Gothic

ART & THOUGHT IN THE LATER MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Essays in Honor of Willibald Sauerländer

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COLUM HOURIHANE

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Rethinking Ecclesia and Synagoga in the Thirteenth Century*

SCHOLARS and students of Gothic art are well familiar with the iconographic motif of Ecclesia and Synagoga. The paired female personifications of Church and Synagogue recur in manuscript illuminations, carved ivories, enamels, stained glass, sculpture, and panel paintings from the late twelfth century to the end of the Middle Ages to such an extent that they can be considered a favored theme of the Gothic era. In such contexts, this elastic motif can signify the harmony of the Old and New Testaments, the triumph of the Church, the backwardness of Judaism, or the hope for Jewish conversion, among other theological and societal notions. The theme is so prevalent and has been referenced so extensively in scholarship that many may wonder whether there is anything new to say about it at all. But there are key aspects of both the origins and effects of Ecclesia and Synagoga that have been overlooked and that suggest now-lost resonances of the figures pertinent specifically to the Gothic period.

My departure point for this discussion is the observation that in the years around 1225–1240, Ecclesia and Synagoga came to be a motif that was particularly favored by designers of sculpted façade programs on cathedrals across northern Europe. A consideration of the figures in this era, within the sole medium of monumental sculpture, allows for examination of the theme in the years that it was first introduced to broad urban audiences, making possible an assessment of the motif’s reception in both sacred and social terms. The three best surviving exemplars from this period are the paired sculptures on cathedral entrances at Reims, Bamberg, and Strasbourg, all created around 1225 (Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6).1 What unites the figures at these sites is that in each instance the female personifications of Church and Synagogue are affiliated with images of ideal male rulership. At Reims Cathedral, colossal figures of Ecclesia and Synagoga are installed high up on the cathedral’s south façade, where they flank a rose window and are surrounded by seven images of kings—part of a larger program around the building’s east end featuring fourteen kings in total. At Bamberg Cathedral, over-lifesized images of Ecclesia and Synagoga stand atop the two pillars at either side of the Füristenportal at the building’s northern flank. Thus installed, the female personifications greet visitors entering the space dominated by the celebrated Bamberg Rider

* This essay previews some of the conclusions in my forthcoming book, *The Jew, the Cathedral, and the Medieval City: Synagoga & Ecclesia in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press). Research for this project was made possible by a Sylvan C. Coleman and Pamela Coleman Memorial Fund Art History Fellowship from The Metropolitan Museum of Art (2007–2008). I thank the members of the Medieval Department of the Metropolitan Museum for support and guidance during my fellowship year. A grant from the Ames Fund for Junior Faculty, Fordham University, covered the costs of photographs and permissions. Thanks are also due to Libby Parker for reading my work in multiple versions and to Glenn Hendler for proofreading, technical assistance, and all around good humor.

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1. Ecclesia and Synagoga also were included among the sculpted figures on the north porch at Chartres and at the west façade of Notre-Dame de Paris (both c. 1220), but these have now been destroyed. At Notre-Dame, replicas apparently following late medieval models were installed in the nineteenth century on the west façade. The larger iconographic contexts of these façades accord in general terms with the ensembles at Reims, Bamberg, and Strasbourg, supporting my overall thesis about the use of the Ecclesia–Synagoga motif in public settings in the first half of the thirteenth century. On the figures at Chartres and Notre-Dame, see P. C. Claussen, *Chartres-Studien: zur Vorgeschichte, Funktion und Skulptur der Verhöllnisse* (Wiesbaden, 1975), 135–140; and W. Sauerländer, *Gothic Sculpture in France, 1140–1270* (London, 1972), 450–457.

**Figure 5.** Ecclesia, south façade, Strasbourg Cathedral (photo: Foto Marburg / Art Resource, N.Y.).

**Figure 6.** Synagoga, south façade, Strasbourg Cathedral (photo: Foto Marburg / Art Resource, N.Y.).
Figure 3. Ecclesia, north façade, Bamberg Cathedral (photo: Foto Marburg / Art Resource, N.Y.).

Figure 4. Synagoga, north façade, Bamberg Cathedral (photo: Foto Marburg / Art Resource, N.Y.).
sculpture. At Strasbourg, personifications of Church and Synagogue, again over-lifesized, enter the space of the viewer, appearing low down and bracketing the cathedral’s south façade, dominated at the center by a sculpture of King Solomon (see Fig. 12).

Focusing on monumental, public representations of Ecclesiae and Synagogue in the second quarter of the thirteenth century, I concern myself with two principal questions. First, why was it that this motif suddenly became popular as a hinge element in some of the most lavish and ambitious cathedral façade programs of the day? And second, what did these works teach their audiences of urban viewers about the position of Jews in an ideally ordered Christian realm? To address these issues, I investigate what I take to be the antique origins of both the Ecclesiae–Synagogue theme and its association with images of male rulership, considering as well how the figures exemplify a vogue for classicizing stylistic trends in the early thirteenth century. I assess the enthusiasm for the motif as a response to new anxieties about the status of Jews in Christian society, and thus argue that, in their monumental and public form, the figures had an emphatically political meaning. I round out my discussion with an examination of the figures of Ecclesiae and Synagogue on the south façade of Strasbourg Cathedral, considering the reception of the sculptures within their urban milieu. Ultimately, I hope that my analysis contributes to our understanding of Gothic visual programs as ensembles that, through the exploitation of naturalistic style, insisted on the legitimacy of concocted images of order, images that often stood in opposition to realities on the street.

**Ecclesiae & Synagogue in the Scholarship**

To begin this investigation, it is worthwhile to review briefly the historiography of the Ecclesiae–Synagogue motif, and thus to demonstrate how this essay builds on, but departs from, existing scholarship. The foundational study of the theme is Paul Weber’s *Geistliches Schauspiel und kirchliche Kunst von 1894.* In this groundbreaking book, Weber seeks to demonstrate the influence of sacred dramas on visual production by reviewing texts dating from the early through the late Middle Ages and matching their descriptions of Ecclesiae and Synagogue to various artistic representations. Weber’s study is a gold mine, an indispensable compendium of textual treatments of the theme. And Weber is admirably forthright in his conviction that together Ecclesiae and Synagogue functioned as a tool through which clerics sought to foster enmity toward Jews, thereby demonstrating that the spread of this motif contributed to society-wide hostilities. Weber’s study invites reflection on the particular historical contingencies surrounding the sites under discussion, although this author stops short of considering relevant political, social, or economic factors in any sustained way. Other studies have focused more specifically on textual instances of Ecclesiae and Synagogue, addressing pictorial representations only in passing. More accessible to Anglo-American audiences is Wolfgang Seiferth’s *Synagogue and Church in the Middle Ages: Two Symbols in Art and Literature,* published in English after the German original in 1970. Addressing images dating from the Early Christian period to the Reformation in media, including carved ivories, manuscript illumination, enamels, monumental sculpture, and painting, and discussing theological and liturgical texts, as well as the general history of Jewish-Christian relations throughout the Middle Ages, this book is valuable in its expansive sweep. But while Seiferth’s study has become a standard reference for scholars in a variety of disciplines, the breadth of the material covered in it precludes tenable conclusions about the production or reception of many of the works discussed. Beyond these studies, encyclopaedias of iconography catalogue a range of

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5. Propositions in Weber’s *Geistliches Schauspiel* and Seiferth’s *Synagogue and Church* (as in notes 2 and 4), as well as related scholar-
images of Ecclesia and Synagoga and introduce corresponding written sources. Typically, these discussions note that images of Synagoga became increasingly defamatory as animus toward Jews quickened across Europe from the late eleventh century on. General surveys of images of Jews in medieval art likewise review a range of instances of the motif, identifying and grouping image types. A recent exhibition catalogue devoted just to representations of Ecclesia and Synagoga supplements such surveys by offering a useful compilation of images.

