel goes to his sister and the cover up of the murders begins.

²⁴⁴ *The Passion of Adam of Bristol*, Folio 21v.

²⁴⁵ *The Passion of Adam of Bristol*, Folio 21r.

²⁴⁶ *The Passion of Adam of Bristol*, Folio 21r.

²⁴⁷ *The Passion of Adam of Bristol*, Folio 22r.

²⁴⁸ *The Passion of Adam of Bristol*, Folio 22v.

²⁴⁹ *The Passion of Adam of Bristol*, Folio 22v

This manuscript is important not just because it is an example of ritual murder and Marian tales that have survived from the medieval period, but because as Robert Stacey has highlighted, it shows a link between the development of Middle English drama and the rise of anti-Semitic myths during this time.²⁵⁰ Rubrications were used in this manuscript not only for legibility and to distinguish sections but also to separate the speaker's lines, so that theoretically they would know where the next reader would begin.²⁵¹ Stacey has argued that this means that the manuscript was meant to be treated as a dramatic dialogue rather than to be read by individuals in isolation.²⁵² The text also introduces every new speaker as either '*cui puer*,' the boy or '*cui judeus*,' the Jew depending on who's voice was reading the section.²⁵³ As there is minimal understanding of what a medieval dramatic text or plays should look like this manuscript cannot be discounted as being one and the form this text takes is not so far removed from a modern conception of what a dramatic text looks like.

The narration at the beginning of the manuscript is by God and sets the scene for the tale, the narration throughout the rest of the work doubles as a form of stage direction.²⁵⁴ The manuscript is also a very crucial one and is more explicit in retelling the tortures and the death of Adam and it also has an element of what Stacey has referred to as 'slapstick' humor. The Jew Samuel is forced to make a fire and do household tasks that would have been his wife's responsibility, and falls when he is startled by the angel in his privy. This

²⁵⁰ Stacey, 'Adam of Bristol', p. 15.

²⁵¹ Stacey, p. 13.

²⁵² Stacey, p. 14.

²⁵³ Stacey, p. 14.

²⁵⁴ Stacey, p. 14.

comedic element to the narrative balances out the gruesome nature of the boy's death and the more serious elements of the accusation. If this was created to be performed, it would have been with an audience in mind, and they presumably would have seen the humor and experienced a sense of *schadenfreude* at the scene before them and Samuel's failings.

The manuscript also contained two illuminations that showed the dress of the Jew Samuel and his wife and child and another one depicting the crucifixion and the setting in the privy.²⁵⁵ This illustration could according to Stacey even show a theatrical performance and stage with an embroidery being used as a backdrop. The manuscript also contains what could be considered as notes for musicians or at least a musical director, who needed to be informed what pieces of music related to which part of the narrative.²⁵⁶ It is Stacey's assertion that this tale was a parish drama which would have been performed in or outside the church described in the text, that of St Mary Redcliff on the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.²⁵⁷ This interpretation gives a different insight into the textual records of ritual murders that have previously been analyzed and importantly a different audience to consider. Instead of these records being read by select individuals and by religious orders, this narrative is being opened up to a broader audience and is clear evidence of the transmission and spread of anti-Semitic narratives during the Middle Ages.

This narrative of ritual murder is incredibly detailed and contains a vast amount of information on the role of the Eucharist and Marian tales on the development of the

²⁵⁵Stacey, p. 14.

²⁵⁶Stacey, p. 15.

²⁵⁷ Stacey, p. 15.

accusation of ritual murder.²⁵⁸ However, when considering the way that the accusation spread outward from Norwich, this accusation and the manuscript account that has survived are vital in understanding the way that the accusation changed and developed over time. This narrative shows in incredible detail what occurred during the torture and crucifixion, and the motive and actions of the Jews even though there was no Christian present except Adam, and he did not live to recount the events. If Stacey is right in his assertion that this manuscript could have been read or even performed, it marks a shift in the target audience of the textual records from religious orders to a more general audience. This would help facilitate the spread of the narrative and the folk traditions of the narrative that developed more clearly in the thirteenth century. The level of violence serves to illustrate the image of the 'evil Jew' and to provide the audience with entertainment. The construction of this narrative is vital in understanding why a medieval audience thought that Jews committed these murders, and how they thought it occurred in a disturbingly graphic way. It also provides an example of how the target audience of these accusations was changing, and an idea of the role that performance was beginning to play in the construction of the narratives around ritual murder.

