THE JEWS OF MEDIEVAL WESTERN CHRISTENDOM, 1000–1500

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INTRODUCTION

An observer viewing world Jewry in the year 1000 would have readily discerned an obvious Jewish demographic distribution and an equally obvious configuration of Jewish creativity. The oldest, largest, and most creative Jewish communities were located in the Muslim sphere, stretching from Mesopotamia westward through the eastern littoral of the Mediterranean Sea, across North Africa, and over onto the Iberian peninsula. Somewhat smaller, but still sizeable and venerable were the Jewish communities of the Byzantine Empire. Our putative observer might have noted, as an afterthought, the small Jewish settlements in western Christendom, huddled along the northern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, in Italy, southern France, and northern Spain; he might have – reasonably enough – not even bothered to mention them, for they would hardly have seemed worthy of serious attention.

Our observer would almost certainly have known that this pattern of Jewish demography and creativity had been established more than a thousand years earlier, long before the rise of Islam to its position of power during the seventh century. He would have been aware that, subsequent to the exile of the Jews from their homeland in the sixth pre-Christian century, two major centers of Jewish life had emerged, one as the result of Jewish resettlement in Palestine and the other as a result of the decision of Jews to secure for themselves a permanent place in Mesopotamia. He would have known that the great religious–political leaders of world Jewry had been the patriarchs of Palestinian Jewry and the exilarchs of Mesopotamian Jewry;

that the classical texts of post-biblical Judaism were the (Palestinian) Mishnah, the Jerusalem (Palestinian) Talmud, and the Babylonian (Mesopotamian) Talmud; that the distinguished rabbis whose teachings were enshrined in the Mishnah and the two Talmuds were all residents of either the Holy Land or the Mesopotamian territory that Jews anachronistically called Babylonia.

Our hypothetical observer would also have recalled that Palestinian Jews had, from a fairly early date, made their way westward, creating new centers of Jewish life all along the Mediterranean shorelines. He would have been aware that the centers in what are today Syria and Egypt were the oldest and largest of these western communities. Newer and smaller settlements stretched out all along the southern and northern coastlines of the Mediterranean Sea – across North Africa, through Asia Minor, and into what is today Italy, southern France, and Spain.

With the rise of Islam during the seventh century and its remarkable conquests, the overwhelming majority of world Jewry fell under the rule of the new religion and the empire built upon it. The only Jewries left outside the realm of Islam were the Jewish communities of the shrunken Byzantine Empire, along the northeastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, and those of the relatively backward western Christian states in Italy, southern France, and northern Spain, along the northwestern shores of that same sea.

While we do not have the kind of observations just now suggested from the year 1000, we do possess the writings of a European Jew who traveled from west to east during the middle decades of the twelfth century. This Jew, Benjamin of Tudela, did not attempt the kind of assessments just now suggested. However, his travelogue – generally rather dry and boring – does provide a first-hand sense of the various areas of Jewish settlement he encountered.[1]

Benjamin made his way down the Ebro River from his home town, reached the Mediterranean, visited some major Spanish port cities, traversed much of southern France, and crossed over into Italy and down the peninsula. Throughout this portion of his journey, he encountered a variety of Jewish communities. The largest of these numbered a few hundred souls or males or households.[2] When Benjamin reached the Byzantine Empire, he encountered much greater urban enclaves and much larger Jewish communities. In Constantinople, he found a city far exceeding in size, wealth, and culture anything he had seen further west. The Jewish community numbered some

three thousand. Again, it is not clear whether this means souls, males, or households. In any case, the Jewish community of Constantinople was many times larger than any Benjamin had encountered in the Roman Catholic sphere of southern Europe.

When Benjamin entered the realm of Islam, he was overwhelmed by what he found. The city of Baghdad, then arguably the greatest city in the Western world, captivated him. His description of the size and splendor of the city reveals an utterly enthralled visitor. The Jewish communities of the Islamic realm in general far surpassed in size and strength those of the Roman Catholic world from which he came. In Damascus, Benjamin found three thousand Jews; in Alexandria, seven thousand Jews; in Baghdad, the staggering number of forty thousand Jews.[3] In Baghdad, according to Benjamin, there were twenty-eight synagogues and a Jewish officialdom that enjoyed remarkable prestige and respect in the caliph's court. While Benjamin limits himself to fairly specific and often pedestrian observations, his travelogue indicates clearly an Islamic realm far superior to Byzantium and Roman Catholic Europe, and Jewish communities that reflect the same ordering of size, strength, and creativity. Even though Benjamin traveled at a time when the balance of power had already begun to shift, he still found that the Jewries under Muslim domination were larger and more fully developed than those under Christian control.

Pressed to predict what the future might hold, our hypothetical observer in the year 1000 would have assumed that the known configuration of Jewish life would surely last into the indeterminate future. In general, of course, most of us have great difficulty in imagining radically altered circumstances. Such a lack of imagination would have hardly been the only factor influencing our observer, however. For there was nothing in the year 1000 to suggest that radical change was in the offing. The constellation of world power appeared remarkably stable. Islam's domination seemed to be challenged seriously by no one, neither the Greek Christians of the eastern sectors of the Mediterranean nor the Latin Christians of the western sectors of Europe. Our observer of the year 1000 would surely have concluded that the contemporary power structure was unlikely to shift and that Jewish life would thus continue along the lines currently discernible.

Benjamin, traveling and writing in the middle of the twelfth century, had the benefit of a century and a half of change. By time he made his journey, western Christian forces had driven the Muslims

out of their Italian strongholds and had begun to push the Muslims southward on the Iberian peninsula. Western Christian armies had even managed to journey eastward and conquer portions of the Holy Land, including the symbolically important city of Jerusalem. Yet it is unlikely that even Benjamin could have envisioned the further changes in the offing.