But for those committed to interrogating the uses and effects of cultural productions in specific historical milieux, most of the previous scholarship on the Ecclesia–Synagoga motif leaves gaps because the figures tend to be isolated from both their larger iconographic and historical contexts. Tracking gestures, attributes, and, only occasionally, the visual settings of the figures, questions regarding medium, scale, style, patronage, and particularly viewership tend to be unexplored. Exceptions to these trends are found in recent analyses of the monumental sculptures that most concern me. Helga Sciurie recognizes that renderings of Ecclesia and Synagoga on high medieval cathedral portals both responded to and helped shape urban conceptions of virtue and justice, although her discussion is brief and general, and contemporary ideas about Jews fall out of her analysis altogether. Annette Weber takes on more directly the conditions for viewing monumental figures of Ecclesia and Synagoga, specifically at the cathedral of Strasbourg. Her suggestive discussion runs parallel to some of the insights I offer below, but Weber gives little consideration to the local status of Jews and the regional political scene—issues at the heart of my analysis. Other recent studies consider works in the specific media of illumination and painting, recognizing, if only implicitly, the effects of scale and medium.

**Jews in a Christian World**

To explain the tight correlation between early thirteenth-century public sculpted renderings of Ecclesia and Synagoga and contemporary political and social concerns regarding Jews requires a brief overview of the fundamental elements of the Christian idea of the Jew in the Middle Ages, and an understanding of how these conceptions began to be tested in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In the simplest terms, Christianity conceives of Judaism as a tradition it has superseded. In this understanding, Hebrew scripture recounts the history, customs, and prophecies of God's
original “chosen” people, but with the incarnation, the laws of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are abrogated, and the text that records them is considered an “Old” Testament, a shadowy precursor to the New. Paul articulates this notion forcefully in his letter to the Romans where he invokes the Genesis story of the twins Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25:21–34). The brothers emerged from Rebecca’s womb already struggling with one another, a contest explained by the voice of God as a presage for a future defined by conflict: “Two nations are in your womb,” says the Lord to Rebecca. “Two peoples, born of you, shall be divided” (Gen. 25:23). Esau, emerging from the womb first, held the family birthright. But, foolishly, he did not value this divinely-granted preeminence, and in exchange for a lowly bowl of lentils, ceded his privileged position to Jacob, who eventually gained the blessing from their father, Isaac. Paul invokes this tale as a prophecy of the relationship of Judaism and Christianity: “The elder shall serve the younger” (Rom. 9:12). Although the Jews were God’s original chosen people, in the new Christian age these “children of the flesh” who still cling to ancient laws are rejected in favor of the “children of the promise,” now deemed to be the true descendants of Abraham (Rom. 9:8).

Augustine’s conception of Jews and their place in history and society built on Paul and set standards and expectations that were to prevail in the early Middle Ages. By the time that this church father wrote in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, Christians could take it as a given that God had abandoned his original chosen people, and that now followers of Christ constituted the “True Israel” (verus Israel). In this schema, Jews get cast as outdated representatives of the earlier age—old folks who stick around to remind others to revel in the vigor of a youth that has discovered a more righteous way. “Why,” asks Augustine in his Tractatus adversus Iudaos, “do the Jews not realize that they remained stationary in useless antiquity [in vetustate supernactae], rather than hurl charges against us, who hold fast to the new promises . . . ?” But for Augustine, Jews still had a critical role in Christian history and hermeneutics. Understood as living testaments to the pre-history of the church, and thus the longevity of the tradition, Jews were sanctioned keepers of the Old Testament, living witnesses who could “carry” the books for the good of Christians, but who failed to understand the meaning therein. “Our librarians are what they have become,” as he puts it. Augustine could also conceptualize these keepers of the Old Testament as minions in service to Christian truth: “[J]ust as it is customary for servants [caparri] to carry books behind their masters, so that those who carry faint and those who read profit,” so too the Jews carry the books for Christians.


14. The foundational studies on Augustine and the Jews are B. Blumenkranz, Die Jüdenpredigt Augustins [1946] (Paris, 1973); and idem, “Augustin et les juifs: Augustin et le judaïsme,” Recherches augustiniennes 1 (1998), 225–41. Blumenkranz’s conclusions have been augmented and refined in the works of Cohen, cited below, and P. Fredriksen, Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism (New York, 2008), as well as other discussions by this author, cited within her bibliography. Fredriksen’s book offers an excruciating analysis of the development of Augustine’s conceptions of Jews in relation to the spiritual climate of his day. As such, she presents a nuanced exposition of the ideas that I cast here in broad


16. Discussed in J. Cohen’s important work, Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity (Berkeley, 1999), 35–41. For the librarian formulation, see, for example, Augustine, Enarrationes in Psalm 56:9 CCSL 39, 700. (“Librarius nostri facti sunt, quomodo solent servii post dominos codices fortes, ut illi portando deficient, illi legendo proficiant.”)

throughout the early Middle Ages, in large part, it seems to me, because the intellectual lights of the age had few encounters with actual Jews. Certainly there were some churchmen, notably Isidore of Seville in the seventh century and Agobard of Lyons in the ninth, who railed against the Jews, but their objections did not ignite broad social reconceptualizations of the idea of the Jew. It was only when Christians began to concern themselves with the reform of society, seeking to echo heavenly perfection in the earthly realm, and when Jews and Christians started to live side by side in northern European urban centers, that Christians became aware of Jews on a broad scale in social and not just theological terms, and started to recognize that Augustinian ideals for Jewish status did not match reality.

In the era between c. 980 and 1200, hundreds of Jews, it seems, migrated from southern European and Middle Eastern centers and settled in the kingdoms of Germany, France, and England to take advantage of the new economic opportunities in the North. Many of the initial communities were established at the invitation of secular rulers who identified Jews as a force that could jump-start local fiscal expansion because of their storied mercantile acumen. When they got there, Jews often settled in streets at the center of town, living collectively but by no means cut off from the larger Christian society. Christians and Jews would encounter one another in city squares daily, and Christians regularly turned to Jewish moneylenders for loans large and small. Jewish dominance in the high medieval money trades is well known, though the reasons for it are sometimes little understood. In the simplest terms, scripture prohibited the charging of interest to one’s co-religionists, and so, in principle, Jews were the only population within European society on hand and warranted to participate in the credit market. Jews, thereby, quickly became intimately associated with moneylending in the popular imagination, despite the fact that Jews wrangled among themselves over the propriety of the practice and economic intercourse with Christians in general. In the mid-twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, could complain in this oft-quoted excerpt: “wherever there are no Jews, we lament that Christian moneylenders... behave Jewishly in a manner even worse [petus in-diaizare].” Secular and ecclesiastical lords protected the Jewish monopoly on the money trades, relying on the ready flow of capital borrowed from Jews and accrued through taxing Jewish gains to support building projects, wage wars, and sustain lavish courts. Jews thus became an essential cog within the economic machinery of the high Middle Ages.

