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Citation

Lapidus, Daniel Roy. 2023. Visualizing Supersessionism: The Case of Ecclesiae et Synagoga. Master's thesis, Harvard Divinity School.

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Visualizing Supersessionism: The Case of Ecclesiae et Synagoga

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A Senior Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of

Divinity, Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts

May 2023/Iyyar 5783

“History, despite its wrenching pain
Cannot be unlived, but if faced
With courage, need not be lived again.”
~Maya Angelou, “On the Pulse of Morning”¹

¹ <https://poets.org/poem/pulse-morning>. I would like to thank Seigen Johnson, whose reading of this poem at a recent Passover and Easter gathering sponsored by the Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium inspired me to quote this here.

Dedicated to the martyrs of Tree of Life Synagogue, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania October 27,
2018/18 Cheshvan, 5779.²

Dr. Joyce Feinberg

Dr. Richard Gottfried

Rose Mallinger

Dr. Jerry Rabinowitz

Cecil Rosenthal

David Rosenthal

Bernice Simon

Sylvan Simon

Daniel Stein

Melvin Wax

Irving Younger

It is for them that I do what I do, that the horror of this medieval and modern hatred might never
darken our shores again.

² <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/pittsburgh-shooting-victims-identified-tree-of-life-synagogue-deadly-shooting-squirrel-hill-2018-10-29/>.

Introduction: Where the Medieval Meets the Modern

At the Central Library in Boston's Copley Square there are a series of murals called "Triumph of Religion" by John Singer Sargent. Created from 1916 to 1919, the murals reflect different scenes throughout the history of religion. Among these is a work depicting a single woman sitting on a dais. She is wrapping herself in a curtain. Her head is turned away, and a blindfold covers her eyes. A crown, which once rested on her head, is falling to the ground. In her arms she clutches a

broken staff and a tablet. She is the Synagoga. (See fig. 1)

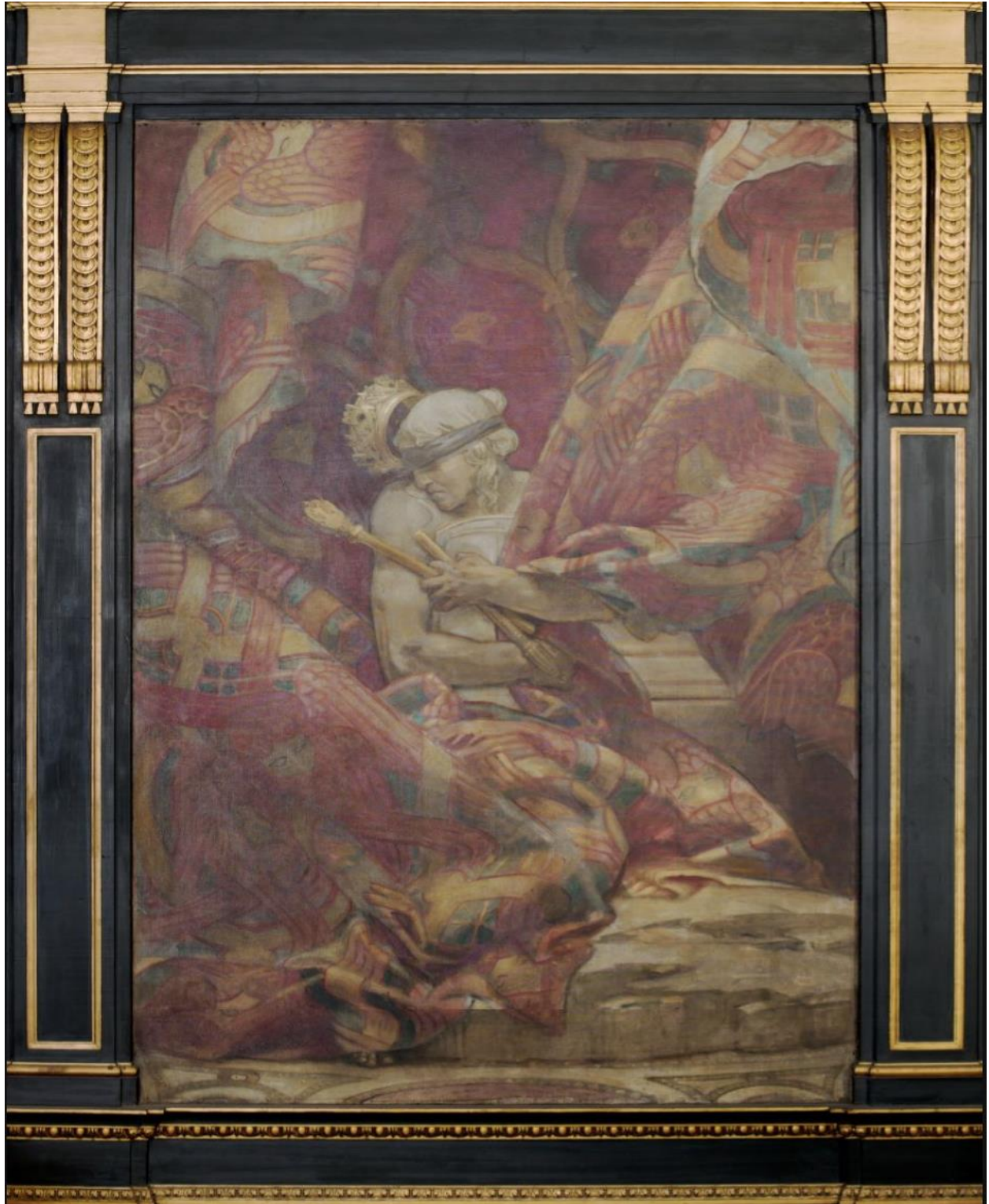


Figure 1. John Singer Sargent, *Synagogue*, Mural, Boston Public Library, 1916-1919. Photographer Sheryl Lanzel.

The motif is recognizable as an iteration of the classic representation of the Synagogue from the Catholic iconographic tradition.³ Yet there is an unusual feature of this iteration of the motif. Typically, in this iconographic tradition, the figure of Synagoga is paired with a second female figure, Ecclesiae. The pairing of the two women highlights the contrast between Church and Synagogue, paralleling the respective merits of Christianity and Judaism. In Sargent's rendering, however, Synagoga stands alone. Depicting Synagoga alone in this context thus leaves the viewer to ponder a broken woman who has lost her former glory. Even when versions of the imagery of "Ecclesiae et Synagoga" convey a negative portrayal of Jews and Judaism, in contrast to Christians and Christianity, the inclusion of women to represent both religions also allows for parallels to be drawn between them.⁴ In the absence of Ecclesiae, such parallels are no longer possible.

Sargent's depiction of Synagoga caused immediate controversy. In a column in the *Boston Herald*, dated October 12, 1919, art critic Frederick William Coburn said of Sargent's new mural: "If one were an orthodox Jew, a rabbi or a cantor, it might be a little distasteful to have this middle-age fashion of depreciating his ancient religion revived in a building supported by public taxation."⁵ Coburn was correct. The Boston Jewish community did find Sargent's mural objectionable, and there was considerable controversy about it, continuing for several years after its creation.⁶

³ John Singer Sargent, *Synagogue*, Mural, Boston Public Library, 1916-1919. Photographer Sheryl Lanzel.

⁴ I am indebted to my advisor, Dr. Annette Yoshiko Reed for pointing out this interpretation.