Were our hypothetical observer of the year 1000 in a position to view world Jewry in the year 1250, halfway through our period, and again in the year 1500, he would have been stunned by the changes. While the Jewries of the Muslim world remained in place in the years 1250 and 1500, they were well on their way to losing their position of demographic and creative eminence. They were in the process of being supplanted in their physical and cultural primacy by the diverse Jewish communities of western Christendom. The rise of Latin Christendom to its central role in the Western world, achieved from the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries, brought in its wake – not surprisingly – a parallel ascendancy of the Jewish communities it harbored and attracted.

Periodically – but not all that often – new powers have erupted from fringe areas and radically altered the power structure of the Western world. Such an unanticipated eruption and restructuring took place during the seventh century, when the forces of Islam exploded unexpectedly out of the Arabian peninsula and overwhelmed both the Neo-Persian and Byzantine empires. A more recent example of this restructuring has involved the rise of the United States to its central position in the West, in the process usurping the hegemony long associated with such European powers as England, France, Germany, and Spain. It was between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries that these European powers – especially England, France, and (Christian) Spain – emerged from their relatively backward state and began to dominate the Western world. The rapid and unexpected emergence of Roman Catholic western Christendom transformed the West and, in the process, realigned the pattern of world Jewish population, authority, and creativity that had remained relatively static for almost a millennium and a half. As a result of this seismic shift in the world power structure, the Jews became and have remained a European and eventually North Atlantic people.[4]

Herein lies the enormous significance of the period we shall study for Jewish history. This era of roughly five hundred

years – approximately 1000 to 1500 – established an entirely new pattern of Jewish settlement and civilization. The geographic lexicon of the Jewish people had heretofore been almost entirely Near Eastern; Jerusalem, Tiberias, Antioch, Damascus, Sura, Baghdad, Alexandria, Cairo were dominant and resonant names. Now, new names came to the fore – Mainz, Cologne, Paris, London, Toledo, Madrid, Cracow, Warsaw, Vilna, and eventually New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles as well. The earlier Semitic languages of the Jewish people – Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic – declined, to be replaced by the languages of the West – German, French, Spanish, and English. Political ideas and ideals underwent radical alteration, as did cultural and religious norms and aspirations. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of these changes.

The relocation of the center of Jewish gravity from the Middle East and North Africa to Europe involved, above all else, a new religious and cultural ambiance. During the period under consideration, the Jews established themselves firmly within the Christian orbit. To be sure, the history of Christian–Jewish relations did not begin in the year 1000. Christianity was, after all, born in the Jewish community of Palestine. Fairly quickly, however, the religious vision centered around the figure of Jesus of Nazareth won adherents beyond Palestinian Jewry. The original leadership of the Jesus movement had been entirely Jewish; as that movement evolved into Christianity, new and gentile leadership came to the fore. The rapid spread of Christianity took place outside of Palestine, across the length and breadth of the Roman Empire, and involved a largely gentile population. Despite its Jewish roots, Christianity established itself as a separate religious faith, the patrimony of a set of non-Jewish peoples.

So long as the vast majority of Jews lived outside the orbit of Christian power, the Jewish issue was muted for the Christian authorities. Church leaders, it is true, produced an extensive anti-Jewish literature during the first Christian millennium. Much of that literature, however, was theoretical, focused on buttressing convictions as to the rejection of Old Israel (the Jews) and the election of a New Israel (the Christians). Genuine engagement with real Jews was, however, limited. From the Jewish side, the lack of engagement with Christianity is yet more marked. Up until the year 1000 and well beyond, we possess not one single anti-Christian work composed by Jews living within western Christendom.[5] Down through the end of the first millennium, the Jews of the world, concentrated

in the realm of Islam, were hardly obsessed with Christianity and Christians.[6]

With the displacement of the center of Jewish population to western Christendom, serious engagement from both sides had to begin. Jews and Judaism penetrated the Christian consciousness in a far more immediate way than heretofore. This meant the augmentation of anti-Jewish argumentation, the adumbration of more extensive policies for the Jewish minority living within western Christendom, the evolution (perhaps deterioration would be more accurate) of Christian imagery of Jews, and the eruption of new forms of anti-Jewish animus and violence. For the Jewish minority, the changes were equally momentous. Jewish life was now constrained by new policies and new dangers; Jews were now regularly exposed to the blandishments of the majority Christian religious faith; Jewish leaders had to learn more about that majority faith and to fashion anti-Christian argumentation that would enable their Jewish followers to resist missionizing pressures and remain loyal to Judaism.

The story of medieval Jewry in western Christendom constitutes a critical element in the saga of the Jewish people; at the same time, this story illuminates significant aspects of majority life in medieval western Christendom. As scholarly attention has shifted away from the leadership groups on the medieval scene – popes, bishops, emperors, kings, and dukes – toward a broader swath of humanity, awareness has developed of the variegated nature of what once seemed a monolithic society. The Jews have come to occupy a significant place in recent study of medieval western Christendom. They provide an intriguing litmus test for treatment of out-groups in an overwhelmingly Christian society; they are especially valuable in that – unlike most other out-groups – they have left a literature of their own, to supplement the data available from the majority perspective.

Indeed, for most of the time period we shall be studying, and most of the geographic areas under consideration, there was a very special quality to the Jews as a minority presence in western Christendom. Generally, the Jews constituted the only legitimate dissenting religious group in all of society.[7] Minority status is never easy; to be the only legitimate religious minority is even more precarious. Often, as we shall see, the negative aspects of this minority status have been highlighted, and there surely was much that was limiting and harmful. At the same time, the successes of the venture should by no means be overlooked. In many ways, the Christian majority – or at least

elements of it – and the Jewish minority cooperated effectively in fostering Jewish presence and activity that proved of immediate and long-term benefit to majority and minority alike.