Some clerical Christians also had intellectual con-


20. Under the leadership of Alfred Haverkamp, a team of scholars at the Arche Maimon-Institut für Geschichte der Juden at the University of Trier has made revolutionary contributions to the study of Jewish settlement and life in western Europe. Any examination of the medieval Ashkenazim should begin with A. Haverkamp and R. Barzen, eds., Geschichte der Juden im Mittelalter von der Nordsee bis zu den Südpolen: Kommentiertes Kartenwerk, 3 vols. (Hannover, 2002).


tacts with Jews, turning to leading rabbis for guidance in the study of scripture, a phenomenon notably explored by Beryl Smalley in *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, and chronicled in dialogue such texts as Gilbert Crispin’s well-known “Disputation of a Jew with a Christian.” 26 When Christians got to know actual Jews, they learned that the population did not conform to the characterization of timid librarians or servants conceived by Augustine. First, Christians discovered that Jewish theological traditions had not stagnated with the formation of the church, and that the Talmud—that post-biblical compendium of midrash, custom and folklore—and not simply the so-called “Old” Testament, stood at the center of Jewish intellectual and ritual life. Moreover, contemporary Jewish religious and social practices were determined by an impressive body of rabbis, leading figures among whom were the celebrated Rashi and other members of his family. 27 Jews, it turned out, were not blindly keeping to the customs and rituals of the ancient Israelites for the good of Christians, but instead were undergoing a scholarly renaissance that rivaled the intellectual and reformist revival of contemporary Christians in the long twelfth century. Likely more surprising was the discovery that some Jews composed anti-Christian polemics, ridiculing Christian interpretation of Hebrew scripture and the fundamentals of church doctrine—these texts being a counter to the *adversus Judaeos* tracts found in Christian theology from the patristic era on. 28

I offer a few examples from this genre that is only just beginning to be explored by scholars. 29 One work, known as the *Book of the Covenant*, by rabbi Joseph Kimhi of twelfth-century Narbonne, exemplifies a multitude of denunciations of the core Christian belief that Mary of Nazareth was a Virgin when she gave birth to Jesus. The critical passage of Isaiah 7:14, of course, refers to an *almab*, a “young girl” in Hebrew, not a virgin. Kimhi thus mocks what he deems to be Jerome’s mistranslation which “led you [Christians] astray and caused you to err.” 30 Another text, the *Nizkorvo Vetus* (Old Book of Polemic), a late thirteenth-century Ashkenazic work that draws upon earlier traditions, observes ironically that in other cases Christians turn to Jews for their authoritative experience with the Hebrew of biblical scripture, the book of Isaiah being, “after all, in our possession.” 31 Jewish polemicians further observe the lack of any overt association between the Isaiah text and Mary of Nazareth: “The prophet said that an *almab* would give birth to a son. So what? … [H]ow do you know this [girl] is Mary? Where do you find her name…?” 32 And the texts cast further aspersions on the motivations behind Mary’s claims to virginity while in a chaste marriage: “To say that a virgin will give birth [would seem] dubious to people, for they will not believe that she did not play the harlot.” 33 Christian ritual is consistently derided as well. In these polemical texts baptism, for example, is sometimes likened to a satanic dousing in “impure waters,” and the


27. For good introductions to high medieval Jewish intellectual life, see Stow, *Alienated Minority* (as in note 21), 135–156; and Chazan, *Jews of Medieval Western Christendom* (as in note 21), 243–283.


rite of confession is deemed just a ruse so that priests can learn the names of loose women with whom they might later pursue their own sinful couplings.34

Jewish expressions of scorn for Christ could become more pointed still. An important recent study by Peter Schäfer examines rare manuscript and early printed versions of the Talmud to discern that medieval versions of the text were peppered with denunciations of Jesus and his mother, mocking those aspects of the Christian story at the heart of Christian belief.35 Jesus is said to be the bastard child of an adulteress, the farthest thing from the son of God; he appears as a disobedient and a sexually lewd student; his power to heal is mocked; his execution is presented as righteous punishment for his idolatry and dereliction; and rather than resurrected, Jesus is said to be punished eternally in hell, boiling in excrement. Similar mocking tales, elaborated further, appear in the parodic polemical work Toledot Yešu (History of Jesus), written in western Europe in the early Middle Ages and broadly circulated thereafter.36 New awareness of the contents of the Talmud spread with the theological explorations of Peter Alfonsi and Peter the Venerable and culminated in the infamous Talmud Trial in Paris in 1240.37 Of course, self-protection required that Jews keep denunciations of Christianity to themselves, and there is limited (though still compelling) evidence of public outbursts expressing such opinions.38 Nonetheless, with Jews and Christians living side by side in cities and encountering one another regularly through economic, intellectual, and perhaps social interactions, not to mention the confidences revealed by Jewish converts to Christianity, it is apparent that Christians got word of Jewish contempt for key aspects of Christian dogma and tradition. With such revelations, Christians were confronted with the fact that the Jews of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Ashkenaz were far from the docile librarians and servants that Augustine had promised. Northern European communities of this era were proud, financially successful, creative, and sometimes obstreperous—a people who, in the eyes of Christian authorities of the day, needed to be kept in their place.

As I see it, the early thirteenth-century institutionalization of identifying dress for Jews, initiatives aimed at limiting Jewish profiteering in the money trades, and the Talmud Trial, with its subsequent burning of twenty-four cartloads of Jewish books at the center of Paris, can all be understood as developments parallel to the installation of images of Synagoga on cathedral façades in the same era across northern Europe.39 Both action and image materialized a drive to reconfigure the Jew to fit the Christian mold. Synagoga, as an embodiment of the Jewish tradition, is shown as downtrodden, weakened, and contained (see Figs. 2, 4, and 6). But she

35. Schäfer, Jesus in the Talmud (as in note 29).
38. See Horowitz, Reckless Rites (as in note 29), 149–185; and Marcus, “A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis” (as in note 20), 478–484.
39. Introductory discussion of such constraints are found in Stow, Alienated Minority; and Chazan, Jews of Medieval Western Christendom (both as in note 21).
is also beautiful, a figure who is patently part of the Christian system. This aestheticization of the defeated Synagogue draws directly on ancient classical conventions, an issue I turn to presently.

**Antique Origins & Political Resonances**

The tendency to personify abstract concepts in female forms, of course, was a mainstay of antique pictorial programs and texts. The Romans harnessed the approach and exploited it particularly in visual assertions of imperial power. On the Arch of Titus, Roma, a Tyche figure—embodying the luck or spirit of a city or domain—leads the emperor’s quadriga, while the ruler is crowned by a personification of Victory. Antique artists equally could use female personifications of conquered territories to convey Roman dominance over such lands. The Sebastion at Aphrodisias (Asia Minor, first century C.E.), a temple sanctuary complex erected to honor the Julio-Claudian emperors, presented a series of standing female figures in relief, each representing a province or peoples (ethne) conquered by Rome.40 Personifications of the Dacians, the Egyptians, the Judeans, and others in the company of rulers and deities, lined the temple portico, demurely taking position as obedient subjects to the divine order orchestrated by the gods and delivered by the Emperor. Elsewhere on the monument, Roman dominance over the colonized territories was visualized more overtly. In the relief of Claudius subjugating Britannia, for example, the emperor is shown at the peak of his strength dominating a flailing personification of the province (Fig. 7).41 Here, the Emperor wedges his right knee against Britannia’s thigh as he pulls her back by her hair. Britannia reaches up her right arm, seeking to stay Claudius’ blow, while with her left hand she flounders to keep her chiton from falling off, though its slippage has already exposed her full breast. The artist here took pains to convey the grace and beauty of the moment, evident in the idealized faces and bodies of both figures, the balletic engagement of masculine and feminine forms, and in the fluttering drapery of Claudius’ cloak, carved in delicate relief. Here, a female personification participates in the long-standing Greco-Roman tradition of insisting on the righteousness of defeat through aestheticized form.