Secular Performance: The role of Royal Manipulation

With the murder of Hugh of Lincoln in 1255, the accusations of ritual murder reached their height in England. The narrative followed the established pattern of ritual

²⁵⁸ For more information on Jewish narratives and the Eucharist see; Rubin, *Gentile Tales*. And R. Stacey, "From Ritual Crucifixion to Host Desecration: Jews and the Body of Christ," *Jewish History*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1998, pp. 11-28; For information on the role of the Virgin Mary and its relationship to Jewish narratives see; Rubin. *Mother of God*.

murders but the accusation came not from religious groups but from the local population. Three different chronicles recount the events that surrounded the boy's death, with slight variations on specific details. The defining characteristic of this accusation is the way that it was taken up and used as part of a political game between Henry III and his brother Richard. The death of Hugh was also immortalized in ballad form which acquired regional variations as it spread and targeted different audiences. Chaucer also incorporated the narrative into his *Prioress Tale* and continued to enforce the idea of the Jewish 'other,' even if it was a virtual Jewish 'other'. This section will examine the role that secular performance played in the development of ritual murder allegations and how the narratives survived despite the Jewish expulsion in 1290.

In 1244 a body was found in a London cemetery, but like the case in Winchester in 1192, it does not result in a martyr cult, like Norwich, Gloucester, or Bury St Edmunds. This account is described by Matthew Paris in his *Chronicle*. Matthews tell us that the body of a boy was found and his legs, arms, and chest covered in Hebrew writing which was identified by those who had assembled, but as they could not read it they sent for converted Jews to decipher the writing.²⁵⁹ Matthew tells us that the Jews had, in order to insult and taunt the suffering of Christ, crucified the child "a circumstance stated to have happened often".²⁶⁰ The Jewish converts spent a length of time deciphering the writing and discovered the child's mother and father, but no surname, and "words to the effect that he had been sold to the Jews."²⁶¹ Members of the Jewish community in London who were

²⁵⁹ Matthew Paris, *Matthew Paris's English History: From the Year 1235 to 1273*, Trans J.A. Giles, and W. Rishanger, Vol. III, London, H.G. Bohn, 1853, p. 21.

²⁶⁰Matthew Paris, *Matthew Paris's English History*, p. 21.

²⁶¹Matthew Paris, p. 21.

suspected to be complicit in the death of the boy fled the city.²⁶² Matthew's details on the nature of the murder and the accusation are lacking in detail, and he points to no actual accusations or repercussions following the discovery of the body. The name of the child is also not given and no cult is developed, although the body is taken away by the canons of St. Paul's and the body is buried near the main altar of the church.²⁶³ This happens, we are told, because it had been heard the Lord "wrought miracles in favor of the boy" and "that the holy bodies, when crucified, had been received in their churches and had also become renowned by miracles."²⁶⁴ However, this is still one of the vaguest of references to ritual murder, but it does demonstrate the spread of the accusation and the similarities with other accusations such as the testimony of converted Jews being used, and the idea of the child being sold or betrayed for financial gain.

Hugh of Lincoln was murdered eleven years after the above accusation and was so incredibly well documented that it remained in the English imagination through into the nineteenth century. In his *chronicle* Matthew Paris details the murder of Hugh of Lincoln "at the time of the Festival of the Apostles Peter and Paul," which is around the 29th of June.²⁶⁵ In Matthews account, the Jews are described as stealing the boy and hiding him until Jews from throughout England were able to congregate in Lincoln for the sacrifice to take place.²⁶⁶ When they arrived "a Jew was appointed to take the place of Pilate" to preside

²⁶²Matthew Paris, p. 22.

²⁶³ Matthew Paris, p. 22.