⁵ Frederick William Coburn, "In the World of Art," *Boston Herald*, October 12, 1919. Quoted in Sally M. Promey, *Painting Religion in Public: John Singer Sargent's Triumph of Religion at the Boston Public Library* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 177. See further Elena Hoffenberg, "Crying Over Spilled Ink: A Century of John Singer Sargent's 'The Synagogue' in the Boston Public Library," *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Association of Jewish Libraries* (2018), <https://jewishlibraries.org/proceedings/>. Accessed November 12, 2022.

⁶ For a detailed description of the controversy surrounding Sargent's mural, see Promey, *Painting Religion in Public*, 177-94.

In response to the controversy, Sargent himself “indicated bewilderment, annoyance, and frustration with the vehemence and duration of the objections to his *Synagogue*.”⁷ Furthermore, Sally Promey notes how Sargent

had adopted, almost as an ethical precept, and well before the *Synagogue* conflict, the notion that the artist must remain apart from contemporary sectarian debates in politics and religion. Consequently, from his own perspective at least, he approached *Triumph of Religion* in a nonsectarian and appropriately secular fashion. The artist did not see that his murals perpetuated, perhaps even exacerbated old biases... For Sargent, his selection of Synagogue and Church was authoritative because numerous art historical precedents existed.⁸

Sargent’s fundamental misunderstanding of his work’s reception seems to be because of his assumption that the existence of “art historical precedents” is a neutral fact that licenses the reproduction of those precedents in the present. For his Jewish contemporaries, however, the precedents he cites were far from neutral. The iconographical motif of “*Ecclesiae et Synagoga*” was not a historical comparison of two faith traditions, but rather the theological denigration of Judaism by the Christian hegemon. The reason that Sargent’s murals caused controversy, whereas its medieval precedents had not, is that those precedents were created by and for Christians, in contrast to Singer’s public murals for an increasingly multireligious and secular American populace.

This thesis analyzes some of the medieval precedents for Singer’s imagery, focusing on what their depictions of Jews and Judaism convey in relation to Christians and Christianity. The oldest extant exemplar of the “*Ecclesiae et Synagoga*” motif dates to the middle of the ninth

⁷ Promey, *Painting Religion in Public*, 194.

⁸ Promey, *Painting Religion in Public*, 201.

century CE. It is contained within the Holy Week liturgy of a sacramentary made for Drogo, Bishop of Metz and son of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charlemagne.⁹ According to Wolfgang Seiferth, the motif was originally based upon the two women standing beneath the cross in crucifixion portrayals. Eventually the motif became part of the standard repertoire of depicting the crucifixion.¹⁰ Thereafter, however, “Ecclesiae et Synagoga” was used in a wide variety of other contexts as well. It was used as an illustration for manuscripts; it was carved into the side of churches; and it was painted in various spaces. The use that is of interest here is its use as a visual accompaniment to key texts in illuminated manuscripts.

In this thesis, I focus on its use in illustrated manuscripts during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Imagery of “Ecclesiae et Synagoga” features especially in Latin language manuscripts. These are manuscripts that were meant for an entirely Christian gaze, in contrast to Sargent’s murals. In what follows, I will consider its function within four such manuscripts: two manuscripts of the Song of Songs, one from twelfth-century France, the other from twelfth-century Tuscany; one manuscript of Flavius Josephus’ *Jewish War* from thirteenth-century France; and one manuscript of the Epistle to the Hebrews also from thirteenth-century France. Much has been written on this motif from the standpoint of Art History.¹¹ My concern in this thesis, however, is less with the artistic features of the manuscript illuminations and more on the meanings made by this motif in relation to the texts that are illustrated. Considering historical,

⁹ Wolfgang S. Seiferth, *Synagogue and Church in the Middle Ages: Two Symbols in Art and Literature*, trans. Lee Chadeayne and Paul Gottwald (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1970), 1.

¹⁰ Seiferth, *Synagogue and Church in the Middle Ages*, 2.

¹¹ See Elizabeth Morrison and Anne D. Hedeman, eds., *Imagining the Past in France: History in Manuscript Painting 1250-1500* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2010); Bernd Nicolai, “Orders in Stone: Social Reality and Artistic Approach: The Case of the Strasbourg South Portal,” *Gesta* 41, no. 2 (2002): 111–28; Elizabeth Monroe, “‘Fair and Friendly, Sweet and Beautiful’: Hopes for Jewish Conversion in Synagoga’s Song of Songs Imagery,” in *Beyond the Yellow Badge: Anti-Judaism and Antisemitism in Medieval and Early Modern Visual Culture*, ed. Mitchell Merback (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 31–61; Nina Rowe, “Idealization and Subjection at the South Façade of Strasbourg Cathedral,” in *Beyond the Yellow Badge*, 179–202.

cultural, and theological perspectives, I will examine what the motif is doing in each of these manuscripts as well as in the specific cultural worlds that made the manuscripts.

My concern in this thesis is especially with situating this iconographical tradition in relation to the history of Jewish/Christian relations. The “Ecclesiae et Synagoga” motif can be understood as a visual depiction of the theological concept of supersessionism. Supersessionism is the belief that the New Covenant in Jesus Christ has superseded the Old Covenant made with Abraham. Prior to Vatican II, this was the dominant way of thinking about Jews and Judaism within the Catholic Church. One of the major points of evidence for this way of thinking was the state of the Jewish communities within European Christian domains during the medieval period. The disfavored status of Jews was not perceived as a social fact of their concerted oppression by the powers of medieval Europe; this status was instead treated as a theological fact reflecting the removal of God’s favor from Jews who refused to embrace Christianity.¹² At the same time, the result of this way of thinking about Jewish people resulted in European Jewry occupying a unique place within Christian thought during this period. In the Christian intellectual paradigm of the Middle Ages, Jews were simultaneously disfavored and yet occupied an important position as a negative example for Christians to follow.¹³ In this thesis, I consider how this prominence is also reflected within the illustrations in European manuscripts produced by Christians for Christians.

1. “Ecclesiae et Synagoga” in Illustrated Manuscripts of the Song of Songs

¹² For more on the status of Jews within medieval Europe, see David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: Norton, 2013).

¹³ See James Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews* (New York: Mariner Books, 2001).

According to David Stern, “No biblical book’s ancient interpretation is more extensively documented than that of the Song of Songs.”¹⁴ Stern identifies a Jewish tradition and a Christian tradition of exegesis of the Song of Songs emerging in Late Antiquity, seemingly in competition.¹⁵ It is thus intriguing that the motif of “Ecclesiae et Synagoga” makes repeated appearances in medieval manuscripts of the Song of Songs.

The two manuscripts that I consider here are both from the twelfth century: one from Burgundy, the other from Tuscany. The Burgundian manuscript, sometimes called “The Bible of Cîteaux,” shows Jesus Christ sitting in between two female figures personifying the Church and Synagogue.¹⁶ (See fig. 2) Jesus has the Church on his right, and the Synagogue on his left. He is depicted as pushing the Synagogue away with his hand so that the Synagogue has fallen over. The face of the woman representing the Synagogue is also blotted out. It is possible that this blotting is a result of damage to the physical manuscript. Given the lack of evidence of damage elsewhere on the manuscript, this seems less likely. There is the faintest trace of a face under the blotting out, suggesting that whoever blotted out the face of the Synagogue did so at a later date, after the manuscript had been completed.

¹⁴ David Stern, *Jewish Literary Cultures*, vol. 1, *The Ancient Period* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 54.

¹⁵ Stern, *Jewish Literary Cultures*, 54.

¹⁶ Bibliothèque municipale, Dijon, MS 12-15, fol. 60r.