Just as female personifications could be used to convey the variety of peoples subsumed within the empire, they equally could be used to represent an imagined homogeneity across the domain through the medium of coinage. This was particularly the case as imperial cohesion began to break down in the fourth century. In the decades following the establishment of Constantinople as an imperial residence in 324, and its subsequent elevation to the status of second capital of the empire, there emerged a new sister Tyche for Roma,


the figure of Constantinopolis. Constantine and Roma appear side by side on imperial coins beginning in the 340s, and persist to the end of the century. Typically, the obverse of such coins features the bust of the emperor, while the reverse shows Rome and Constantinople personified as sister-queens, sometimes both enthroned and together holding a shield, as on a solidus of Constantius II from around 350 (Fig. 8). Roma faces front, wears a military helmet and holds a scepter. Constantinople, also holding a scepter, bears a turreeted city-wall crown, has one foot on a boat’s prow, and turns deferentially toward her senior companion. This coin was reissued several times under Constantius II’s successors, was minted at centers across both the eastern and the western portions of the Empire, and became one of the most common of late imperial coins. Other coins show the enthroned sisters bearing symbols of victory, as in a double gold solidus minted by Gratian, but based on models established under Constantine. In subsequent coins, Roma is sometimes left out altogether, and the upstart Constantinople is shown as the sole consort to the imperial likeness on the coin’s obverse, as in a gold solidus struck for Theodosius II and subsequent rulers. More luxurious works, such as manuscripts, consular diptychs, and jewelry, similarly feature Tyche figures for Rome, Constantinople, and other imperial centers, but the rivalry between the two imperial capitals in the fourth century as depicted on coins makes most vivid the development of a widely circulating image-type presenting older and younger feminized embodiments of temporal power.

42. See J. M. C. Toynbee, “Roma and Constantinopolis in Late-ante Art from 312–365,” Journal of Roman Studies 37 (1947), 135–144; and G. Bühl, Constantinopolis und Roma: Stadtansichten der Spätantike (Kilchberg and Zürich, 1997), esp. 10–78, for the following discussion.
46. Kent, Roman Coins (as in note 45), 342, no. 749.
47. Some are discussed in K. J. Shelton, “Imperial Tyches,” Gesta 18/1 (1979), 27–38.
one often subservient to the other, and both bound intimately with images of the male sovereign.

The motif of Ecclesia and Synagoga, I argue, grew directly out of this imperial vocabulary of forms. It was thinkers who were accustomed to seeing female personifications of fortune or civic authority in official imperial contexts who first inserted feminine embodiments of Church and Synagogue into theological texts. Certainly, there had been a long tradition in Judeo-Christian texts of using a female personae to materialize notions of defeat or triumph. We need think only of the downtrodden Jerusalem, assimilated to a dejected woman, in the Book of Lamentations (Lam. 1:1–2; 5:8–9; and 5:16–17), or the Israelites celebrated as a queenly figure by Zachariaiah (Zach. 9:9)—figures that drew upon larger literary and pictorial trends of the ancient world. Church fathers transferred such traditions to the Christian realm, developing Ecclesia and Synagoga as characters to be integrated within larger theological speculations. So Augustine, for example, in his exegesis on Psalm 44, could invoke the Church as a bride mystically united with Christ, while the Synagogue appears as a worn out matron: “Indeed, Ecclesia is the new bride, Christ the bridegroom. Who then gave birth to the son of God in the flesh? Synagoga. He will leave father and mother ... And who is the mother he leaves? The Jewish people, Synagoga.” 48

But in the era of the Christianization of the Roman empire, one thinker apparently recognized that the two characters had their own triumphal story to tell. Drawing upon a long tradition of debate literature, this unknown writer composed a dialogue between Ecclesia and Synagoga arguing over which one has the right to rule the earth. This text, known as the Altercatio Ecclesiæ et Synagogæ, was composed in Spain or north Africa sometime between 438 and 476, and was popular throughout the Middle Ages, in part likely because of its misattribution to Augustine. 49 In the text, Ecclesia and Synagoga are presented as aristocratic matrons, rivals each making the case for her claim to sovereignty before a judge.

The narrator of the dialogue introduces the players, explaining that now that the emperor has embraced Christianity, it is evident that the “lady who is the Synagogue, once powerful and wealthy” no longer has rights to her possession. 50 Of course, the Synagogue and her people the Jews never had such authority within the empire. But the author here casts the contest in absolute and strikingly politicized terms. So, for example, the struggle between Jacob and Esau, from the time of Paul interpreted typologically as a reference to the struggle between Christianity and Judaism, as discussed above, here gains a patently imperial cast:

The Church: Read what was said to Rebecca: The elder shall serve the younger. And when you ask how you [Synagoga] serve, look at the legions’ standards ... bear in mind that the emperors are worshippers of Christ.... No Jew may be emperor, prefect, comes, may enter the senate, be admitted to military service.... You have lost the rank of membership of the higher nobility. 51

Indeed, in 418, Emperor Honorius banned Jews from holding public office, thereby inscribing theological conceptions of Jewish ignominy into a practical legal code. 52 Within the Altercatio, putatively a work of theology, in turn, imperial law decides spiritual merit. The contest between Church and Synagogue makes vivid Christological notions of scriptural typology and historical progression, but the terms of the debate are decidedly administrative.

Questions of worldly authority do not alone inform each character’s defense of her right to sovereignty. When the characters’ barbs turn vicious and more personal, their mutual denunciations still often are


49. A new edition of the Altercatio text is found in CCSL 69A. English translation from the Migne PL edition of the works of Augustine is found in A. Lukyn Williams, Adversus Judaeos: A Bird's Eye View of Christian Apologetics until the Renaissance (Cambridge, 1925), 326–338. Translations given here are from Lukyn Williams with slight alterations.

50. Lukyn Williams, Adversus Judaeos (as in note 49), 317.

51. Lukyn Williams, Adversus Judaeos (as in note 49), 328.

52. A. Linder, ed., trans., and commentary, The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation (Detroit, Mich., 1987), 76–77. Such laws, though, seem to have been ignored in many cases.
founded upon claims of relative social status: “I knew
the king when you [Gentiles] were but barbarians; I
ruled great nations when you were mere herdsmen,”
asserts the Synagogue dismissively. “Yes, you were
mistress of the world,” rejoins the Church, “but now
are only maid.” 53 Throughout the rest of the text, this
maid is repeatedly indicted as a miserable, unhappy,
murderous, foolish woman (misera, infelicissima, mulier
parricida, stulta). After a series of exchanges over points
of Christian doctrine, Ecclesia seems to weary of in-
voking repeated theological justifications for her au-
thority and lashes out:

Listen, Synagoga, listen and see thou widowed and for-
saken woman! I am what you have not been able to
be. I am the queen who has removed you from your
throne…. My bridegroom is fair beyond the sons of
men, the king of kings, who has set the marriage crown
on my head and has clothed me with purple… 54

Ecclesia gained her status because she won the love of
a regal Christ. She is the favored consort at the celestial
court, while superseded Synagoga looks on, dashed
from the throne. Christ’s queenly bride continues to
debate her deceased predecessor, and the text ends with
the Church’s declaration of triumph. 55

Pictorial representations of Ecclesia and Synagoga,
for their part, enter the lexicon of the medieval artist
only in subsequent centuries, usually in small-scale lux-
ury works. The earliest instances are in ivory plaques,
carved in the late Carolingian era to adorn manuscripts.
In these pieces, personifications of Church and Syna-
gogue appear standing to either side of the crucified
Christ, as in an ivory from the Victoria and Albert Mu-
seum (Fig. 9). 56 Here, as in other related works, Ecclesia
catches the blood emerging from Christ’s side as Syna-
goga retreats from the scene. I suggest that the formu-
lation of the pictorial motif of Ecclesia and Synagoga
in the ninth century was an element within a broader
Carolingian cultural phenomenon—a taste for things
antique. In many of these ivory Crucifixion plaques,
Ecclesia and Synagoga appear along with personifica-
tions of Oceanus and Terra (Sea and Earth), and Sol and
Luna (Sun and Moon), that is, figures drawn from the
vocabulary of Roman official art. 57 Frequently, more-
over, acanthus leaf ornamental borders, an additional
borrowing from the antique visual realm, frame the en-
sembles. It is a commonplace of art-historical literature
to speak of the Carolingian fascination with antique
imperial culture as a type of rebirth, a notion notably
elaborated by Erwin Panofsky. 58 Recently, scholars
have complicated Panofsky’s conceptualizations, dem-
onstrating the subtle ways that Antiquity could serve
alternately as a model and a negative exemplum in the
interrelated political, theological, and cultural spheres,
and further, that Carolingian borrowings from the past
involved reformulations driven by contemporary con-
tingencies, rather than blind adaptations. 59 In the case
of the Crucifixion plaques with Ecclesia and Synagoga,
it seems that the female personae function as modified
Tyche figures, included within a constellation of clas-
sicizing forms surrounding the crucified Christ that
collectively celebrate Christian, rather than imperial,
triumph.