The spatial boundaries of this study are easy to delineate and are hardly controversial. The designation "western Christendom" points to the distinction between the eastern and western areas of the Christian world, with the eastern centered in the imperial court at Constantinople and the western centered in the papal court at Rome. On another level, eastern Christendom was constructed around Greek language and culture, while western Christendom was constructed around Latin, its linguistic derivatives, and its culture. With the passage of time, these two segments of the Christian world pulled further away from one another. This process of disengagement and differentiation culminated in the bloody Fourth Crusade of 1204 and the sacking by western Christian troops of the eastern Christian imperial city of Constantinople.[8]

While there was considerable unity within western Christendom – religious, cultural, and political – that unity should by no means be overstated. This vast area harbored considerable differences as well. The fault lines were both horizontal and vertical. Perhaps the most significant fault line lay in the distinction between the Mediterranean lands of southern Europe and the more remote lands of the north. The Mediterranean lands of the south had been fully absorbed into the Roman Empire and had been richly infused with Roman civilization and culture. Remnants of Roman civilization and culture were (and are) everywhere palpable across the southern tier of Europe. In contrast, the lands of northern Europe had been only brushed by the contact with Rome and had preserved much of their Germanic heritage.[9] In a general way, the southern sector of medieval western Christendom was far more advanced in the year 1000 than were the areas of the north. That situation, however, was to change rapidly and dramatically.

The remarkable vitalization of western Christendom subsequent to the year 1000 took place most markedly in the heretofore backward north. By the year 1500, England and France had emerged as large and powerful monarchies on the Western scene, contesting Spain for preeminence. Indeed, part of the French kingdom's success lay in its absorption of previously independent southern territories into the expanded royal domain, centered in the north. Paris and London were the greatest cities of medieval western Christendom by the year

1500; strikingly, they had both been backward provincial towns five hundred years earlier. There is perhaps no more eloquent testimony to the centrality of northern Europe in the great awakening of medieval western Christendom that took place between 1000 and 1500.[10]

There is a second major fault line as well, one that proceeds on a vertical axis, and that is the distinction – particularly noteworthy in the north – between western Europe, on the one hand, and central and eastern Europe on the other. In the year 1000, the most potent political authority in western Christendom seemed to be the German emperor. Rooted in imperial lore and tradition, the German throne seemed likely to remain the strongest political power among the emerging states of western Christendom. Such was not, however, to be the case. The far less imposing kings of France, England, and Spain learned how to manipulate the feudal system to their advantage, slowly converting local rule and royal prerogative into large, stable, and increasingly puissant monarchies. Germany slipped far behind its more westerly neighbors in economic development, political maturity, and cultural creativity. Further east, at the fringe of medieval western Christendom, such kingdoms as Hungary and Poland slowly began to develop by the end of our period.

Finally, there is yet one more important geographic distinction, involving interior areas of western Christendom and those exposed to outside forces. On many levels, differences emerged between those lands generally insulated from outside aggression and with a relatively homogeneous population (in which Jews were prominent as the only legitimate dissenters), on the one hand, and territories that bordered on other realms and in which populations were heterogeneous, on the other.[11] The lands of the east – Italy in the south and Hungary and Poland in the north – were very much exposed to external intrusion, as was the Iberian peninsula in the southwest. There were salient differences between exposed and interior areas in terms of majority self-image and in terms of the populations with which the Christian majority (even in a few instances the Christian ruling minority) had to deal.

We shall have to be constantly aware of these important geographic distinctions. They will play a key role in understanding the roots of Jewish life in the south, the establishment of important Jewish communities in the rapidly developing north, the banishment of these new Jewish centers to the eastern peripheries of northern Europe toward the end of our period, and the eventual disappearance of

almost all Jewish life from the western sectors of Europe by the year 1500. It is impossible to make the kind of generalizations necessary in an overview such as this without occasionally slighting one or another geographic sector of large and complex medieval western Christendom. Ideally, there should be available more focused studies of medieval Jewish life for each of the geographic regions included in medieval western Christendom.[12]

While the geographic parameters of this study are fairly easy to specify, the temporal boundaries are somewhat more difficult. The designation "medieval" is fraught with problems. Medievals would never of course have identified themselves as medievals; they very much saw themselves as *moderni*, that is to say moderns, the latest link in the chain of human history. The terms "Middle Ages" and "medieval" came into being as the medieval synthesis began to unravel; they were terms of opprobrium, used to highlight the alleged backwardness and benightedness of the period that stretched from late antiquity to the onset of the Renaissance. Generally, this negative sense of the Middle Ages focused on the purportedly suffocating centrality of religion in every sphere of human endeavor. This centrality of religion – monotheistic religion at that – contrasted with the more open society of ancient Rome and with the more open society that the men and women of the Renaissance hoped to create. Out of this backlash the pejorative term "medieval" was fashioned.

In practical terms, how does this view of the Middle Ages translate into tangible dating for the beginning and end of the medieval period? This is an extremely difficult question to answer. Scholars have differed regularly as to the onset and conclusion of the Middle Ages. Happily, for our purposes, the debate over the beginnings of the Middle Ages is irrelevant. As already noted, significant Jewish presence in medieval western Christendom did not emerge until the end of the first Christian millennium, the point in time when the region began its long ascent toward dominance in the Western world. Thus, whatever "medieval" might mean in the abstract, for this specific study of the Jews of medieval western Christendom it identifies a period that begins around the year 1000.[13]

The end point for this study is more problematic. Once again, there is considerable scholarly dispute as to marking the close of the Middle Ages. Clearly, the Middle Ages ended at different points in time in diverse sectors of western Christendom – generally earlier in the western areas and later in the eastern areas. Since by the fourteenth

century the process of removal of the Jewish population to the eastern edges of western Christendom was well under way, for the bulk of European Jewry medieval conditions ended quite late. For the purposes of this study, however, the adjective "medieval" will be attached to western Christendom, not to the Jews. This will be a history of the Jews in medieval western Christendom, rather than a history of medieval Jewish circumstances in western Christendom. As the medieval synthesis began to disintegrate, toward the close of the fifteenth century, our story will conclude, even though Jews continued to live under medieval conditions for centuries to come in the northeastern areas of Europe.