²⁶⁴Matthew Paris, p. 22.

²⁶⁵ Matthew Paris, p. 138.

²⁶⁶ Matthew Paris, p. 138.

over the torture of the boy.²⁶⁷ They “bet him till blood flowed and he was quite livid, they crowned him with thorns, derided him, and spat upon him.”²⁶⁸ After torturing him they “crucified him and pierced him to the heart with a lance.”²⁶⁹ The boy’s mother was searching for him and eventually discovered his body down a well and it was then recovered by the bailiffs of the city.²⁷⁰ A Jew called Copin was tortured and confessed that the Jews crucified the boy in order to mock Christ’s suffering.²⁷¹ The Canons of Lincoln Cathedral took the body after it had been viewed by a large number of people, they buried it in the cathedral “as if it had been the corpse of a precious martyr.”²⁷² As a response to this accusation and with the involvement of Henry III “eighteen Jews were dragged to the gallows and hung.”²⁷³ This account of the accusation moves away from the early efforts of religious groups which sought to legitimize the murders by associating them with the Easter festivities and played off existing religious tensions. As the accusations were spreading and becoming a fixture in the imagination of the general population there was no longer a need to legitimize as the myth that Jews committed crimes like these, as it was generally understood.

The way that Jews were assigned to play the role of Pilate and to oversee the murder also hints at a form of performance in the construction of the narrative itself. Does the

²⁶⁷Matthew Paris, p. 138.

²⁶⁸Matthew Paris, p. 138.

²⁶⁹Matthew Paris, p. 138.

²⁷⁰ Matthew Paris, p. 140.

²⁷¹ Matthew Paris, p. 140.

²⁷² Matthew Paris, p. 140.

²⁷³ Matthew Paris, p. 141.

performance of the Passion legitimize the accusation in the same way as a connection with Easter legitimized the accusations at Norwich, through an understanding and belief in the fact that Jews mocked the Passion of Christ? This accusation follows the standard pattern of ritual murders that had been established by this time: A boy is kidnapped or stolen, he is kept for a period of time, he is tortured with allusions to Christ's suffering, he is crucified and killed by a stab wound, his body is found, people gather and accusations are made through eyewitness accounts or the injuries that the body has suffered. This formula provides the basis for the accusation and shows how the narrative has become established and well and truly been disseminated to a general audience.

The Annals of Burton on Trent convey a different version of the narrative but one that is similar in many respects to the events that Matthew Paris recounts. The Burton annals place the murder two days later than Mathew's chronicle, on 31 July.²⁷⁴ This account blames the Jew Jopin for kidnapping Hugh, who was a child of 9 years, on the evening of 5 July.²⁷⁵ The boy was concealed by the Jewish population for 26 days and deprived of food before a council of Jews from throughout England decided that the boy should be killed.²⁷⁶ The boy was stripped naked, flogged and spat on.²⁷⁷ They then cut his face and removed the cartilage from his nose and also removed his lips before breaking the boy's jaw and his teeth.²⁷⁸ He was then stabbed by the Jews and lanced in the side to kill

²⁷⁴ *Annales de Burton*, in, *Annales Monastici: Rerum Britannicarum Mediiæscriptores*. Vol I, London, Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1864, p. 340.

²⁷⁵ *Annales de Burton*, p. 341.

²⁷⁶ *Annales de Burton*, p. 341.

²⁷⁷ *Annales de Burton*, p. 341.

²⁷⁸ *Annales de Burton*, p. 41.

him. In this version, the boy was discovered by a blind woman who regained her sight.²⁷⁹ The annals of Waverley contain a shorter account than the Burton annals but follow the same general pattern of narrative construction.²⁸⁰ These accounts reinforce the version of events that Matthew Paris recorded and illustrate the development of a 'standard' form of the accusation. However, these annals are still created for an elite audience rather than at the general public.