In the twelfth century, as Jews moved to the intelle-

53. Lukyn Williams, Adversus Judaeos (as in note 49), 327.
54. Lukyn Williams, Adversus Judaeos (as in note 49), 331.
55. Some manuscripts break at line 540, others continue to 597
(see Altercatio in CCSL 59A [as in note 49], 17–18). But both versions
end with Ecclesia claiming victory for herself.
56. London: V & A, 290–1867. See A. Goldschmidt, Die Ilsen-
beinfiguren aus der Zeit der karolingischen und sächsischen Kaiser, VIII.—
XI. Jahrhundert (Berlin, 1914), Vol. I, no. 88; and D. Gaborit-
Chopin, Ivoires du moyen-âge (Fribourg, 1978), 70, fig. 86.
57. Another similar work also featuring Oceanus and Terra is
London: V & A, 251.1867. Related Crucifixion plaques with Eccle-
sia and Synagoga as well as Sol and Luna, though without Oce-
anus and Terra, are: Paris: BnF Ms. lat. 9453; Gannat: Church of
Saint-Croix; and New York: Cloisters 1974.266 with Paris: Louvre
OA 10652. See Goldschmidt, Elfenbeinfiguren (as in note 56), Vol.
1, nos. 85, 86, and 89; Gaborit-Chopin, Ivoires du moyen-âge (as in
note 56), 70–71 and 190 (no. 87); and idem, Ivoires médiévaux V°—XIV°
58. E. Panofsky, “Renaissance and Renascences,” in Renaissance
and Renascences in Western Art (New York, 1971), 42–113, esp. 43–54
on the Carolingians. For application of Panofsky to Carolingian
ivories, see R. Melzak, “Antiquarianism in the Time of Louis the
Pious and its influence on the Art of Metz,” in Charlemagne’s Heir:
New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840), ed. P. God-
59. A noteworthy discussion is L. Nees, A Tainted Mantle: Her-
cules and the Classical Tradition at the Carolingian Court (Philadelphia,
1991), 3–17, for a review of historiography.
tual and cultural centers of Europe, depictions of Synagoga in luxury pieces took on a decidedly more defamatory tone. Now, on works like the Stavelot altar, for example, Synagoga appears with a lance and blindfold, emblems of her enmity toward Christ and blindness to his message. Around the same time, artists also began to depict Ecclesia and Synagoga within public pictorial cycles, as on the right tympanum of the abbey church of St.-Gilles-du-Gard. In that relief, Synagoga gets her due for rejecting Christ, standing to the right of the cross and being shoved down, dashed from the scene by a vengeful angel.

**Ecclesia, Synagoga & Triumph**

Yet it was in the thirteenth century, in the era when ecclesiastical and lay rulers were increasingly uneasy about Jewish denunciations of Christian belief, Jewish-profiteering at the expense of Christians, and the liberty with which Jews circulated unrecognized throughout Christian cities, that the Ecclesia–Synagoga motif was adopted in monumental, lifelike form as a key element within the decorative programs of the most ambitious urban building projects of the day. Here I return to the three examples that I introduced at the beginning of this essay. In each of these three monumental instances of the motif, the female personifications of Church and Synagogue are joined to an image (or images) of masculine, divinely-sanctioned rulership. At Reims, they appear with seven colossal images of kings, hovering in the top storey of the cathedral’s south façade. At Bamberg, as I have argued in a recent article, Ecclesia and Synagoga are best understood in relation to the celebrated Bamberg Rider sculpture, a Christian prince, directly inside the portal they adorn. And at Strasbourg, they bracket an ensemble dominated at the center by a figure of Solomon. As discussed above, in the very years that these programs were being created, secular and ecclesiastical rulers were instituting new legal and administrative codes designed to constrain the Jew within Christian society. And so it appears that while the Ecclesia–Synagoga motif in these contexts was intended to convey a general theological message of the ascendancy of the Church, it also projected an ideal of Jewish docility and submission in a correctly ordered Christian realm.

Style, in part, was the carrier of this message. In the opening decades of the thirteenth century, artists experimented with idealized naturalistic styles long rejected in monumental works perhaps because of their association with idolatrous paganism. Sculptors at Reims, Bamberg and Strasbourg participated in this classicizing revival, drawing inspiration either indirectly through forms transmitted in metalwork, or directly from antique ruins scattered about northern Europe or viewed on journeys south of the Alps. Such analogies are evident, for instance, when comparing the faces of Ecclesia and Synagoga at Reims with Roman


61. See my “Synagoga Tumbles, a Rider Triumphs: Clerical Viewers and the Fürstenportal of Bamberg Cathedral,” *Gesta* 43/1 (2004), 15–44, with further references.


examples (compare Figs. 1 and 2 with 10), or the damp drapery of the figures at Bamberg and Strasbourg with that of an imperial Roman female figure (compare Figs. 4 and 5 with 11), to invoke two among hundreds of possible classical points of comparison. In an era when both an imperious church and ambitious lay leaders sought to evoke the grandeur of ancient Rome in emphatically Christian terms, this long-rejected triumphalist representational mode was embraced, although of course it is impossible to prove a causal connection between the two phenomena.

The idealized naturalism of Ecclesia and Synagoga at Reims, Bamberg, and Strasbourg, moreover, confirms the status of the personae as figures that mediate between the lived and the ideal realms. The works are carved with a dramatic lifeliness—limbs and joints

Skulptur” (cited previously in this note), 100–103; and Hamann-MacLean, “Antikenstudium” (cited previously in this note), 238 and 236–238. For general discussions in addition to citations above see: W. Sauerländer, “Art antique et sculpture autour de 1200: Saint-Denis—Lisieux—Chartres,” and “Intentio vera nostra est manifestare ea, que sunt, sicut sunt: Bildtradition und Wirklichkeiterführung im Spannungsfeld der staufischen Kunst,” in Cathedrals and Sculpture (London, 1999), Vol. 1, 339–365 and 369–392.
adhere to the rules of anatomy, faces and gestures mimic human expressions, gravity seems to weigh down drapery. Such elements place the figures in dialogue with the natural world. Their status as personifications and their idealized beauty, however, make plain that they are representatives of a transcendent heavenly order. So Synagoga defeated, linked with the mighty Ecclesia, conveys the virtue of a Judaism that maintains a docile presence within the Christian sphere, but the figures stop short of presenting any kind of blueprint for actual administration.