The divergences within the Jewish communities of medieval western Christendom make the terminal date of 1500 sometimes irrelevant, sometimes inappropriate, and in one major case highly appropriate. The year 1500 is obviously irrelevant to English Jewry, whose history came to a close in 1290, and to French Jewry, whose creative history ended in 1306. It means little for the history of German and eastern European Jewish history. The year 1500 is actually problematic for the history of Italian Jewry, for which most historians see the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as a unified epoch.[14] 1500 is of course highly appropriate for Iberian Jewry, given the expulsion from Aragon and Castile in 1492 and from Portugal in 1497. Again, the date has been chosen out of consideration of the Christian majority, rather than any special sector of the diversified Jewish minority.

Thus, the temporal boundaries of this study will be the years 1000 and 1500. During this five-hundred-year period, the old Jewish communities of the south expanded markedly and a new set of Jewish communities was created in the north; both sets of Jewish communities developed through the thirteenth century with measures of success and failure; they disintegrated subsequently in the more advanced areas of western Europe and were reconstituted on the eastern peripheries of western Christendom, especially in the north. Despite all the shortcomings and failures, the bulk of world Jewry made its transition into the rapidly developing Christian orbit, a change that would not be undone down to the present.

In some ways, the shortest word in my title – "of" – has presented the most difficulties. I vacillated regularly between *The Jews in Medieval Western Christendom* and *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom*. The first title suggests the relative isolation of the Jews whom we shall be studying; the second integrates them somewhat into their

European ambience. I ultimately opted for the latter title, out of the strong conviction that medieval Europe was far more than simply a terrain on which Jewish life unfolded. Problems aside – and they were manifold – the Jews upon whom we shall focus were very much a part of the medieval European scene. They spoke the language of their land; they were integrated into the economic and political structures of their societies; their cultural and religious lives were deeply affected by their environment; they influenced – for good and ill – the majority ambience within which they found themselves.[15]

Reconstructions of the past are ultimately determined by the source materials bequeathed to posterity. Where the data are rich, the reconstructions can be dense and nuanced; where the data are thin, so too must be the historical account. To what extent are sources available for reconstructing the story of the Jews of western Christendom from 1000 to 1500? How fortunate or unfortunate are we with regard to the evidence? The simple answer is that we are moderately fortunate. The data are far richer than those available for the first half of the Middle Ages; they are, at the same time, far poorer than those available for reconstructing the experience of modern Jewish communities. Not surprisingly, availability of source materials for reconstructing the history of the Jews in medieval western Christendom is much influenced by the temporal and geographical distinctions just now drawn.

During the period between 1000 and 1500, as the various sectors of medieval western Christendom and their Jewries matured, increasing quantities of source material were compiled and maintained. As we approach the close of this period, the sources – at least in certain parts of western Christendom – become truly copious and diversified. As the same time, the geographic distinctions just noted played a significant role. The southern and northwestern sectors of Europe, for example Italy, Spain, southern France, England, and northern France, provide extremely rich documentation; the north-central and northeasterly areas, for example Germany, Hungary, and Poland, provide far less. The removal of Jews from the more advanced areas of western Christendom has deprived us of considerable data; the Jews, as noted, relocated in those areas where documentation remains sparse. Thus, we are differentially provided with data. For some periods and places, the data are rich; for others, they are poor.

Since the focus of this study is the interrelated activities of majority and minority in fostering Jewish presence and creativity in medieval

western Christendom, we shall necessarily depend on the evidence provided by both the Christian majority and the Jewish minority. With regard to the former, one of the most important developments of our period was the maturation of authority, both religious and temporal. A critical element in this maturation was the creation of stable institutions and reliable record keeping.

The first truly potent institution to emerge in medieval western Christendom was the papacy. The papal court quickly developed all the appurtenances of power, including scrupulous record keeping. Papal documentation grew exponentially from the twelfth century on. While Jews constituted a fairly minor element within the complex of Church priorities, they were important enough to generate thousands of papal documents and conciliar decrees. This rich documentation was among the first bodies of non-Jewish source material to be exploited for reconstructing the history of medieval Jewry.[16]

The pioneering secular authority in record keeping was Angevin England, beginning in the latter decades of the twelfth century. The records of the Angevin monarchy are extremely rich, and data concerning the Jews are copious. Indeed, no one has been yet able to control this vast documentation. At the same time that the royal records were multiplying at an astonishing rate, so too were the archives of the various ecclesiastical institutions of England. An increasingly large number of literary sources – histories, poetry, early theater pieces – were produced and preserved as well. Thus the relatively small English Jewish community is documented with a richness nowhere else available for medieval western Christendom at this early point in time.[17]

The French monarchy matured slightly more slowly than its English rival, and the same is true for its archives as well. Since the Jews were expelled from France at the beginning of the fourteenth century, the explosion of royal documentation that began during the thirteenth century does not fully illuminate the medieval experience of French Jews. At the same time, the rich local court and notarial records of southern France have preserved valuable evidence of Jewish life and activity. An increasing volume of Christian literary evidence also began to accumulate prior to the expulsion.

The kingdoms of medieval Spain were yet slower to develop the institutional and archival maturity of England, but eventually they did. Since medieval Spanish Jewry far outlasted its English counterpart, by time we reach the latter decades of the thirteenth century

and on into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Spanish records become increasingly voluminous.[18] Much interesting research is currently being done on the Jews of Spain, based on the available documentary evidence.[19] Once more, literary evidence grew at a rapid pace as well. Both historical accounts and belle-lettristic compositions serve to round out the evidentiary base for reconstructing the history of the Jews of medieval Spain.