A defining characteristic of the death of Hugh of Lincoln is the way that it was utilised by the secular elite as a political performance. Previous accusations had generally been ignored by the secular elite but at Lincoln we see them taking a vested interest in the case of Hugh. Taxing the Jewish communities was a valuable source of revenue for the Crown and during the thirteenth century the amount extracted from the community was increasing with financial exploitation. In order to raise revenue quickly Henry III had sold his right to tax the Jewish community to his brother Richard Earl of Cornwall.²⁸¹

"He [Henry] sold the Jews for some years to his brother Earl Richard, that the Earl might disembowel those whom the king had skinned."²⁸²

This in the long run put Henry at a financial disadvantage because in 1250 Henry had taken a crusading vow.²⁸³ Although he never went to the Holy Land he focused his attention to

²⁷⁹ *Annales de Burton*, p. 343.

²⁸⁰ *Annales de Waverleia* in *Annales Monastici: Rerum Britannicarum Mediiæscriptore*, Vol II, London, Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1865.

²⁸¹ A. Julius, *Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 105.

²⁸² Matthew Paris, p. 115

²⁸³ M. Powicke, *The Thirteenth Century 1216-1307*, Second Edition, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 106.

the Kingdom of Sicily and Pope Innocent IV's mission to remove the Hohenstaufen dynasty. Henry planned to replace the Hohenstaufen dynasty, which ruled the Kingdom of Sicily, with his son Edmund.²⁸⁴ These endeavours placed an additional financial burden on Henry, coupled with the substantial cost of ruling England his response was to 'mortgage' the Jewish community to his brother.

With the death of Hugh, Henry seized the opportunity to regain the Jewish source of revenue. He ordered the imprisonment of those deemed responsible and to execute them. In doing so, he could legitimately seize their wealth, as all wealth held by Jews defaulted to the Crown on their death. Richard who was invested in maintaining his revenue source, intervened on the Jews' behalf. If Richard was convinced of the Jews' guilt he would in all likelihood have not intervened as a direct challenge to his brother.²⁸⁵ In the aftermath of the death of Hugh, Henry's belief in the Jews' culpability or his brother's intervention swayed his resolve as the remaining Jews were released from prison. ²⁸⁶ This interaction between the brothers was part of a broader performance which capitalised on the accusation of ritual murder but used it as a tool to manipulate financial revenues.

Shortly after the events of 1255, a ballad was created that recounted the death of Hugh and it spread throughout Britain and brought the accusation to a general audience which led it to acquire regional differences. The earliest version of the ballad was written

²⁸⁴ Powicke, *The Thirteenth Century*, p. 106.

²⁸⁵ Langmuir, "The Knights Tale of Young Hugh of Lincoln," p. 479.

²⁸⁶ Langmuir, p. 479.

shortly after the death of Hugh and it is the most detailed narrative to survive.²⁸⁷ This version demonstrates the development of a specific narrative as the ballad achieves numerous regional variations. The Anglo-French Ballad opens with the broad sketching of the Jews plot to slaughter a Christian child:

Hear now a fine song
Of the Jews of Lincoln, who by treachery
Committed the cruel murder
Of a child named Hugh.²⁸⁸

This narrative follows closely with the account of Matthew Paris and the historical events that gave rise to the legend of St Hugh. The ballad claims that Hugh was kidnapped at the beginning of August, later than Matthew Paris or the Burton annals recorded. There is a ceremonial auction where the child is brought by the Jew Hagin for 30 silver pennies:

At once Jopin the Jew spoke,
Who fancied to speak very well:
“The child must be sold
For thirty pennies, as Jesus was.”²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ R. Dahood, “The Anglo-Norman “Hugo de Lincolnia”, p. 1.

²⁸⁸ “Ore oez un bel chançon
Des Jues de Nichole, qui par treason
Firent la cruel occasion
De un enfant que Huchon out non!”
Hugo de Lincolnia, Folio. 135r.

²⁸⁹ “Tantost dis Jopin li Ju,
Qui quidost dire mult grant pru:
“L’enfant covent qu’il seit vendu
Pur trente deners, cum fu Jhesu.”
Hugo de Lincolnia, Folio. 135v.