Case Study: Christians and Jews around the South Façade of Strasbourg Cathedral

Examination of Ecclesia, Synagoga, and their larger architectonic and iconographic context at Strasbourg brings to light the social and political meanings that the figures projected in the second quarter of the thirteenth century (Fig. 12). The south façade at Strasbourg was created around the year 1230, an addition augmenting the Romanesque incarnation of the cathedral, which had been built in the eleventh century. 64 This southern portal is on the side of the building facing the bishop’s palace, and it functioned not only as a ceremonial entrance to the church, but also as the locale for convening the bishop’s municipal court. 65 That is, the bishop of Strasbourg also bore the title of count, and this portion of the cathedral seems to have been conceived as an arena for the performance of his secular as well as his sacred authority. Over the course of the thirteenth century, the rest of Strasbourg Cathedral was rebuilt in the Gothic style, and this portal was integrated within that new structure, but at the outset, both stylistically and functionally, this region of the building often operated as an autonomous site.

The south portal at Strasbourg has been altered since its inception, victim to vandalism during the French Revolution and changes in taste. Originally, the sculpted ensemble at Strasbourg south was protected by a roof and enclosed at the front by a gate, so that the whole space had the feeling of a loggia, a coherent and enclosed space, though one open to the city. Indeed, one can still see the consoles that initially supported the roof on the façade, below the string course at the base of the building’s triforium. In addition to the removal of the porch’s roof, some of the original sculpture has been lost. Isaac Brunn’s well-known engraving of circa 1617 shows that when the portal was created, twelve figures of apostles adorned the jambs, raised up to the level of the Solomon figure at the center (Fig. 13). The thirteenth-century Solomon figure was destroyed and a nineteenth-century replica now sits in its place. The same is true for the bust-length figure of Christ behind the Old Testament king, as well as the scenes in the lintels, though the celebrated tympana of the Death of the Virgin and her Coronation are original. 66

In 1972, Otto von Simson published an article explaining the complicated iconography of this portal that integrates figures of Solomon, Christ, and apostles, Marian scenes, and Ecclesia and Synagoga. 67 In brief, von Simson explains the ensemble as a manifestation of the Christian understanding of the putatively Solomonic text of the Song of Songs. Building upon earlier

65. See A. Erler, Das Straßburger Münster im Rechtlichen des Mittelalters (Frankfurt am Main, 1954). Erler admits that the sources are silent about the precise circumstances under which the Strasbourg south façade would have staged legal proceedings (p. 52), but collectively he garners sufficient evidence of the use of the site for this function.
66. For the latest assessment of the construction of the south façade with a discussion of alterations, see Meyer, “La construction” (as in note 64).
hermeneutics, twelfth-century exeges saw the poem as an allegorization of Christ’s union with the Church and the Christian soul, the lovers (the sponsus and sponsa) in the dialogic Song then functioning as figures for Christ and his beloved Ecclesia. The Ecclesia figure in turn was taken to allude to the Virgin, crystallizing in a triune figure of Bride-Church-Mary. Christian exeges further associated the scorned bride, the Sulamite (or Sunamite) woman of the Song, with Synagoga or the Jews. Ultimately, von Simson sees the Strasbourg ensemble, along with the Pillar of Angels, a structure at the interior of the Strasbourg south transept, as an expression of Honorius Augustodunensis’ eschatological vision for the salvation of the Christian soul, as well as

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the Jews. Honorius anticipates that at the end of days, just as the lovers in the Song call the Sulamite woman to turn toward them, so too the call of the Church would be heard by the Jews, who would finally turn toward Christ. For von Simson, the corkscrew posture of Synagoga on the Strasbourg façade manifests that idea—or ideal—of turning (see Fig. 6). 68

The clerics of Strasbourg may well have looked upon the figure of Synagoga on their new south façade and reflected on both the ideal and the reality of Jewish conversion. In March of 1229, there had been a celebrated local case in which a Jewish man converted to Christianity, renounced his Jewish wife, and demanded custody of their four-year-old son. 69 As overlord of the city’s Jews, the local bishop had the authority to adjudge in this case, weighing the child’s prospect of life with a Christian father and no mother against a future in the Jewish community. Apparently it was not an easy decision, because after considering the matter before a diocesan synod, the bishop took the case all the way to Pope Gregory IX. The Pope ruled that it was better for the child to live motherless than to put his soul in danger by leaving him with the Jews, a judgment that was later enshrined in Gregory IX’s Decretals. 70 Further evidence of Jewish conversion to Christianity in Strasbourg in the second quarter of the thirteenth century is found in the local use of the surname “Judeus” among people who apparently were Christian. One Burchardus Judeus, for example, served as a witness to a document concerning the property of Strasbourg’s collegiate church of St. Thomas. 71

But a closer look at the figures of Ecclesia and Synagoga at Strasbourg suggests that the message of the ensemble was one of Christian triumph more than anticipation of ultimate union, a point recently made by Willibald Sauerländer in an article on the portal. 72 At the left extreme is the Church (Fig. 5). Legs oriented outward and upper body turned to the right, she has just noticed Synagoga over at the other end of the porch. The triumphant Queen Ecclesia thrusts her shoulders back and twists around to confront her predecessor. With her right hand she grasps the staff of a labarum, and with her left she cradles a chalice. Crown planted firmly on her head, the Church extends her neck slightly outward so as to better her view across the portal complex. Her eyes are wide open and her lips are parted as if she has just called out. Synagoga across the way is the weak subject of this direct address (Fig. 6). Physically, she is the antithesis of the Church. While Ecclesia’s luxuriant robe provides stability, Synagoga’s diaphanous drapery slithers down her thighs and weaves around her ankles. While Ecclesia’s mantle unifies her upper body, arms, and attributes, Synagoga has no mantle and her arms jut out to either side. Her spear is broken and tangled in a banner, and she holds the tablets of the law tentatively, hiding them behind her body. The Church calls out, but, blindfolded and weakened, the Synagogue is not up to the fight. She turns away, mournfully absorbed in her own defeat.

The docile and decrepit Synagoga of Strasbourg cathedral’s south façade had little in common with the actual Jewish population living in the streets directly to the north of the cathedral, running alongside the residence of the cathedral chapter. 73 Jews had come to the city of Strasbourg beginning in the twelfth century, joining other communities in the Rhineland region. Local rabbis became leaders among the Jews of Alsace, and local pawnbrokers and creditors dominated the money trades. This scholarly, spiritual, and fiscal success found expression in the rapid establishment ed. (New York, 1966), 180–183 (no. 59); and S. Simonsohn, The Apostolic See and the Jews—Documents: 492–1404 (Toronto, 1988), 128–129 (no. 124).


70. S. Grayzel, The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century, rev.
of the community in a cluster of streets at the center of town, housing a synagogue, a community bakery, a mikveh (ritual bath), and luxury homes. This Jewish district was nested right at the center of the city, the main artery of the vicus judaorum (today’s rue des juifs) running parallel to the cloister of the cathedral canons and terminating at a short street (today’s rue du dome) leading directly to the north façade of Strasbourg Cathedral (Fig. 14). Beyond this physical integration within the civic milieu, administratively the Jews of Strasbourg seem to have been considered integral members of urban society. Around 1214, the Strasbourg bishop and the leading burghers of the city negotiated the terms of a document known as the Second Municipal Charter. Among the rulings of this agreement was a provision that the local Jews were to be keepers of the city banner, while seven nearby monasteries were to outfit the civic militia with horses to pull the war chariot. The Jews, thus, were entrusted with the most important symbol of the city’s military strength, a vexillum possibly adorned with an image of the Virgin and Child. The Jews of Strasbourg, moreover, may have fought alongside the civic militia in defense of the city. The vicus judaorum lay close to the city wall, and at the edge of this district was a tower, once known as the “Judenturm,” from which soldiers could stave off hostile forces. There is no firm evidence that Jews themselves were charged with the defense of this region, but evidence from other Rhineland cities suggests this possibility. These were Jews with good reason to feel proud and self-assertive. They had established themselves quickly, were thriving financially and spiritually, and constituted a valued component of the larger civic structure. Moreover, there are no reports of attacks on Jews within Strasbourg during the whole of the thirteenth century.