For Italy, the proliferation of principalities and the longevity of the Jewish communities have resulted in extensive archival deposits. A voluminous set of documents has been published over the past few decades, providing a rich evidentiary base for the reconstruction of Jewish life all across the peninsula, at least for the latter centuries of our period.[20] The process of working through these materials and integrating them into a synthetic view of the Jewish experience in medieval Italy has proven most difficult. In the north-central and northeastern areas of Europe – Germany, Hungary, and Poland – the volume of non-Jewish source materials diminishes.

There are, unfortunately, almost no Jewish documentary materials available from our period. Record keeping within the Jewish communities of medieval western Christendom may well have begun during our period; however, the upheavals occasioned by expulsion resulted in the destruction of most of the documentary evidence created by the Jews of medieval western Christendom. Thus, our major Jewish sources are literary compositions of one or another kind.

Most valuable for our purposes are historical narratives. Medieval Jews – in western Christendom and elsewhere – were not deeply drawn to the writing of broad histories, as were their Christian neighbors. Recurrently, however, unusual events moved Jewish observers to record what they had seen or heard, sometimes in order to warn contemporaries against danger, sometimes in order to memorialize fallen heroes, sometimes in order to lodge a plea before the divine audience, and sometimes in order to engage difficult questions associated with Jewish suffering. The resultant narrative records, sparse though they are, provide invaluable evidence of the minority perspective on important developments on the medieval scene. The related literary genre of poetry, especially liturgical poetry, provides similar evidence of important developments, although generally providing less in the way of specific detail.[21]

A genre that became increasingly popular with the passage of time was polemical literature, which constituted a Jewish response

to enhanced Christian proselytizing. While there is an element of the timeless – and often an element of the tedious – in polemical literature, in many instances these compositions provide valuable evidence of accelerating religious pressure exerted by the majority on the minority and of creative minority response.[22]

The literary genres most favored by the Jews of medieval western Christendom revolved around what the Jews viewed as their two revelations, which they designated their Written Torah, i.e. the Hebrew Bible, and their Oral Torah, i.e. the classics of rabbinic teachings. Biblical and talmudic commentaries and codes of Jewish law, which are central to an understanding of Jewish cultural and intellectual activity, generally shed minimal light on the quotidian lives of the Jews of medieval western Christendom. The one popular genre of rabbinic law that does provide considerable insight into everyday Jewish life is the rabbinic *responsum*. Beginning with a query, normally generated by a real-life situation, the medieval *responsa* literature reveals much about the interactions between Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors, as well as much about internal interactions within the Jewish community. As was true for the non-Jewish materials, so too the Jewish evidence is spotty, occasionally extremely rich and sometimes quite poor.

Specific data – sometimes rich and sometimes sparse – provide the underpinning for modern historical reconstructions. In approaching this particular historical reconstruction, the first important decision I had to make involved the alternative paths of narrative versus topical organization, each with advantages and disadvantages. Given the remarkable changes in Jewish fate from the year 1000 to 1500, my decision has been – probably not surprisingly – for narrative reconstruction. This option enables fullest focus on the evolution of the Jewish communities of medieval Latin Christendom. The major disadvantage of this choice is the loss of social history. Topics such as religious practice and the role of family and women do not lend themselves well to the basic narrative format I have utilized.

Having opted for a basically narrative approach, I quickly concluded that the complex nature of medieval western Christendom and its Jewish communities precluded a single narrative treatment. The Jewries of medieval Latin Christendom were simply too divergent one from another to allow for one encompassing narrative. Thus, the narrative account of Jewish fate in medieval western Christendom has been divided into four chapters – the first treating the one major

pan-European institution, that is the Roman Catholic Church; the second describing the older Jewish communities of southern Europe; the third focused on the new Jewish communities of the northwest, i.e. northern France and England; and the fourth portraying the Jewish communities of north-central and northeastern Europe, i.e. the German lands, Hungary, and Poland.[23] These four narrative chapters will then be followed by a chapter that attempts to draw together the material aspects – positive and negative – of medieval European Jewish experience and a second chapter that attempts to make sense of the Jewish spiritual and intellectual experience.[24]

The efflorescence of studies in medieval Jewish history has been noted, and it has raised a number of important issues, two of which deserve to be addressed. In the first place, as the parameters of interest in medieval western Christendom have expanded, and as the Jews, along with other marginal groups, have become increasingly a focus of interest, the circle of those reconstructing the medieval Jewish experience has – happily – expanded. In addition to the more traditional group of historians whose training and central interest has been in the Jewish past, a growing number of general medievalists have devoted themselves to projects involving the Jews of medieval western Christendom.[25] This development has contributed richly to our expanding knowledge of the Jews of medieval Europe. On occasion, there has seemed to be a tension between treatment of the Jews within the context of overall Jewish history and acknowledgement of the embeddedness of these Jews in their medieval milieu.[26] The stance of this study will be that neither context can be dismissed; in fact, the combination is what shaped the fate of the Jews of medieval western Christendom. For this reason, the book will insist on acknowledgement of both the diachronic and the synchronic aspects of the Jewish experience, that is to say the Jewish experience as shaped to an extent by the overall trajectory of the Jewish past and the Jewish experience as shaped by the specific contours of one or another area of Europe. The book thus begins with discussion of the legacies imposed upon and introduced by the Jews of medieval Latin Christendom prior to indicating how these legacies were preserved and altered in the new European contexts. The dual focus on the diachronic and synchronic will be maintained throughout.

The expanded perspectives brought to the study of medieval history in general and medieval Jewish history in particular raise yet

another important issue. As noted, attention has moved from the leadership groups on the medieval scene – both lay and ecclesiastical – to the more nuanced sense of medieval society as composed of numerous elements and classes, each of which must be understood in its own terms to the extent possible. The lively new interest in the Jews of medieval western Christendom in fact flows from this new and more open stance on the part of scholars. However, in writing a composite history of the Jews of medieval western Christendom, I have found myself forced to make some assessments I would have preferred not to make, to highlight certain issues and to submerge others. In effect, I have had to move in the direction of identifying "major" facets of medieval Jewish experience. I have found this necessity distasteful, but unavoidable.