Hagin then declares the death sentence and kills the boy by piercing his heart. This ballad also emphasizes the collective guilt of the Jewish population in England. As this ballad was circulating before the expulsion the tone of the narrative is casting Jews as a radical, unified and homogenous population who harbored a homicidal virulence towards the Christian population.²⁹⁰

This ballad is inextricably linked to pre-expulsion tensions and irrational fears but it does illustrate a more general audience for the narrative and the role of performance in disseminating the accusations but it is still recorded in Norman-French rather than Middle English. In English, there are numerous versions of the ballad to survive, each with its own regional narrative construction.²⁹¹ However, if this ballad is creating a narrative in order to create a Christian identity and to promote the ‘malevolence’ of the Jewish population then it is being utilized in the same way that Abbot Samson manipulated the murder of Robert of Bury. As with Bury, the success of the Jewish ‘other’ rested in a general understanding of the accusation which can only really be spread through performance, ballad and folk legend. This ballad illustrates how the mode of transmission had changed significantly from the death of William of Norwich. Instead of being a *vita*, written in Latin and read by a few select members of the religious elite, this ballad was in the vernacular and spread by oral traditions and retold and performed to audiences of the population. This aided not only the popularisation of the accusation but also allowed for it to spread beyond the communities where it originated. The ballads of Saint Hugh spread throughout the British

²⁹⁰ Heng, ‘England's Dead Boys: Telling Tales of Christian-Jewish Relations before and after the First Europe Expulsion of the Jews’, *MLN*, vol. 127, no. 5, 2012, p. 62.

²⁹¹ For three different versions of the Ballad: *Hugh of Lincoln, Sir Hugh and the Jews Daughter*, see; Child, F. J. *English and Scottish Ballads*, Vol. 3, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1864, pp. 138-146.

Isles and spawned regional variations and differences. A version of this ballad was popular in America during the nineteenth century which testifies to its ability to circulate in society long after the alleged murder took place.

Although the Jews were expelled from England in 1290, the narratives of ritual murder did not disappear. Geoffrey Chaucer created his *Prioress's Tale* in the fourteenth century, almost a hundred years after the Jews were expelled. The tale is set in Asia Minor, but as there were no Jews residing in England at the time it could not be set in an English town. The construction of the narrative could refer to any victim of ritual murder in the Middle Ages but the last verse refers back to the specific case of Hugh:

O Hugh of Lincoln, likewise murdered so

By cursed Jews, as notorious

(For it was but a little time ago),

Pray mercy on our faltering steps, that thus

Merciful God may multiply on us

His mercy, though we be unstable and vary,

In love and reverence of His mother Mary.

Amen.²⁹²

For Chaucer to include this reference to Hugh in his work it requires more than an understanding of the concept of ritual murder, it requires knowledge of the narrative of Hugh of Lincoln. The accusation at Lincoln in 1255 takes the narrative beyond the expulsion of the Jews in 1290 as the narrative continued to develop despite the lack of Jews

²⁹² Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, Trans N. Coghill, London, Penguin Books, 1977, p. 93.

in England. Although this was created long after the death of Hugh, the memory of the accusation could be drawn upon to emphasise this tale of ritual murder that has just been recounted. It also draws the attention of the audience back to a time when these accusations were frequent in English society. This could be a way of reinforcing Jewish 'otherness' by remembering that these violent acts were 'once-upon-a-time' conducted on English soil against innocent Christian children. Invoking this memory served to continue the narratives of ritual murder and reinforce the boundaries around Christianity by utilising a trope that had previously been used.

Conclusion

During the thirteenth century three forms of performance helped to spread the narratives of ritual murder throughout England, and ensure their survival despite the Jewish expulsion. These performances were very different in their construction, and the role that they played in the transmission of the narratives. The ecclesiastical performance on the stage in local churches reached a greater audience than could have previously read the hagiographical texts that were kept in monasteries. Spreading tales of Jewish 'malevolence' and emphasising their role as the crucifiers of Christ established vital ground work which allowed accusations of ritual murder to take hold. The argument raised by Stacey that the death of Adam of Bristol was a staged performance meant to be acted out, highlights another area from which the narrative could be spread. Although, there are many questions that still need to be answered around this manuscript it does pose a new argument for the dissemination to a wider and common audience.