Figure 2. Image of Ecclesiae et Synagoga in the Bible of Citeaux. Bibliothèque Municipale de Dijon. M 12-15 III, fol. 60r.

The second of these manuscripts is the so-called “Bible of Montalcino.” Produced in Tuscany, this Bible also depicts Jesus between the two figures representing the Church and Synagogue. However, in this manuscript, the figure representing the Synagogue is lying down before Jesus and the Church.¹⁷ This feature is unique among the manuscripts of this period, which usually show both figures standing, and then have blemishes or alterations to the figure of the Synagogue. In this case, the mechanism of representing the alleged defectiveness of the Synagogue is different. The figure of the synagogue is depicted as fallen, lying on the ground

¹⁷ Biblioteca comunale, Montalcino, MS 1-2, II, fol. 56r.

before Christ and the Church.¹⁸ (See fig. 3)



Figure 3. Ecclesiae et Synagoga in the Bible of Montalcino. Biblioteca Comunale di Montalcino. M#1-2, II, fol. 56r.

Most interestingly, the figure of the Synagogue is depicted as “holding [the] scapegoat,”¹⁹ an image associated with the sins of Israel.²⁰ The Bible of Montalcino, therefore, marks an intensification in anti-Jewish iconography. The Synagogue is now depicted not only as fallen and broken, but as clutching the sins of the Jewish community. Thus, the Jews are no longer depicted as blind but as willfully clinging onto their sins despite seeing the “truth” of Christianity. This licenses a whole new range of anti-Jewish attitudes and actions.

2. “Ecclesiae et Synagoga” in Illustrated Manuscripts of Flavius Josephus

At the beginning of his *Ecclesiastical History*, the fourth-century Christian writer Eusebius speaks of “what befell the whole Jewish people right after their plot against our savior” (*Hist.eccl.* 1.1).²¹ As evidence of this, in Book 2 of the same work he cites Josephus’ *Jewish War*, as evidence of “the calamities that began for the whole people from the time of Pilate and their effrontery against the savior” (*Hist.eccl.* 2.3). Thus, Eusebius is developing a role for the writings of the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, and the events depicted in these Jewish writings, within Christian thinking. That role is one in which the events that befall the Jewish community in Judea, during and after their revolt against Rome in the late first century of the common era, become evidence for the rightness of Christianity and the decline of Judaism.²²

¹⁸ Biblioteca comunale, Montalcino, MS 1-2, II, fol. 56r, description from *Princeton Index of Medieval Art*, accessed October 27, 2022.

¹⁹ Biblioteca comunale, Montalcino, MS 1-2, II, fol. 56r, description from *Princeton Index of Medieval Art*, accessed October 27, 2022.

²⁰ Roger De Verteil, “The Scapegoat Archetype,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 5, no. 3 (1966): 209–25.

²¹ The translation of *The History of the Church* that I will use for this thesis is Jeremy M. Schott, trans., *The History of the Church: A New Translation* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).

²² For more on Eusebius and Josephus, see Adam Gregerman, *Building on the Ruins of the Temple* (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 165; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 97-136.

Medieval Christians developed another means of articulating the same basic worldview: the visual depiction of “Ecclesiae et Synagoga” personified as women. In the “Ecclesiae et Synagoga” tradition, the Church (Ecclesia) is depicted as a majestic ruler, with powers and royalty fully intact. The Synagogue, by contrast, is depicted as broken, blindfolded, with her crown falling off her head and her scepter broken. The point the image pair makes is a clear one: only one of these two is capable of leading, of providing divine guidance and correct moral teaching. The other is useless and broken; its time has passed, and there is no purpose in following it anymore. Strikingly, some medieval Christians made this point precisely by adding this image to manuscripts of a Jewish work, namely, Josephus’ *Jewish War*.

In a late thirteenth-century manuscript of Josephus’ *Jewish War*, produced in France, the motif of “Ecclesiae et Synagoga” appears on the top page of Book 2, Chapter 1.²³ (See fig. 4) What is the significance of this usage? This inscription appears to be unusual if not unique. In the *Index of Medieval Art*, a search for “Personification of synagogue” returns 180 results of various forms of the synagoga motif, while a search for “Josephus” returns 66 records. The only record

²³ Morgan Library, MS M.533, fol. 87r.

in common, between the two, is this one.



Figure 4. Ecclesiae et Synagoga in 13th century manuscript of Josephus' *De Bello Judaico*. Morgan Library, New York, NY, Manuscript M.534 fol. 87r.

The manuscript in question is a late thirteenth-century Gothic manuscript of *The Jewish War*. According to the documented provenance provided by the Morgan Library, where the

manuscript resides, it was produced in a Carthusian monastery. It is one of two Josephus manuscripts produced contemporaneously, the other being his *Antiquities of the Jews*.²⁴ Both manuscripts are richly illustrated with a variety of different images. The individual pages each have two columns of Latin text with a header indicating which book of the text the page is in. The illustration we are interested in occurs at the beginning of Book 2 of *The Jewish War*. In the illustration, both Ecclesiae and Synagoga are set against a gold background. Everything else about the two figures is inverted. Ecclesiae is wearing a brown cloak over a blue robe; Synagoga is wearing a blue cloak over a brown robe. There are castle turrets atop both figures. Ecclesiae is a brown castle against a blue backdrop; Synagoga is a blue castle against a brown backdrop. The border of the illustration is brown on the side of the Ecclesiae and blue on the side of the Synagoga. Above the castle turrets, there are two birds, one on each side of the illustration, facing opposite directions.

According to Elizabeth Morrison, during this period in medieval France “secular manuscripts were often painted by artists who were likely trained on the repetitive iconography of Bibles and psalters.”²⁵ Morrison further notes how, “In secular books, the images were intended to excite the reader, often providing a visual synopsis of events.”²⁶ Furthermore, Morrison argues that there was “a limited number of iconographic models that were repeated ad infinitum with small changes in detail” and that these were adapted by the illustrators of Bibles and psalters as they began to illustrate other texts.²⁷ As evidence of this, Morrison uses the

²⁴ Morgan Library, MS M.533, fol. 87r.

²⁵ Elizabeth Morrison, “From Sacred to Secular: The Origins of History Illumination in France,” in *Imagining the Past in France*, 11; cf. Allison Stones, “Sacred and Profane Art: Secular and Liturgical Book Illumination in the Thirteenth Century,” in *The Epic in Medieval Society, Aesthetic and Moral Values*, ed. H. Scholler (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1977), 100-12.

²⁶ Morrison, “From Sacred to Secular,” 11.

²⁷ Morrison, “From Sacred to Secular,” 9; cf. Robert Branner, *Manuscript Painting in Paris during the Reign of Saint Louis: A Study of Styles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

contemporaneous manuscript of *Antiquities*, and shows that the artist illustrated Josephus' account of creation using a standard illustration for the Genesis account "almost without change."²⁸ Since both of these Josephus manuscripts were produced in the same monastery at the same time, we can assume that similar choices guided the selection and placement of images in *Jewish War*, particularly the "Ecclesiae et Synagoga" image which is of interest here.

Some of the reason for its inclusion, then, might be similar to the pattern we noted above for the Song of Songs. In addition, however, I suggest that it makes sense to examine Christian attitudes towards Josephus' works. What did Josephus do for late antique and medieval Christian thinkers? Adam Gregerman, for instance, points to a telling example from Origen already in the third century CE: Origen claims that Josephus, "attributed the destruction [of the Second Temple] to the Jews' murder of the Jerusalem church leader James in the 60s."²⁹ As Gregerman points out, however, "this idea appears nowhere in the extant texts of Josephus...a direct link between the crucifixion of Jesus and the destruction is missing."³⁰ Nevertheless, Origen wants to link these two events, and using Josephus lends his theory a persuasive Jewish provenance that it would not have otherwise. Just as the Jews are a means to an end in salvation history, so too Origen feels at remarkable liberty to use the writings of the Jewish historian Josephus.