Opting for a basically narrative structure necessitates some central image or set of images, often called a meta-narrative or a master narrative. While regularly lamented, this imagery is in fact indispensable. Data must be organized in some coherent fashion, and the master narrative affords this coherence. To be sure, the data and the imagery must ultimately reinforce one another. Radical disjuncture between the data and the master narrative suggests that the latter is inappropriate.

Quite often, master narratives turn out to be quite judgmental, in effect to reflect one or another ideological predisposition. The history of the Jews in medieval western Christendom has conjured up much negative imagery among the descendants of these Jews. For subsequent Jewish memory, the Jewish experience in medieval Latin Christendom has been synonymous with persecution and violence; it has meant bloody crusading assaults, anti-Jewish slanders and the popular attacks they spawned, the dreaded inquisition and the pain it inflicted. These memories have been deeply embedded in the ritual and liturgy of medieval and modern Jews.[27] While persecution and suffering have been projected as *leitmotifs* of the two-thousand-year experience of Jewry in exile, an overwhelming majority of the catastrophes memorialized in post-exilic Jewish ritual and liturgy derive from experience under medieval Christian rule.

As noted and analyzed by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, history writing was undertaken only fitfully by medieval and early modern Jews. That limited body of historical writing very much reinforced the popular perception of medieval Christian persecution and Jewish suffering.[28] When fuller integration into historically conscious

nineteenth-century European society stimulated the onset of modern history writing within the Jewish world, the prior memory patterns created the framework through which historical data were interpreted. For the first great historian of the Jews, Heinrich Graetz, the dominant patterns of pre-modern Jewish history were suffering inflicted by the outside – preeminently Christian – world and heroic Jewish commitment to life of the intellect through which the suffering was transcended. When Graetz's romantic and intellectually oriented framework was challenged by a newer nationalist and more specifically Zionist historiography, the emphasis on persecution and suffering was yet more pronounced, with the Jewish experience in medieval Latin Christendom once again highlighted, without the redeeming creativity suggested by Graetz.

Majority Christian perceptions of the Jewish experience in medieval western Christendom have been similarly simplistic and one-sided. While this experience looms very large in Jewish memory, its impact is considerably reduced in Christian memory. The little recollection that remains is, once again, highly negative, although with an opposing valence. For Christians, the folk recollections involved Jewish hostility, which took a number of forms, including political treachery, for example bringing the Muslims onto the Iberian peninsula during the eighth century; vicious anti-Christian rage, which led Jews to murder; and the harm inflicted by Jewish moneylenders and moneylending. For Christian memory, there was no counterpart to Graetz's insistence on Jewish creativity; there was no awareness of the Jews as involved in anything other than relating negatively to the Christian majority.

General medieval historiography has likewise been affected by much ideological prejudgment, both negative and positive. As noted, the very terms "Middle Ages" and "medieval" reflect damning indictments made by Renaissance thinkers, determined to forge a new European civilization. For the men and women of the Enlightenment, the Middle Ages constituted a deplorable interlude in European history. Not surprisingly, rejection of these negative perspectives resulted in the creation of a highly romanticized view of medieval Latin Christendom, a world viewed in this camp as rich in ideals and meaningful achievements, enlivened by a great Church and chivalric commitments, achieving heights of human creativity. Again, the relation of these views of the Middle Ages to important assessments of nineteenth- and twentieth-century realities and issues is patent.

Recent historiography – both Jewish and general – has moved in new and different directions. Historians of the Jews have come to see their Jewish subjects in all periods as living within majority environments that challenged them in multifarious ways – not only through persecution and violence – and that stimulated the Jewish minority to wide-ranging creativity. For the study of Jewish life in medieval western Christendom, this has meant a decided movement away from the folk and earlier historiographic emphasis on suffering and toward a fuller appreciation of the many dimensions – both positive and negative – of the Jewish experience in medieval Europe. At the same time, as the study of medieval western Christendom in general has abandoned its earlier focus on the ecclesiastical and secular authorities, the tendency toward the judgmental has diminished markedly, replaced by a desire to understand the complexities of medieval European society and life.

The present account of the Jews in medieval western Christendom is very much anchored in the new tendencies discernible among historians of the Jews and historians of medieval Europe. It begins by rejecting the sense of the medieval Jewish experience as consisting essentially of suffering. To the contrary, one of the most striking aspects of the Jewish experience in medieval western Christendom involves the growing number of Jews who became part of the Christian ambience. To be sure, some of these Jews came into Christendom involuntarily via conquest; others, however, made a conscious decision to leave the Muslim world and to immigrate into Christendom, which suggests positive imagery of Christian society on the part of such Jews. Even those Jews who passed into Christian territory via conquest still had the option of leaving and generally chose not to exercise that option. Perhaps more strikingly yet, as the situation of the Jews in medieval western Christendom deteriorated, the overwhelming majority of these Jews opted to stay within their Christian ambience, rather than abandon it.

The changing material fortunes of the Jews in medieval western Christendom will be tracked carefully, with no sense that Jewish fate was preordained from the outset. There were positive factors working on Jewish fate and negative factors as well. Both sides of the story will be presented. There was certainly enough of the positive to encourage considerable voluntary Jewish migration into medieval Latin Christendom and to maintain the desire of most Jews to remain with its confines. The decline of Jewish life is palpable as we move into the

fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and that decline will necessitate considerable description and analysis. There is, however, no intention to project a teleological vision of Jewish history in medieval western Christendom, a sense that Jewish life was doomed in this environment from the outset. Put differently, the Jews who made their way into medieval western Christendom and elected to stay there will not be treated in this book as myopic, unaware that there was no hope for a Jewish future in Christian Europe. They will, rather, be projected as vigorous and adventuresome pioneers, willing to tie their fate to the most rapidly developing sector of the Western world. In the process, these pioneering Jews achieved much and lost much, but such is the way of the world.