74. Weigand, Urkundenbuch der Stadt Strasbourg, vol. 1, Urkunden und Stadtrechte bis zum Jahr 1266 (Strasbourg, 1879), 481 (no. 617). For commentary, see Mentgen, Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß (as in note 73), 125.


76. See Mentgen, Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß (as in note 73), 125–126. On the right of Jews to bear arms up until around the mid-thirteenth century, see G. Kisch, The Jews in Mediaeval Germany: A Study of their Legal and Social Status (Chicago, 1949), 111–128.

77. See Mentgen, Juden im mittelalterlichen Elsaß (as in note 73), 125–126. On the right of Jews to bear arms up until around the mid-thirteenth century, see G. Kisch, The Jews in Mediaeval Germany: A Study of their Legal and Social Status (Chicago, 1949), 111–128.
When clerics looked at the figure of Synagoga on the south façade of Strasbourg cathedral, they encountered a weak and broken figure that gainsaid the status of the prosperous and esteemed local Jewish community. Moreover, if the portal’s iconographic program was inspired by Christian exegesis on the Song of Songs, as von Simson and others would have it, clerics who were in the know might have equally reflected on Jewish interpretations of the Solomonic text—interpretations that undermined and even mocked Christian hermeneutics, in the manner of the examples reviewed earlier in this essay. For, in distinction to the Marian allusions that Christian exegetes discerned in the Song of Songs, Jewish thinkers long had taken the poem’s nuptial imagery as a figuration of God’s relation to the Jews before and under the Diaspora. The commentaries often take the form of a historical narrative, tracking the relationship between the Lord as bridegroom and his bride, the people of Israel, progressing from Exodus through the time in the kingdom of Judaea, to the Roman occupation and the current exile, with an anticipation for future redemption with the coming of the Messiah. Rashi, for example, explains the Solomonic text as a dialogue between God and his estranged beloved, Israel, who together look back to a time of union in the Promised Land before the Diaspora. While Christian exegetes likened the Jews to the Sulamite woman of the Song who was alienated from the bridegroom-Christ, Rashi assured his Jewish readers that the exile referenced in the text does not bespeak a rejection of Israel nor is it an annulment of Israel’s chosen status, but rather, it is simply a temporary separation—Israel is still God’s wife and God is still Israel’s husband. The well-known opening line of the Song, in which the bride longs for the “kiss of his mouth” (1:1), according to Rashi, anticipates the Lord’s reunion with Israel, when God will stop covering his face and renew the covenant. Rashi instructs his readers not to be discouraged by their current exiled state, and even warns them not to submit to the temptations of Christians keen to convert Jews—an ideal that, indeed, was central to Christian exegesis on the Song as discussed above. The passage “Your throat [is] like the best wine; worthy of my beloved to drink” (7:9), Rashi explains, is an admonishment to be careful in dialogues with Christians: replies to Christians who seek debate or conversion should be like good wine.

The Song of Songs held a particularly prominent place for Jewish exegetes, since it was read during the Passover Shabbat celebration. With hermeneutical texts like those of Rashi circulating widely, with the intellectual stature of the Strasbourg community and with the remarkably close proximity of the vicus judaeorum to the cathedral district, it is easy to imagine that the canons of Strasbourg Cathedral would have been aware of Jewish scholarship on the Song of Songs—if not Rashi’s in particular, then other similar pronouncements. When they looked at the south façade of Strasbourg Cathedral, these clerics could be reassured that Solomon was a hero of Christian, not Jewish, history, who ruled the earth in anticipation of Christian triumph. If Jews insisted that their Diaspora was simply a temporary episode of exile, the clerics could find evidence of Jews’ patent estrangement from the Lord in the figure


of the defeated Synagoga with broken spear and drooping banner. Clerics who knew that Jews found in the Song of Songs defenses against Christian proselytizing, rather than Honorius’ call for Jewish conversion, could note Synagoga’s silence in the face of her Christian opponent. As Ecclesia twists her head toward Synagoga and opens her mouth in debate, Synagoga turns away, lips sealed—hardly proffering the spiritual and intellectual “good wine” that Rashi recommends Jews harness in conversation with Christians.

Other Jewish texts offered more mocking assessments of the Christian understanding of the Song of Songs. The Nizzanah Vetos, mentioned previously, for instance, notes the confused identities of Christ and his mother-bride in the Christian hermeneutics on Song of Songs 5:1.83 The text of the biblical passage reads: “I have come into my garden, my sister, my beloved.” Aware of the Christian assimilation of the beloved to Mary, the Jewish polemicist observes that Christ entered the “garden” of heaven on the day of his death without his mother, and so the Christian take on the verse does not make sense. The polemicist observes, in the same passage, a further snarl of implied kinship ties: “If this were said of Jesus it would prove that he had a sister.” Further, “they [Christians] maintain that Jesus said ... he has no father or mother, no son or daughter, but Israel.” This (albeit inexact) paraphrase of Matthew 12:48–50 points to the illogic of exegesis that casts the bride of the Song of Songs as mother, beloved, and sister, and that considers this composite figure to be a companion to the bridegroom-as-Christ, himself said to be free from the ties of such earthly relations.84 The analysis moreover points to an apparent inversion of roles found in Christian exegesis on Song of Songs 3:11:

The heretics [Christians] speak defiantly concerning the verse, “[B]ehold King Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of this wedding.” They say that every “Solomon” in the Song of Songs is sacred and that this verse refers to the mother of Jesus. This is how you should answer them [in a debate]: “What was the crown with which his mother crowned him? If anything Jesus crowned his mother and not she him.”

By the thirteenth century, Jews in cities across northern Europe were accustomed to seeing sculpted tympana and likely other ephemeral church adornments featuring the motif of the Coronation of the Virgin, Christ crowning his mother as Queen of Heaven.85 An image of this very moment was depicted in the right tympanum of Strasburg south (Fig. 12). How then, the Jewish polemical asks, can Christians justify exegesis that casts the Virgin as the crowner and Christ as the crownees? Strasburg’s clergers, looking at the right tympanum of the south façade, might have wondered at this inversion themselves before reflecting on exegesis such as that of Alan of Lille, which explicates the Song of Songs’ invocation, “come from Lebanon | come, you will be crowned” (4:8), as a reference to the Coronation of the Virgin.86 They likely also remembered typological interpretations that explained the importance of Christ’s ultimate crown, the crown of thorns, held by an angel in the top tier of the Pillar of Angels within the south transept.

Thus we can understand the south façade of Strasbourg as an ensemble that stood at the intersection of a range of theological and social discourses in which Jews and Christians variously cooperated with and confronted one another on matters spiritual and municipal. The Strasbourg sculptural program, of course, indicates none of the intellectual confidence of northern European Jews in the thirteenth century, nor does it suggest more immediately the vitality of the local Jewish community. That is, if the Strasbourg bishop created an atmosphere for relatively peaceful coexistence in Strasbourg’s city streets, up on the site where the bishop held court and where ceremonial entrances were performed, the Synagogue was presented as
utterly bested—allowed to remain in Ecclesia’s realm only thanks to ecclesiological fiat. With this observation, I finally turn from the realm of abstract intellectual debate to the more concrete terrain of the larger imperial orbit.