In my view, the use of Synagoga motif in this thirteenth-century Gothic manuscript can be understood as a visual representation of Christian attitudes toward the events depicted in *Jewish War* as well as the use of Josephus to articulate this attitude. The decapitated synagogue is the permanent state of Jews in the world of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it could also be a way to claim ownership over the destruction of the Second Temple.³¹ Gregerman shows that Origen and

²⁸ Morrison, "From Sacred to Secular," 11.

²⁹ Gregerman, *Building on the Ruins of the Temple*, 75.

³⁰ Gregerman, *Building on the Ruins of the Temple*, 75.

³¹ Gregerman, *Building on the Ruins of the Temple*, 74-76, 102, 112-13, *passim*.

Eusebius argued for the fundamental interconnectedness of Jesus Christ and the destruction of the Temple by Roman forces in 70 CE. It is perhaps unsurprising that later generations of Christians, following their lead, would continue to interpret the Roman destruction of the Temple as a fundamentally Christian event, enacted by a Christian God, to show favor to the Church over the Synagogue. The Jews are no longer needed to play a central role in history. The longing Jews felt and still feel for the Temple is irrelevant, on this account, because it was destroyed to prove the truth of Christianity, the end which justifies any means. Yet centuries after the destruction of the Temple, this assertion is nevertheless repeated.

In addition to serving as a normative theological claim about Judaism and Christianity, the motif of “*Ecclesiae et Synagoga*” also serves as a positive claim about the world the Church made. It is not just that: in the aftermath of Jesus the Church is the New Israel and is now superior to the Jews, but that the Church has taken active steps to make that the reality of the world through their actions toward the Jewish people in their sphere of influence. In his analysis of the precedents of the Holocaust, Raul Hilberg notes that by the time our manuscript of Josephus’ *Jewish War* was created in the last decades of the thirteenth century, the Catholic Church had taken no fewer than eighteen actions against the Jews in the areas under its control.³² In effect, the Catholic Church was as responsible an entity on earth at the time for the state of the Jewish community as visually thematized in the motif of “*Ecclesiae et Synagoga*.”

It is worth remembering, however, that this illustration is rare. To my knowledge, we know of no other surviving exemplars of the intersection of “*Ecclesia et Synagoga*” in the context of manuscripts of Josephus’ *Jewish War*. But its uniqueness is not an indictment of its usefulness. My suggestion is that it is telling, nonetheless. We have seen how early Christian

³² Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Octagon, 1978), 5-6; see table 1.

thinkers made use of Josephus' writing. And the existence of medieval manuscripts of Josephus means that the medieval descendants of Origen and Eusebius also saw use in the writings of Josephus, using this iconographical motif to draw out the supersessionist implications of using a Jewish historian as supposed evidence for Christian triumphalism.

III. Ecclesiae et Synagoga in the Book of Hebrews

A thematically similar use of the synagoga motif, which also comes from a similar region and period, is another 13th century French manuscript, this time of the Letter to the Hebrews. (see fig. 5)³³ In the introductory letter accompanying the Letter in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* Pamela Eisenbaum notes that Hebrews "is often perceived as among the New Testament's most anti-Jewish texts."³⁴ Eisenbaum goes on to note that supersessionist theology "inscribes Judaism as an obsolete, illegitimate religion, and in the New Testament this idea is articulated no more plainly than in Hebrews."³⁵

³³ Illustrator unknown, "Letter to the Hebrews", 1275-1299, Manuscript number M969, The Morgan Library, New York, NY.

³⁴ Pamela Eisenbaum, "The Letter to the Hebrews", in Amy Jill-Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler eds, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: Second Edition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 460.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 462.



Figure 5. Ecclesiae et Synagoga in 13th Century Bible. Morgan Library, New York, NY, M.969, fol. 427r.

The illustration of Ecclesiae et Synagoga in this manuscript of the Book of Hebrews is different to the ones in the Song of Songs that were examined earlier (see fig. 3). The most obvious difference is that in this manuscript Ecclesiae et Synagoga has been divorced from the Crucifixion. The two figures stand on their own without Jesus on the cross. This is representative of later renderings of the motif. The illustration, which survives in remarkable condition, is contained within a historiated O at the beginning of the Book of Hebrews.³⁶ Ecclesiae still holds

³⁶ Princeton University, *Index of Medieval Art*, system number 179595, Manuscript M.969. <https://theindex-princeton-edu.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/s/view/ViewWorkOfArt.action?id=61EA4879-FA4E-4C45-9C37-0E5F341812C2>.

a cross and chalice, she wears a royal blue robe and wears a crown. There is a halo behind her. Synagoga wears a grey sackcloth. Synagoga's staff is broken and her tablets are falling out of her hands.

One of the reasons for the reputation that Hebrews has enjoyed over the centuries is due to the work of the Church Father John Chrysostom. Jody Barnard remarks that, "In the hands of Chrysostom Hebrews is a radical statement of wholesale supersessionism", and that, "such anti-Jewish interpretations [as Chrysostom's] quickly became commonplace, and remained unchallenged until very recently."³⁷ Given this reception history of the Epistle to the Hebrews, it makes sense that our medieval illustrator thought to include a familiar visual motif of supersessionism as another means of getting the point of the text across.

However, there is more going on here than a mere visual representation of the theme of Hebrews. The Epistle to the Hebrews is one of the books of the New Testament that most enables the breaking of the Jewish community depicted in Synagoga. The debate about the intrinsic supersessionism of The Book of Hebrews is an active one. John Gager in *The Origins of Anti-Semitism* argues that "Hebrews presents us with the most sustained case of early Christian writings against the continued validity of the old covenant".³⁸ Against this view, Lloyd Kim has argued that Hebrews is neither anti-Jewish nor anti-Semitic, and that supersessionism is a problematic term.³⁹ The question of whether the text of Hebrews is itself anti-Jewish or antisemitic is beyond the scope of this study. It is enough to note, as we saw from Barnard

³⁷ Jody Barnard, "Anti-Jewish Interpretations of Hebrews: Some Neglected Approaches", in *Melilah: Manchester Journal of Jewish Studies*, no. 11 2014, 27. file:///Users/danlapidus/Downloads/10.31826_mjj-2015-110104.pdf. Accessed September 25, 2022.

³⁸ John Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 183. Quoted in Lloyd Kim, *Polemic in the Book of Hebrews: Anti-Judaism, Anti-Semitism, or Supersession?*, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications 2006), 200-201.

³⁹ Lloyd Kim, *Polemic in the Book of Hebrews: Anti-Judaism, Anti-Semitism, or Supersession?*, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications 2006), 197-201.

above, that later generations of Christian exegetes found Hebrews a fruitful text for pursuing their anti-Jewish, supersessionist agendas.⁴⁰

As Barnard points out, the main exegete responsible for much of the reception history of Hebrews is John Chrysostom. In commenting on Hebrews 3:3,⁴¹ Chrysostom says, “And see how he [Chrysostom means St. Paul] covertly shows the superiority [of Jesus to Moses]”.⁴² Thus, for Chrysostom, the main point of this verse is demonstrating the relative superiority of Jesus over Moses, and by extension the superiority of the Old Covenant to the New, and Christianity to Judaism. Thus, Hebrews became a potent theological weapon for the later church to use against the Jews.