The interactions of Christian majority and Jewish minority will by no means be limited to the material realms of demography, economics, and politics. Medieval western Christendom was alive with intellectual and spiritual vigor. The Jews of medieval western Christendom were challenged by this dynamic environment, both directly and indirectly. Directly, the Christian majority became increasingly committed to a program of conversion. Occasionally, these efforts were carried out violently, in contravention of ecclesiastical teachings. More often, the modalities of convincing the Jews were peaceful and ecclesiastically legitimate, ranging from informal suasion to formal preaching and disputation. Whatever the modality of persuasion, Jewish leadership was called upon to identify salient differences between the two faiths, emphasizing of course Jewish strengths and Christian shortcomings. Less directly, the sheer vigor and dynamism of the Christian majority stimulated enhanced creativity among the Jewish minority. Living in a dynamic majority, even an often hostile dynamic majority, moved the Jews of medieval western Christendom to a rich creativity of their own. The Jewish creativity celebrated by Heinrich Graetz was not unrelated to the Christian environment that he decried.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that focusing on the Jews and the effort – in part Jewish and in part non-Jewish – to establish viable Jewish life in medieval western Christendom has meant projecting developments, to a significant extent, from an essentially Jewish perspective. History generally involves conflict of one sort or another, and historical accounts are always written from a particular point of view. The War of American Independence reads differently from an American perspective than it does from a British perspective. The

conquest of the American West is perceived differently by the victorious settler population than by the native American victims of that conquest. Telling the story of the medieval Jews from an essentially Jewish perspective means, for example, seeing Jewish resistance to Christian missionizing as a success, although the same development was perceived by ecclesiastical leadership as a failure on its part and on the part of the Jews as well. Likewise, the expulsions from the westerly sectors of Latin Christendom will be portrayed from a Jewish perspective, that is to say as a negative outcome. To be sure, there were many in western Christendom for whom expulsion of the Jews was a signal victory. The present account will not be framed from their perspective.

The story that will unfold herein is a complex amalgam of successes and failures, on the part of both the Christian majority and the Jewish minority of medieval western Christendom. It involves the best and worst of human characteristics; it is filled with contingencies at every point; it has no plot resolution, either happy or sad; it concludes open-ended, with benefits and liabilities extending far beyond the year 1500, indeed down into our own times. Those seeking a clear-cut and obvious moral to this tale will be disappointed. Hopefully, the complex saga of the Jews in medieval western Christendom – not at all reducible into simple conclusions and lessons – will provide useful insights into the Jewish, Christian, and human conditions.

I

PRIOR LEGACIES

Jews were settled in medieval western Christendom prior to the year 1000, although in relatively small numbers. Those early Jews left almost no evidence of their existence to posterity.[1] They seem to have exerted little impact on the larger number of Jews who came to populate a rapidly changing western Christendom subsequent to the year 1000. We find very few references in that later period to precedents from earlier Jewish life in Europe.

This is not to say that, as Jewish numbers expanded in medieval western Christendom, these later Jews and their Christian neighbors were unaffected by pre-existent legacies and innovated freely with respect to Jewish circumstances. To the contrary, Jewish life, as it expanded all across medieval western Christendom from south to north, was deeply affected by inherited structures and attitudes. By the year 1000, Jews across the globe had evolved a rich social and intellectual framework for living as a creative minority within monotheistic majority societies. At the same time, the Christian majority was heir to a set of complex and ambivalent policies toward and perceptions of Judaism and the Jews. Surprisingly, perhaps, we must begin with the prior legacy of Islam and its stances toward Jews living under its rule. Since so many of the Jews who were absorbed into medieval western Christendom after the year 1000 came – involuntarily (through Christian conquest) or voluntarily (through immigration) – from the Muslim sphere, their circumstances and expectations played a significant role in the Jewish experience in medieval western Christendom.

THE MUSLIM LEGACY

While it may seem somewhat strange to begin with the Muslim legacy as part of the necessary backdrop to this study of Jewish life in medieval western Christendom, there are a number of justifications for so doing. First of all, prior to the year 1000, the bulk of world-wide Jewry – as we have seen – was to be found within the Muslim sphere. This meant that the Muslim world had enjoyed far greater contact with a Jewish minority than had western Christendom and had, as a result, developed far fuller policies for dealing with tolerated minority communities in general and with the Jews in particular. The Jews absorbed into medieval western Christendom from the year 1000 onwards had their expectations fashioned in no small measure from their prior experience in the Islamic world. Equally important, the Jews absorbed into medieval western Christendom were deeply steeped in the vibrant culture of the medieval Muslim world and brought much of that culture with them into their new Christian environment. Finally, the situation of the Jews in the Muslim sphere will recurrently offer enlightening contrasts with Jewish life in medieval western Christendom.[2]

Islam emerged onto the world scene very much in the mold of biblical Israel, as a political and religious unity. In utterly unexpected fashion, the Muslim armies broke out of the Arabian peninsula and conquered in almost every direction, creating one of the Western world's great empires in the process. The populations subjugated by the Muslim armies were vast and heterogeneous. The victorious Islamic authorities divided the non-Muslim subject population into two camps, that of the polytheists who had no intrinsic rights and that of the monotheistic precursors of Islam, meaning essentially Jews and Christians. This latter group did have a set of basic rights, to be enjoyed in *quid pro quo* fashion. Jews and Christians were entitled to physical security and the right to observe their own traditions, in return for political loyalty to the Muslim regime, tax revenues, and acknowledgement through a set of stipulated limitations of a status inferior to that of what ultimately became an Islamic majority.