The secular performance that followed the death of Hugh of Lincoln illustrates the height of the manipulation of ritual murder in medieval England. Using the death of Hugh as a tool for extorting money from the Jewish community showed an 'acceptance' of the accusation by Henry III. Whether or not Henry believed in the accusation he used it as a political tool to use against Richard when he needed to increase his financial revenue. In the decades following Hugh's death the narratives continued to spread and circulate despite the Jews being expelled from England in 1290. The circulation of these narratives illustrates how they had adapted and been manipulated in order to have a life separate from the original events that inspired them. The power of the accusations of ritual murder was in their ability to evolve beyond their origin in specific communities and this is how they spread throughout Europe and survived into the Modern era.

Conclusion

In the vocabulary of evil, what could be a more potent and patent set of images than kidnapping, mutilation, murder, and cannibalism? That children are the common victims makes such behavior all the more heinous.²⁹³

The rhetoric that developed around the accusations of ritual murder, described by Darren O'Brien, as the 'pinnacle of hatred' is what this thesis has explored. The rhetoric, construct, and narrative development are key to understanding why these accusations took hold in medieval society. Instead of focusing on the specific accusations as individual events, exploring them as an overall narrative development is instrumental in understanding the nature of them. Ritual murder narratives are a key example of how narratives can be used in a way which created a group narrative that influenced both the Christian and Jewish communities. Using these collective narratives which can be found in the accusations of ritual murder as a focal point through which to understand both the Jewish experience and the broader history of medieval history has been the focus of this methodological approach. The fantasy of ritual murder developed in England as a tale spread by monks but eventually became a tool of royal manipulation and extortion. This development can be mapped during the medieval Jewish residence in England as a way of examining the Jewish experience and the Christian perception of this minority community. Tracing the development from its emergence from the origin in 1144 to the Jewish expulsion adds another dimension to the understanding of the Christian-Jewish relationship. The ritual murder accusations intersected both communities and were continually repeated and manipulated throughout the Jewish residence in medieval England.

²⁹³ O'Brien, *The Pinnacle of Hatred*, p. 1.

Darren O'Brien's examination of the history of these anti-Semitic narratives has provided an excellent analysis of the development. O'Brien has also highlighted the need to study the early stage of the accusations in England. The only way to explore these accusations is to examine the 'limited' or 'unreliable' sources that have previously been ignored or dismissed. E. M. Rose's recent work has added to this discussion on ritual murder, but there are still a significant number of gaps in the historiography that still need to be filled. Several accusations of ritual murder in England have been overlooked by numerous scholars. The accusations at Winchester and the death Adam of Bristol have often been excluded from the debates on ritual murder but these accusations are key in understanding how and why the legend of ritual murder took hold in society. Including all the accusations of ritual murder in medieval England that have known records or documentation of, no matter how fleeting, provides a comprehensive understanding of the development and allows for the narrative construction to be explored. Methodologically this thesis has explored these accusations as a development and thus the accusations that have survived as a couple of lines in a chronicle, or an obscure medieval ballad, are just as important as the most famous accusations at Norwich or Lincoln.

The methodological approach utilised in this thesis aims to provide a different understanding of the way ritual murder accusations emerged and were consequently spread. Approaching the accusations of ritual murder as narrative constructions that could be repeated in a different community, adapted, and manipulated by different authors or leaders allows the accusations to be understood as a living memory that could transcend time and place. The different sources that have survived documenting the accusations of ritual murder, span many different media, this poses a significant challenge for academics.

Instead of being able to analyse entire chronicles or writings by one individual we are left with fragments from chronicles, hagiographies, ballads, poems, literature, and images scattered across England. However, this also provides an excellent foundation through which to trace the narrative development and to analyse how the accusations took hold and spread in English society.