Beyond the interests of the church, around the time of the construction of Strasbourg Cathedral’s new south façade, Emperor Frederick II was instituting a new legal code that defined Jews as subservient within an ordered Christian society. This imperial action was driven by an outbreak of violence against Jews. In the mid-1230s, there was a wave of attacks on Jewish communities in the German heartland following the circulation of rumors that Jews slaughtered Christian children and gathered the blood for ritual use—that is, the blood libel.87 Frederick II adjudicated on the blood libel accusations from his court at Haguenau, just twenty-eight kilometers north of Strasbourg. After both Jewish and Christian plaintiffs made appeals to Frederick, the Emperor launched an inquiry to settle the question. Like a new Solomon, the emperor weighed testimony from both sides, listening to witnesses, including Jews who recently had converted to Christianity. After two rounds of deliberations, Frederick issued his Privilege and Judgment in Favor of the Jews (Privilegium et Sententia in Favorem Iudaeorum), which declared the charges of ritual murder to be libelous and outlawed their perpetuation. Further, the Emperor assigned Jews a new official status within the realm, deeming them to be servi camere nostre or Servants of the Royal Chamber—special property of the Emperor and thereby off limits to attack.88 These protections, of course, came at a price. Jews now were constrained to make yearly payments to the Emperor’s coffers. What Frederick’s ordinances effectively did was transform the antitype theological notion of Jews as docile stewards to Christians into a policy for temporal administration. Those “librarians” and “servants” of Augustine now were obligated to the royal chamber as appurtenances within a larger imperial system of social control. Jews would not inspire riotous outbreaks of violence. They would be Frederick’s special property, quietly kept in their place.

The south façade of Strasbourg Cathedral does not directly manifest the specific aspects of either imperial or episcopal policies on Jews. Cathedral decorative programs were too expensive, and intended to last for too long, to respond to the particular contingencies of a given decade, in my view. But by the early thirteenth century, ecclesiastical and lay rulers had reason to be disquieted by what we might call the uppity Jewish communities of Ashkenaz. And, as just discussed, Jewish presence in Christian lands sometimes ignited murderous riots, anathema to Augustinian justifications for Jewish survival, to say nothing of more general ideals for maintaining territorial order. The figure of Synagoga defeated was one means through which to project an ideal of a Judaism that persisted but knew its subordinate place within Christian society. Artists harnessed this motif, and, echoing antique devices for depicting imperious power, joined it to figurations of both Ecclesia triumphant and ideal masculine rulership. These ensembles, then, were presented in monumental naturalistic form and placed in city centers, proclaiming that earthly order is effected through the ascendance of the Church and the defeat of her forerunner.

Afterlife

By way of conclusion, I observe that the triumphalist political meanings of the Ecclesia–Synagoga motif that I discern at Strasbourg—as well as at Reims and Bamberg—were only in vogue for a short period. From the mid-thirteenth century through the fourteenth, monumental sculpted personifications of Church and Syna-


gogue began to be seen alongside generalized embodiments of Virtue and Vice rather than with images of masculine power. A favored iconographic setting for the figures was among figures of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, as they appear at Erfurt (Fig. 15), as well as other sites. This change in iconographic context, I posit, was driven in part by the rituals carried out before monumental public sculptures of Ecclesia and Synagoga, at sites such as those addressed in this essay. Burghers were entreated to participate in penitential rituals below the hovering figures of Ecclesia and Synagoga at Strasbourg and perhaps at Reims. The bishops

89. See Sciurie, “Ecclesia und Synagoge an den Domen” (as in note 9).

90. At the Trier Liebfrauenkirche, Ecclesia, and Synagoga are on the west façade (c. 1240) with Peter as fisher of souls, John the Evangelist with chalice triumphing over evil, and Adam and Eve. At the northern “Paradise Portal” of Magdeburg Cathedral (c. 1270; installed thus c. 1330–1335), the west porch of the cathedral at Freiburg im Breisgau (c. 1290), and the western “Triangular” portal of Erfurt Cathedral (c. 1330), Ecclesia and Synagoga accompany the Wise and Foolish Virgins. Large-scale sculptures of Ecclesia and Synagoga figure within related programs at the cathedrals of Minden (c. 1250–1280) and Worms (c. 1300–1310), and at the church of St. Seurin in Bordeaux (c. 1300).

of Strasbourg and Bamberg carried out legal proceedings before the sculpted figures, and at Bamberg it seems that accused criminals were bound to the post beneath Synagoga. For generations, lay people and clerics participated in and oversaw rituals of atonement and the exercise of legal justice performed in front of personifications of Church and Synagogue. For these audiences, the figures appear to have accrued a generalized meaning, conveying the contest between good and evil in broad social terms—this being an index of the larger spiritual developments of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, where new emphasis was placed on the internal spiritual battle of the laity rather than on a corporate plan for earthly order.

As cathedral decorative programs used the Ecclesia–Synagoga motif to convey a general opposition between morality and immorality, the actual Jewish populations of northern Europe increasingly were expelled from and exterminated within Christian society. French King Philip IV's general expulsion of 1306 compelled the Jews of Reims and the region to leave. Although some Jews were readmitted to the kingdom in 1315 under Louis X, and more returned around 1359, the communities never re-established their previous vibrancy, and Jews were expelled from the French crown lands once and for all in 1394. Farther east, in the region of the empire, meanwhile, deadly riots were decimating Jewish populations on a scale not seen since the infamous Rhineland slaughters of the First Crusade. In the 1280s and 1290s, rumors of Jewish ritual murder of Christian children began to circulate, despite Frederick II's denunciation of the claim in 1226. Such tales, along with the newly developed calumny of Jewish host desecration, inspired mobs of Christians in 1298 to join the retinue of a German knight named Rindfleisch who launched widespread massacres, killing thousands of Jews at 146 centers throughout Franconia, Swabia, Hesse, and Thuringia. Between 1336 and 1339, gangs known as the Armleder, after the leather bands that these low estate marauders wore on their arms instead of knighthood armor, swept through cities in Franconia and Alsace, assaulting and killing Jews for their putative enmity toward Christians. And, as is well known, accusations that Jews caused the plague by poisoning wells and other water sources inspired mobs to slaughter countless Jews across Europe.

We have unusually rich information on the extermination of the Jews of Strasbourg. Strasbourg had the largest population of Jews in the upper Rhine at the time; according to some reports, 2,000 in total. Here,
on Friday, 13 February 1349, the Jews of the city were gathered together and prepared for their deaths. Meanwhile, the Jewish street was barricaded and those Jews hiding in their homes were hunted down. The following day, on the feast of St. Valentine, the Strasbourg Jews were led in a massive procession toward the site prepared for their collective incineration. While the Jews marched, Christians of the city tore at their clothes, leaving the community members half-naked as they headed toward execution. At the site, a great pyre, or perhaps a wooden house built for the occasion, was set aflame. Children who consented to baptism, and apparently particularly attractive Jewish women, were spared from the conflagration, but some seem to have chosen death over conversion. The burning is reported to have gone on for six days, though it may be that it took this much time to catch all the Jews who sought refuge in the vicus iudaorum.

By the mid-fourteenth century, the once-vibrant Jewish communities of France and Germany had been silenced—expelled from their homes and executed in widespread and systematic slaughters. Pockets of Jews re-established themselves in these regions during the generations following the Black Death, but the former strength of Jewish intellectual and economic life in northern Europe was never to be recovered. All the while, images of Ecclesia and Synagoga stood at the heart of the region’s economic and cultural centers. Inserted into new iconographic and social contexts, they were now drained of any reference to Jewish history and contemporary Jews. In the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as urban dwellers shuffled past cathedral entryways, personifications of Church and Synagogue bespoke a general opposition between upright and amoral interior life—the political imperatives of an earlier age, when vigorous populations of Jews needed to be contained and controlled within the Christian system, now were but a faint memory. Jews themselves had been wiped out of Europe’s cities, and Synagoga, a now anodyne symbol, stood dutifully, amongst an array of good and evil forces, a fantasy of a docile deviance cut to ecclesiological specifications, and contained within an ordered Christian realm.