When examining the reception history of Hebrews, and by extension, how it is that *Ecclesiae et Synagoga* ended up in this text at this time, it is important to examine the key figure in the development of interpretation on Hebrews: John Chrysostom. When medieval readers read Hebrews, they read it through Chrysostom’s eyes. [probably need a citation here] However, in the eight centuries that pass between the life of Chrysostom and the production of this manuscript, much cultural context that would have been obvious to Chrysostom’s initial audiences was lost. According to Robert Wilken, in Chrysostom’s time, “excess and exaggeration were the marks of skillful preaching”.⁴³ Unmoored from its original context and

⁴⁰ Jody Barnard, “Anti-Jewish Interpretations of Hebrews: Some Neglected Approaches”, in *Melilah: Manchester Journal of Jewish Studies*

⁴¹ “Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself.” NIV.

⁴² John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews*, Homily 5, New Advent, Translated by Frederic Gardiner. From *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 14. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1889.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/240205.htm>. Accessed October 3, 2022.

⁴³ Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 10.

read in a vacuum, Chrysostom's work on the Letter to the Hebrews turns Hebrews into Barnard's "radical statement of wholesale supersessionism".⁴⁴

The fact that this manuscript comes to us from late thirteenth-century France is also highly significant. In 1242, the King of France ordered every copy of the Talmud burned after the disputation of Paris. Judah M. Rosenthal describes the first half of the thirteenth century as, "The triumphant onslaught of the Church against its enemies [which] affected also the position of its most ancient enemy, the Jews".⁴⁵ Simon R. Schwarzfuchs also notes that this was a period of repeated expulsions of the Jews from France.⁴⁶ The combination of these factors meant that the position of the Jewish community in France at this time was especially precarious. The Synagoga was even more broken and blindfolded in relation to the Ecclesiae. This was so not because of the relative theological merits of each of the Ecclesiae and Synagoga, but because the centers of power in France had taken specific concrete steps to break the Jewish communities under their jurisdiction. The Book of Hebrews, its orthodox interpretation shaped by Chrysostom, was therefore a key text in licensing the aggression of the Catholic Church against the Jews. When temporal forces were favorable, the Church was able to take the theology of Hebrews and make it the reality for European Jews. The Ecclesiae et Synagoga motif was a visual shorthand indicating their success.

What do these pieces of art say about the nature of Jewish-Catholic relations in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries? Relations between European Jewry and the hegemonic Catholic Church had been indelibly shaped by the events of the First Crusade, which began less than twenty years

⁴⁴ See footnote 37.

⁴⁵ Judah M. Rosenthal, "The Talmud on Trial: The Disputation at Paris in the Year 1240." *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 47, no. 1 (1956): 58. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1453186>. Accessed October 10, 2022.

⁴⁶ Simon R. Schwarzfuchs "The Expulsion of the Jews from France (1306)." *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 57 (1967): 482. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1453511>. Accessed October 10, 2022.

before the first manuscript under study here was made. In his seminal analysis of this period in the history of Jewish-Catholic relations, Robert Chazan says that “In this newly developing area [Northern Europe], there was only one inherited tradition that defined the stance of majority society toward the Jewish minority, and that was the legacy of the Roman Catholic Church...It revolved around three central elements: theological negation, political toleration, and practical limitation.”⁴⁷ This would be the governing paradigm of Jewish-Catholic relations throughout the medieval period. *Ecclesiae et Synagoga* can be seen as an example of the first of the “three central elements” described by Chazan, “theological negation”. For Chazan, “theological negation” meant the “Church doctrine [which] asserted that the Jews had once in fact possessed the truth of revelation, misread it, and thereby forfeited their covenantal relationship with the Deity”.⁴⁸ This is visible in the *Ecclesiae et Synagoga* motif as we have examined it here. The Synagoga is set up in parallel to the *Ecclesiae*, thus intimating that these two entities share several commonalities. These commonalities, however, only serve to highlight the divine disfavor that has been visited upon the Synagoga. In this case, the artistic motif served to demonstrate the real-life injustices inflicted on the Jews in the medieval period.

According to Jonathan Riley-Smith, the persecution visited upon Jews during the First Crusade did not spring up out of nowhere. Riley-Smith points to a telling episode of anti-Jewish persecution that occurred a little less than a century prior to the advent of the First Crusade. According to Riley-Smith, in the early 11th century, the Jewish community of Orléans was blamed for the vandalism of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem; as a result, “some Jewish communities in France appear to have been decimated; that in Orléans almost ceased to

⁴⁷ Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 28.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

exist.”⁴⁹ This is significant to the topic under study here because about 50 kilometers west of Orléans lies the town of Cîteaux where the Bible of Cîteaux was produced in the first decades of the twelfth century. Thus, the Bible of Cîteaux came into existence at a time when anti-Jewish violence was an increasingly salient feature of the society which produced it.

The eleventh century marked a change in the dynamics of Jewish-Christian relations from the centuries that preceded it. According to Daniel F. Callahan, “Prior to that outbreak [in the eleventh century] their [Jewish and Christian] interaction in the early Middle Ages had been much more amicable, with only sporadic episodes of anti-Judaism.”⁵⁰ In sustaining this argument, Callahan points to the analysis by Bernhard Blumenkranz that demonstrates a lack of a cohesive Jewish policy on the part of the Popes in the period ending with the eleventh century.⁵¹ Blumenkranz says that the available data constitute “proof of the fact that the Jewish problem was considered to differ from place to place, to be the product of an ever-changing context calling for a different solution in each case”.⁵² Callahan further points out that Robert Chazan “does not see 1096 as marking a significant change in medieval Jewish history” and cites his *European Jewry and the First Crusade* in furtherance of this argument.⁵³ If we accept Chazan’s argument that 1096 does not constitute a substantial point of departure for the history of Jews in the Middle Ages,⁵⁴ what does that mean for our examination of Ecclesiae et

⁴⁹ Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusaders, 1095-1131* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 25-26. Footnote in original cites Ralph Glaber, *Historiarum Libri Quinque*, 132-6; Adhémar of Chabannes, *Chronicon*, 160-71 and Daniel F. Callahan, “Ademara of Chabannes, Millennial Fears and the Development of Western Anti-Judaism”, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 46, No. 1, January 1995

⁵⁰ Daniel F. Callahan, “Ademara of Chabannes, Millennial Fears and the Development of Western Anti-Judaism”, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 46, No. 1, January 1995, p. 19.

⁵¹ See note 3 in Callahan, “Ademara of Chabannes”, in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*.

⁵² Bernhard Blumenkranz, “The Roman Church and the Jews”, in *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict: From Late Antiquity to the Reformation*, Jeremy Cohen ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 197.

⁵³ Daniel F. Callahan, “Ademara of Chabannes”, p. 20.

⁵⁴ Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade*, 201.

Synagoga? If 1096 is not a major turning point in the history of this period, then the anti-Jewish culture that gave rise to our *Ecclesiae et Synagoga* inscriptions must have been percolating for some time prior to the time when our manuscripts were being compiled. This makes sense given Jonathan Riley-Smith's account of the destruction of the Jewish community of Orléans almost a century prior to the First Crusade.