The martyrdom of William of Norwich was a constructed event which pivoted around the death of a twelve-year-old boy. Thomas of Monmouth was not in the city at the time of the boy's death, but he nevertheless undertook the task of establishing Williams's sanctity, through his alleged martyrdom at the hands of the Jewish community. As Thomas established Williams's sanctity he drew upon pre-existing anti-Jewish polemics and a pre-existing tradition of martyrdom and the trope of sanctity. The incorporation of these literary traditions served to legitimise Thomas's claims and also to create a foundation that could easily be picked up and used in different social situations. Anti-Jewish polemics and the Christian tradition of martyrdom and sanctity were ideas that were widespread in medieval society and created a foundation from which the accusations of ritual murder could flourish.

Despite this, the first accusation at Norwich had the potential to be also the last accusation in England. Thomas of Monmouth placed his emphasis on creating a martyred victim out of a dead boy but largely failed to convince the general population of Norwich of the Jewish community's culpability of this crime. However, instead of passing into obscurity, this accusation evolved and spread through the power of a narrative tradition. The accusation at Gloucester was the second in England, and the literary structure and trope were incredibly similar to that of William of Norwich. Like the accusation at

Norwich, they picked up on Jewish-Christian tensions in the town in the form of a gathering of the Jewish community and also reinforced the sanctity through the works of monks and buried his body in Gloucester Cathedral.

The death of Robert of Bury, like the deaths of William and Harold, was used to create a cult of sanctity around the body of the dead body. However, the accusation at Bury was manipulated for political and religious reasons by the Abbot of Bury St. Edmunds. The fear and example of ritual murder, and the massacre of Jews in the 1190 violence in the lead up to Richard I's crusade were used as an emotive manipulation which supported the Abbots expulsion of the Jews from his town. This manipulation illustrates the transferential nature of the narratives and how they could be adapted and moulded to survive in different social situations. Following the accusation at Bury, there were four accusations in Winchester which highlight the extent of the transferential nature and the way that the ritual murder narratives could be adapted both by the religious elite and the general population. The multiple accusations at Winchester also illustrate how the memory of the allegation was kept alive through generations and how it was no longer controlled by the religious elite. It has transcended the boundaries of the first accusations which were constructed and controlled by religious communities. At Winchester, the accusations came from the general population and through this developed its life as separate from the 'original' accusation created by Thomas of Monmouth. By the early thirteenth century, the accusation of ritual murder had become an established trope and narrative within English society.

As the accusations of ritual murder became popularised they were also adapted as a performance and as a religious *exempla*. The alleged death of Adam of Bristol was used

as a religious performance to instil religious fervour and belief, but at the same time to vilify the Jewish population. The surviving manuscript that recounts the death of Adam of Bristol is an area that requires further examination and the argument that Robert Stacey puts forward regarding the performance aspect is something a key area for further research. However, it does provide an excellent example of the rhetoric and narrative construction that was adapted from the earlier accusations to fit the specific social and religious environment of Bristol. The author of the manuscript incorporated specific scenarios that were of concern at the time. The disposal of the body in the privy, the discussion of clerical celibacy and the Irish connection are all elements that make the death of Adam a product of a specific environment where the traditional narrative structure was manipulated and adapted.

The thirteenth century also saw the use of ritual murder allegations as religious *exempla* which served not only to reinforce the pinnacles of the Christian faith but also to vilify the Jewish community who were increasingly becoming targets of persecution and economic sanctions. These *exempla* illustrate how the narrative moved from specifically targeting the religious elite, to being being preached at whole communities from the church pulpit. This stage was one that was incredibly influential in not only spreading the narrative of ritual murder, but also host desecration, later blood libels, and general anti-Semitic hostility. As the stage changed, so did the narratives that influenced and were incorporated into the ritual murder structures. Issues that surrounded gender, motherhood and childhood were incorporated into the narratives to elicit specific emotional responses from their audience and thus to increase their potential to vilify the Jewish community. By spreading fear about the 'evil' Jew who 'preyed' upon innocent children, or who passionately hated

the Virgin Mary, the narratives of ritual murder took on a new height of both popularity and malevolence.