In fact, that account of the destruction of the Jewish community of Orléans ties into an important feature of Christian thinking vis-à-vis Jews in the medieval period. According to Riley-Smith's analysis, the reason for the destruction of the Jewish community in Orléans was "an extraordinary rumor [that]...western Jews – in one account the community Orléans...had bribed a pilgrim to carry messages hidden in a hollow staff warning him that a western army was being raised to conquer the Levant."⁵⁵ This kind of rumor mongering was an important feature of medieval Christian thinking about Jews. Debra Higgs Strickland argues that "Christian portraits of Jews tell us next to nothing about medieval Jews, but they reveal a great deal about medieval Christians."⁵⁶

So, what does *Ecclesiae et Synagoga* reveal about medieval Christians at the turn of the twelfth century? The Bible of Cîteaux's inscription reveals a tremendous amount of anxiety on the part of its Christian authors regarding the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. There is an evident fear of the parallels between Judaism and Christianity present in this inscription. This explains why, in the Bible of Cîteaux, Jesus is pushing the Synagogue away. This is the "theological negation" of Chazan's analysis that we examined earlier.⁵⁷ However, this

⁵⁵ Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusaders*, 25.

⁵⁶ Debra Higgs Strickland, *Demons, Saracens, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 96. Footnote in original cites Michael Camille, *Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and Miri Rubin *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

⁵⁷ See note 45.

“theological negation” is reflective of real-world concerns. The creator(s) of this manuscript are clearly concerned about the position that Jews occupy in their society. It only makes sense to depict Jesus as pushing away the Synagoga if one is of the belief that the Synagoga is creeping too close to the Church, and one is anxious about what that means.

However, Jesus’ pushing away the Synagoga is not merely reflective of internal Christian anxieties. It is also reflective of the world Christians were in the process of creating in medieval Europe. Christians in the Middle Ages were not simply depicting Jews in their art as a means of dealing with their own anxieties about society, they were acting those anxieties out on the real living Jews who existed within their sphere of influence. As we continue to analyze the period in which these manuscripts were produced, we will see a pattern of *Ecclesiae et Synagoga* reflecting not only internal theological concerns and social anxieties, but also reflecting the actual lived world of Jewish-Christian relations in the period.

Contextualizing our second manuscript requires us to move to a different space and time. The Bible of Montalcino, which dates to the middle of the twelfth century and was made in Siena, Tuscany, contains the same *Ecclesiae et Synagoga* motif attached to the same Biblical text as the Bible of Cîteaux. How do we explain the appearance of the same iconographic motif in the same text in two places separated by more than 1,000 kilometers of distance and 50 years of time?

Twelfth-century Siena was marked by a longstanding conflict with its neighbor and rival Florence.⁵⁸ The conflict between Florence and Siena owed much to the geographical closeness between the two cities, they are less than 100 kilometers apart. According to Ferdinand Schevill, “When Florence pressed the claim that its county line toward the south reached within a few

⁵⁸ Mario Ascheri, “Siena: the City and Its State Throughout Time”, in *A Companion to Late Medieval and Early Modern Siena*, Santa Casciani and Heather Richardson Hayton, eds. (Brill: Leiden, 2021), 14.

miles of Siena's norther gate, the Sienese protested, partly because the issue was in doubt, and partly because they did not feel safe with a neighbor of the mettle of Florence camped almost under the shadow of their wall."⁵⁹ Florence was the stronger of the two cities, and it had defeated the Sienese by 1158.⁶⁰ Thus, the Siena that gave rise to the Bible of Montalcino was one at a crossroads in its development. It is possible that such a political situation created anxieties about the future of Siena with the result that those anxieties were projected onto Jews in the form of *Ecclesiae et Synagoga*.

Another key factor in the development of Tuscany at the time of the creation of the Bible of Montalcino was the invasion of the northern Italian peninsula by Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I, Barbarossa, in the mid-twelfth century. Frederick made two Italian campaigns in the time when the Bible of Montalcino was being written. Frederick first entered Tuscany in 1155 on his way to Rome to be officially coronated as Holy Roman Emperor.⁶¹ The invasions of Barbarossa were part of a conflict between the towns of Northern Italy and the Holy Roman Empire.⁶²

Thus, Siena in the mid-to-late 12th century was a place caught between several powerful entities: the Florentines, the Empire, and the Papacy. This would have made mid-century Siena a place anxious about its place in the world and struggling to develop an advantageous relationship with the powers that surround it. Perhaps, it is even possible that our illustrator saw a little of bit of Siena itself in the fallen Synagoga. Perhaps they thought that Synagoga too was a smaller entity being pushed around being powers larger than herself. Such an interpretation is still highly

⁵⁹ Ferdinand Schevill, *Medieval and Renaissance Florence, Volume I: Medieval Florence* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), 79.

⁶⁰ Mario Ascheri, "Siena: the City and Its State Throughout Time", 14.

⁶¹ John B. Freed, *Frederick Barbarossa: The Prince and the Myth* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 138.

⁶² Giovanni Spadolini, *Florence: A Thousand Years, with 240 plates* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1984), 27.

paternalistic, capable of only seeing the Jews as perpetual victims rather than people with agency, but it does suggest a certain nuance in thinking about the Jews, at least as regards this one case. This is not to argue for an innate benignness of *Ecclesiae et Synagoga*, but rather to leave room for the possibility that usages of *Ecclesiae et Synagoga* existed on a spectrum. Even in this interpretation, Jews are still depicted as inferior in ways that would have real impacts on actual Jews and Jewish life within the Christian sphere of influence.

Such an interpretation also misunderstands the actual lived dynamics of Jewish-Catholic relations in this period. The Catholic Sienese may have seen themselves as caught between more powerful entities and thought that they were, therefore, oppressed. However, their status as a place caught between empires was not comparable to the real lived experiences of Jews living in the same area of imperial influence.⁶³ Contemporaneous with his Italian campaigns, Emperor Frederick Barbarossa reissued a charter of Jewish “rights” that, according to Robert Chazan, represented “a more or less standard set of privileges...granted by the German rulers of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.”⁶⁴ The document confirmed by Frederick goes on to enumerate a series of restrictions on the nature and scope of Jewish-Christian social intercourse.⁶⁵ Thus, there were concrete limitations on the scope and scale of Jewish life in ways that were not paralleled for the Catholic Sienese.

The charter outlined certain privileges the Jews were to enjoy in areas of imperial control. These rights included the right to avoid church justice, “free right to exchange silver with anyone”, free movement throughout imperial territory, and they were protected against being

⁶³ Giovanni Spadolini notes that this time in the middle of the 12th century was “a period of imperial predominance”. Spadolini, *Florence: 1,000 Years*, 27.

⁶⁴ Robert Chazan, Introduction to Frederick I’s Charter to the Jews of Worms, in *Church, State, and Jew in the Middle Ages* Robert Chazan, ed. and trans. (New York: Behrman House, 1980), 63.

⁶⁵ Frederick I, Charter to the Jews of Worms, in *Church, State, and Jew in the Middle Ages* Robert Chazan, ed. and trans., 63.

convicted of a crime based solely on the testimony of Christian witnesses.⁶⁶ However, the granting of all these privileges by the emperor meant that the Jews were subject to his jurisdiction more than that of the Church.⁶⁷ This represents a twist on the *Ecclesiae et Synagoga* dynamic. In other times and places, the Church was at liberty to take *Ecclesiae et Synagoga* off the book page or the sculpture plinth and into the lived reality of medieval Jews. At least during the decades when the Bible of Montalcino was composed, there were constraints on the ability of the Church to turn normative theology into positive experience. This is not to say that the Church had no influence, but that its ability to exert influence upon Jews outside their sphere of influence was limited.

Furthermore, in Siena, Jews were not merely an idea, but an actual people who lived in the city. According to *Tuscan Jewish Itineraries*, “A document dated 1229 records that Jews had been living in the city for some time and that their main business was money lending.”⁶⁸ The problem for this study is that the Jewish communities of Italy in this period have not, to my knowledge, been the subject of a great deal of scholarship. Most scholarship of European Jewry in the Middle Ages overlooks Italy, and most scholarship of Italian Jewry starts its analysis later than the period in which the Bible of Montalcino was produced. One reason for this relative dearth of scholarship covering Sienese Jewry in the period under study here is that “at the time of the Roman Empire and in the first ten centuries of the Middle Ages, that is, approximately until

⁶⁶ Frederick I, Treaty to the Jews of Worms, in *Church, State, and Jew in the Middle Ages*, Robert Chazan ed. and trans., 64-65.

⁶⁷ I am, perhaps subconsciously, indebted to a quote from David Nirenberg from a documentary about the Black Death which I have watched a great many times over the years, “[Jews] were, in a no other medieval person was, owned and directly dependent on the King, or a great noble like a bishop.” Hal Masonberg director, *The Plague*, History Channel, 2005. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jS33xGVkW60>.

⁶⁸ *Tuscan Jewish Itineraries*, Dora Liscia Bemporad and Annamarcella Tedeschi Falco eds., Gus Barker trans. (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1995), 151. An acknowledgement to the *Jewish Virtual Library*’s article “Jewish Virtual World: Siena, Italy”, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/siena-italy-jewish-history-tour> for pointing me toward this source.

1350, almost all Italian Jews lived in the southern part of the peninsula (Rome and Southern Italy and Sicily).⁶⁹ This means that the Jewish communities that did exist in the northern half of the Italian peninsula were quite small at the time.

The expanded study of pre-Renaissance Italian Jewry is important for the future of Jewish history as a field of study. Given Italy's importance as the center of Catholic power it is impossible to have a complete understanding of Jewish-Catholic relations and power dynamics in the medieval period without studying those Jews who lived in closest proximity to papal authority. It is also important to build a Jewish historiographical tradition about the Middle Ages as a counterweight to the tendency within Jewish history to focus on Biblical times and modern times, with scant attention paid to the nearly two millennia in between.

Roughly a century of time and more than 1,000 kilometers of space separate the Bible of Montalcino from our next manuscript. In that century, much about Jewish life in Catholic Europe changed. One of the major changes was brought about by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. The Fourth Lateran Council produced new regulations on the lives of Jews within the Church's sphere of influence. Canon 68 of the Fourth Lateran Council requires "Jews and Saracens of both sexes in every Christian province and at all times shall be marked off in the eyes of the public from other peoples through the character of their dress."⁷⁰ The rationale given for this rule is that, in places where Jews are allowed to dress in the same way as Christians, "it happens at times that through error Christians have relations with women of Jews or Saracens, and Jews and Saracens with Christian women."⁷¹ This indicates a preoccupation with boundaries between Christians and

⁶⁹ Michele Luzzati, "Florence against the Jews or the Jews against Florence", in *The Most Ancient of Minorities: The Jews of Italy*, Stanislao G. Pugliese ed. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 59.

⁷⁰ Canons of the Fourth Lateran Council, *Medieval Sourcebook*, Fordham University. <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/lateran4.asp>. Accessed January 19, 2023.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Jews in this period, which suggests that such boundaries were often blurred in ways that were unacceptable to the Catholic hierarchy. The mention of “relations” also means that the Church’s concerns about Jews had a sexual dimension. This means that, in addition to social interaction, the Catholic hierarchy was concerned with the possibility of Jews and Christians having sexual relationships. The children of such unions would inevitably further blur the boundaries between Christians and Jews and in so doing, imperil the hegemonic position the Church enjoyed. It was in the Church’s interest to keep the line between Jews and Christians as clear and distinct as possible, and this drive will inform much of what we are going to examine going forward.

In addition to requiring Jews to wear distinctive clothing, Canons 69 and 70 of the 4th Lateran Council also included two further prohibitions on Jews holding office, and on baptized Jews “returning to their former rite”.⁷² Canon 70, in particular, says that Jews who are “retaining remnants of their former rite...obscure by such a mixture the beauty of the Christian religion”.⁷³ This again demonstrates a preoccupation with blurring the boundaries between Jews and Christians, indicating that at the turn of the thirteenth century such boundaries were not entirely clear and were becoming less clear. The purpose of these Canons was to stratify society and make it exceedingly difficult for people to move between classes of people. It also served to carve out the Jews as a minority class who would enjoy fewer rights than their Christian neighbors.

Another indicator of changes in the nature and dynamics of Jewish-Christian relations in this period was the advent of the disputation. According to Anna Sapir Abulafia, disputations, “had much more to do with Christians than with Jews”.⁷⁴ This fits in with a recurring pattern we

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in Dispute* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1998), ix.

have heretofore observed in other areas of Christian-Jewish contestation during this period. It is clear from a review of the scholarship on this topic that Christians used Jews as a canvas on which to project their own insecurities about themselves. (Do I need a citation here?) However, Christians did not stop there. Christian anxieties about Jews would, again, culminate in real effects on the Jews living in areas of Christian influence.

In his work, *The Friars and The Jews*, Jeremy Cohen examines how the disputation literature of the thirteenth century arose from an intra-Jewish conflict about the writings of Maimonides. He quotes a letter from a Rabbi David Qimhi, in which Qimhi says regarding an opponent of Maimonides, “his [Rabbi Solomon ben Abraham’s] uncircumcised heart did not rest until he applied also to the preachers (Predicatores) and to the priests, making the same request until the matter reached the cardinal, putting the Jews of Montpellier and its satellite communities in great danger, and exposing them to the mockery and ridicule of the gentiles.”⁷⁵ Cohen takes care to point out that Qimhi’s letter is unique in that it is the only one which “directly accuses Solomon of informing to the Christian clergy.”⁷⁶ However, there was clearly an intra-Jewish controversy on the eve of the Christian-initiated disputations. Furthermore, there was interest in that controversy on the part of the Christian clergy, again quoting Cohen, “All the sources corroborate the interest in the orthodoxy of Jewish writings taken by the Dominican and Franciscan inquisitors at Montpellier”.⁷⁷

The controversy over Maimonides proved to be a prelude to a series of disputations concerning the Talmud that would emerge over the course of the thirteenth century (Cohen footnote here) and thereby inform the manuscript illustrators of our last two *Ecclesiae et*

⁷⁵ Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 55

⁷⁶ Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 57.

⁷⁷ Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 58.

Synagoga examples which were produced in the last decades of the thirteenth century, one in Northern France, and the other in Dijon. The community where the Maimonidean controversy occurred was itself embedded within a Christian community that was dealing with a crisis of its own: the Cathar heresy. Montpellier, where the Maimonidean controversy occurred, was, to quote Daniel Silver, “a steadfast Catholic island in a seething Catharist sea. Perhaps this militant orthodoxy put the Jewish community under some duress to control its own speculatives.”⁷⁸ It seems reasonable that tensions among the Christian hegemon would have exerted influence on Jews to comport themselves in such a way as to not agitate that hegemon.

Most importantly for the purposes of this study, the parties to the Maimonidean controversy appealed to authorities beyond the area of southern France where the controversy arose. In so doing they involved not only the leaders of Jewish communities in northern France and in Spain, but also involved Dominican and Franciscan inquisitors.⁷⁹ How those inquisitors became involved is a point of controversy.⁸⁰ However, the fact of their involvement is more important than the details of how that involvement came to pass. The involvement of the Inquisition in an internal Jewish dispute indicates an increasing Church interest in Judaism and Jewish affairs. This is vital background context for understanding why, in the later decades of the thirteenth century, two Catholic illustrators would use visual depictions of Jews to make arguments about Christianity.