In 1255 the death of Hugh of Lincoln led to another significant change in the narrative structure of ritual murder. Unlike at Norwich in 1144 when the accusation was dismissed both by the Crown and by the general public, at Lincoln the accusation gained the support of the Crown and the public who were baying for Jewish blood as compensation. Henry III exploited the accusation and used the narrative to further his own political and economic goals. By throwing Crown support behind the accusation Henry was able to execute members of the Jewish community and consequently to seize their property. Which for a king in need of new sources of finance which, following his mortgaging of the Jewish community to Richard Earl of Cornwall, was much needed. This manipulation of the accusation illustrates not only how it was popularised, but also how it could continually be manipulated to serve different social, religious, and political needs. The fluid nature of such an accusation led to significant deaths following the death of Hugh of Lincoln. However, the expulsion of the Jewish community from England in 1290 put pay to the emergence of any new accusations of ritual murder.

Despite the lack of a Jewish presence in England after 1290, the narrative of ritual murder did not disappear. *The Ballad of Little Saint Hugh* which recounted the 1255 accusation, spread throughout the British Isles and into the new world where it was still being performed in New York in the twentieth century. Versions of this ballad are still performed and shared on social media platforms in the twenty-first century. As the ballad spread it acquired regional differences and peculiarities that are products of the different time periods and communities that performed, recited, and kept it alive in collective

memory. This survival of the legend of Saint Hugh highlights the transcendental nature of the ritual murder accusations and how the narratives that surrounded them were created in such a way as to ensure their continued survival and popularity. The literary revival of the fourteenth century, in particular with the works of Chaucer, also managed to keep the narratives alive. England no longer had a Jewish presence, but it had a 'virtual Jewish presence' that was kept alive through collective memory and stoked by authors such as Chaucer, monks such as John Lydgate, and a ballad tradition which spread throughout the British Isles.

This narrative tradition which was open to adaption and interpretation was key to ensuring the longevity of the accusation which could have faded into irrelevance in the 1150s. The accusation of ritual murder should be explored as a narrative development rather than distinct individual events as the power and influence were not in the specific event but how the narratives could be constructed and manipulated to serve different religious, political, economic, or social environments. Rather than arguing about their inspiration, academics should use narratives to gain an understanding of medieval society and Christian-Jewish relations through the understanding of narrative transmission and development.

This thesis has been concerned with one geographic location and one specific form of anti-semitic accusation, which has limited the scope of development that could be analysed. This focus on England has excluded the development that occurred in continental Europe as the narratives of ritual murder took hold there during the late twelfth century. This focus has allowed for an examination of the ritual murder accusations in England which are often over looked by historians of these allegations. This thesis has

highlighted the scope of analysis that can be achieved when exploring the allegations of ritual murder as a cohesive narrative. However, there are still numerous areas that need further scholarship in order to fully understand the emergence and development of ritual murder narratives. Comparing the development in England to the way that ritual murder and later blood libel narratives evolved in France, Germany, and Eastern Europe in the later Middle Ages would provide a valuable insight into these anti-semitic legends. Ritual murder was also just one legend of this nature that emerged during the Middle Ages. Host desecration, blood libel, devil worship, and witchcraft are all narratives which adapt and incorporate different narratives as they spread throughout Europe. Comparing these narratives and the literary structure and themes that move between the legends is an area that requires further scholarship and focus from historians.

Ritual murder is a stain on the fabric of medieval Europe. Anti-Jewish legends that gave rise to anti-Jewish hatred and led to the deaths of large numbers of Europe's Jewish population were the product of a specific social, and religious environment. Understanding this environment and the social, cultural, and religious foundation that inspired the ritual murder accusation allows for the nature of the narratives themselves to be explored. The origins of the accusation in medieval England is a point where scholars can begin to trace the societal implications of these anti-Jewish legends. However, these accusations are still generally explored as individual events. By exploring the accusations as a form of narrative development and tracing how the narratives were constructed and adapted to different societal environments. This adaption is key to understanding the nature of the ritual murder narratives and how and why the legends took hold in medieval society and how they managed to survive the passage of time and survive being transplanted into different countries, societies, and cultures.

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