The culmination of these events were the two major disputations that occurred in the middle of the thirteenth century. The focus of these disputes was on the Talmud, the code of Jewish law written by the Rabbis in the early Rabbinic period. Jeremy Cohen notes that, in the

⁷⁸ Daniel James Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy 1180-1240* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 152, n.1.

⁷⁹ Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 53.

⁸⁰ Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 58. Cf Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism*, 150.

period under study here, “the Talmud suddenly became a prime target of Christian anti-Judaism.”⁸¹ The first of these disputations occurred in Paris after a convert from Judaism to Christianity, Nicholas Donin, appeared before Pope Gregory IX “with a list of charges against rabbinic Judaism”.⁸² According to Solomon Grayzel, the charges laid against the Talmud by Donin were that “1.–The Talmud is the work of man, and therefore cannot be divine. 2.–The sacredness which the Jews attribute to it is an insult to the Bible and the Prophets. 3.–It is filled with errors and legends that are both foolish and misleading.”⁸³ Grayzel argues that the reason Nicholas Donin rebelled against the Talmud and turned it over to the Christian authorities is “that Nicholas became a convinced Karaite.”⁸⁴ According to the *Jewish Virtual Library*, Karaite Judaism is, “a Jewish religious movement characterized by the recognition of the Tanakh [Hebrew Bible] alone as its supreme authority in Halakhah (Jewish religious law) and theology.”⁸⁵ If we accept Grayzel’s argument that Nicholas was a Karaite, then the Catholic Inquisition, by launching its attack on the Talmud was again using an intra-Jewish controversy to advance its own anti-Jewish agenda.

This raises the important question of what happened at Paris when the Talmud was put on trial? The Catholic Inquisition levelled 35 discreet charges against the Talmud.⁸⁶ The arguments levelled by the inquisitors can be broadly divided into two camps: the first of these are attacks on the provenance of the Talmud, and the Jewish claim that “It [the Talmud] was preserved for a

⁸¹ Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 60.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews: A Study of Their Relations During the Years 1198-1254, Based on the Papal Letters and the Conciliar Decrees of the Period* (New York: Hermon Press, 1966), 339. Thanks to Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 60, n. 19 for telling me where to look.

⁸⁴ Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 340. Thanks to Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 60, n. 19 for indicating that Grayzel argues this.

⁸⁵ Author Unknown, “Jewish Concepts: Karaites”, *Jewish Virtual Library: A Project of the America-Israel Cooperative Enterprise*, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/karaites>. Accessed January 26, 2023.

⁸⁶ *The Trial of the Talmud: Paris, 1240*, John Friedman, Jean Connell Hoff, and Robert Chazan eds., Jean Connell Hoff trans., (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2012), 102-121.

long time without being written until certain men came...who rendered it in writing”.⁸⁷ The second of these two camps is the attacks on the alleged content of the Talmud which was considered offensive to the Catholic hierarchy.

In response to these attacks, Jewish leaders in France sought to defend the Talmud against the attacks from the inquisitors. Perhaps the most interesting defense of the Talmud came during the portion of the disputation that dealt with accusations about whether the Talmud blasphemed Jesus of Nazareth and the Virgin Mary. This is as close as medieval Judaism comes to having its own version of the *Ecclesiae et Synagoga* motif. The key difference between *Ecclesiae et Synagoga* and the infamous passage of the Talmud that depicts Jesus as “boiling in excrement”⁸⁸ is one of power. As demonstrated throughout this essay, the Catholic Church had the power to make *Ecclesiae et Synagoga* the reality for the Jewish communities living in their midst. Jews had no such power. The assertion that Jesus is boiling in human excrement might offend Christian sensibilities, and its repeat mention in modern times is not a boon to repairing Jewish-Christian relations, but that does not make it a historical equivalent.

The Jewish defenders of the Talmud tried to argue that the Jesus referred to in the Talmud is not Jesus of Nazareth. According to John Friedman, who translated the Jewish responses at the Disputation of Paris, “In this passage from *Talmud Bavli*, Gittin 57a, the words *poshei yisrael*, “The sinners of Israel,” have been substituted for *Yeshu HaNotzri*, Jesus of Nazareth...as late as the 16th century, publishers of most editions of the Talmud edited out or emended insults of Jesus, Mary, and Christianity in general.”⁸⁹

⁸⁷ “Latin Accusations”, Jean Connell Hoff trans., from *The Trial of the Talmud*, 104.

⁸⁸ Gittin 57a, translation provided by Sefaria.org, <https://www.sefaria.org/Gittin.57a.3?lang=bi>. Accessed January 31, 2023.

⁸⁹ “The Disputation of Rabbi Yehiel of Paris”, John Friedman trans., from *The Trial of the Talmud*, 135, n.88. The original footnote directs the reader to consult Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 173 n. 11.

As a result of the Disputation of Paris, the Catholic Inquisition and religious authorities were already preoccupied with Jews and Jewish matters on the eve of the production of our final two manuscripts. This preoccupation likely explains why two different manuscript illustrators in France in the second half of the thirteenth century decided to avail themselves of the *Ecclesiae et Synagoga* motif when illustrating their respective manuscripts. There is no evidence, to my knowledge, that the Disputation had a direct bearing on the illustrators' choice to use the *Synagoga* motif in illustrating their manuscripts, however, the Disputations undoubtedly raised the salience of Jews and Jewish issues in the Catholic imagination of the period and therefore these two uses of the *Synagoga* motif cannot be understood outside of that broader context.

Conclusion: “Two Sisters of the Same Dignity”?

On the campus of St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, there is a sculpture. (See fig. 6) The sculpture depicts two figures sitting next to each other. One figure holds a Torah scroll, and the other a Bible. The two figures look as though they are having a dialogue, learning from, and listening to, what the other has to say. Created to mark the fiftieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*,⁹⁰ this sculpture is “*Synagoga and Ecclesiae in Our Time*”.

⁹⁰ Author Unknown, St. Joseph's University. <https://www.sju.edu/college-arts-and-sciences/ijcr/synagoga-ecclesia>. Accessed February 5, 2023.



Figure 6. Joshua Koffman, *Synagoga and Ecclesiae in Our Time*, Sculpture, 2015, St. Joseph's University, <https://thecatholicspirit.com/news/nation-and-world/jews-christians-can-learn-from-their-shared-scriptures-say-scholars/>.

According to Rev. Federico Lombardi, then-Director of the Vatican Press Office, “This statue is exactly a demonstration of two sisters of the same dignity, the Church and the Synagogue.”⁹¹ The power of *Ecclesiae et Synagoga* in medieval times came from the Church's ability to make the medieval motif a living reality for European Jews. The Church's temporal power is different now than it was in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It may no longer have the ability to enforce its dictates on those who are not Catholic; however, if *Synagoga and Ecclesiae in Our Time* is to become lived reality in the same way that its medieval predecessors

⁹¹ Ibid.

were, it is going to require intentional work on the part of the Church to make it so. The sculpture is a moving symbol of the Church's changing attitudes towards Jews and Judaism. In order for it not to become an outdated relic of one era's optimism, the Church must continue the path of repentance and repair that it began with *Nostra Aetate*'s acknowledgement that "We cannot truly call on God, the father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God."⁹²

⁹² Pope Paul VI, "Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions: *Nostra Aetate*", October 28, 1965, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html. Accessed February 5, 2023.

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