The guarantees of physical and spiritual security were by and large maintained throughout the early centuries of the Middle Ages. There are few recorded instances of Muslim infringement on these rights during this period. In return, the Jews did prove loyal to their Muslims rulers and did produce the obligatory tax revenues. The demand for

inferior Jewish status had a checkered history. To an extent, it was maintained; to an extent, it was neglected. Jews recurrently evaded the restrictions supposedly incumbent upon them and rose to heights of wealth, social standing, and political power. One of the areas in which the restrictions were most regularly evaded and in which Jews frequently achieved wealth and power was the Iberian peninsula, where eventual Christian conquest was to bring into the Christian orbit large numbers of Jews accustomed to considerable latitude in lifestyle.

As we shall see, Jews in post-1000 Christendom were subjected to more or less the same set of theoretical policies. The differences, however, are instructive. As Islam developed, Jews were only one of its monotheistic precursors; fundamental Christian stances toward the Jews were formed at a point when Jews were the sole monotheistic precursor community, making the Christian–Jewish relationship much more focused and intense. Whereas Islam saw itself simply as the third and final of the monotheistic revelations, the Christian relationship to Judaism and the Jews was – as we shall shortly see – much more involved, convoluted, and emotionally charged.[3] Moreover, the population of the medieval Muslim world was far more heterogeneous than its Christian counterpart; this heterogeneity again provided an ease and latitude by and large missing in western Christendom.

Westerners today often fail to appreciate the extent to which the Islamic world far outstripped its Christian counterparts through the first half of the Middle Ages. We have earlier utilized the Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela to convey some sense of this imbalance, which was military, economic, technological, and cultural. The last is especially important for our purposes. The Jews living in the vibrant Muslim sphere were thoroughly conversant with majority culture. They, like medieval Jews in general, spoke the language of their environment, which in this case was Arabic. Since Arabic was the written language as well, Jews had entrée into the dominant high culture and were creatively challenged by it. The Jews immigrating into medieval western Christendom brought with them the high culture of the Islamic world, which constituted simultaneously a challenge to Jewish identity and a stimulus to Jewish creativity.

The institutional framework for maintaining Jewish life as a minority community in the medieval Muslim world was fully developed. Alongside a rich complex of local institutions, there existed a set of centralized institutions that claimed roots well back in antiquity.

The exilarchate housed in Baghdad claimed direct descent from the Davidic dynasty; the great academies likewise housed in Baghdad could be traced back into the period of the evolution of the Babylonian Talmud. The antiquity and central authority of these institutions contrasts strikingly with the sense of newness and limited authority of the Jewish institutions of medieval western Christendom.

The creativity of the Muslim environment and its Jewish minority resulted in considerable augmentation of an evolving Jewish cultural legacy. The traditional areas of Jewish study, focused around the Bible and the Babylonian Talmud, were much enhanced. In biblical studies, a new emphasis on lexical and grammatical accuracy emerged; in rabbinic studies, the first efforts to examine closely and mine the rich and diffuse talmudic corpus are discernible. In addition, new avenues of cultural creativity developed. The most prominent of these innovative areas were theological and philosophical speculation and secular poetry. In both instances, the broad and stimulating environment encouraged the Jewish minority to experiment with new forms and ideas. Quickly, these Jews made the new cultural outlets their own. To be sure, such innovation inevitably raised hackles in some sectors of the Jewish community. Conflict around the new creativity was inevitable and quickly materialized.

While Jewish identity in the medieval Muslim world was not directly challenged by a majority propensity toward missionizing, Islam was successful nonetheless in attracting polytheists, Jews, and Christians to its ranks. Precisely how deeply these conversions cut into the Jewish community is not clear. In any case, the conversions were not the result of concentrated Muslim efforts to reach out to the other monotheistic communities. There were no identifiable structures for regularly engaging Jews and Christians with Islamic truth, and there is relatively little in the way of Muslim anti-Jewish and anti-Christian polemical literature. As a result, there is likewise relatively little in the way of an anti-Islamic polemical literature created by the Jews, since there was no genuine defensive need for such a literature.

The greatest challenge to Jewish belief and identity emanated from the philosophic inclinations of the period. Medieval Islamic culture engaged profoundly the riches of Greco-Roman civilization, preserved much of that civilization through extensive translation, and expanded the Greco-Roman legacy in its own terms. Many of the foundations of Greco-Roman thought were inimical to monotheistic principles, challenging simultaneously traditional Islam, Judaism,

and Christianity. The best minds of the period – Muslim, Jewish, and Christian – were absorbed by the effort to mediate between their received religious traditions and the impressive philosophic legacy of Greece and Rome.

Jews lived all across the medieval Muslim world, from the great centers of the Middle East across North Africa and over onto the Iberian peninsula. People and ideas passed freely from east to west and back. The large Jewish communities of North Africa and especially the Jewish settlements of the Islamic Iberian peninsula constituted a considerable reservoir of new Jewish recruits to medieval western Christendom. In some instances – particularly in the Iberian peninsula – the transition was involuntary, as Christian armies added ever larger portions of Spain to the realm of Christianity. In other instances, movement from the Islamic sphere to western Christendom represented a conscious choice on the part of Jews attracted by the dynamic development of western Christendom. In both cases, the Jewish communities of western Christendom were demographically and culturally strengthened by the flow of immigrants. The enlarged Jewish population heightened Christian sensitivity to the Jewish minority, reinforcing traditional concerns and creating new anxieties. These Jews who had now become, in one way or another, part of western Christendom brought with them expectations of the ruling majority, patterns of minority existence, and a richly developed cultural legacy.

THE CHRISTIAN LEGACY

Awareness of the Islamic legacy provides us, on the one hand, with an understanding of the backdrop for Jewish life in post-1000 western Christendom, since so many of the immigrants came from the Muslim sphere and brought with them political and social expectations and a rich cultural legacy. At the same time, awareness of the Islamic stance toward Judaism and the Jews affords us a number of extremely useful contrasts, which serve to highlight the special tensions that shaped Jewish experience in the Christian orbit; this awareness indicates how unusual Christian–Jewish relations have been over the ages, how complex the stances with which Christianity has encountered its Jewish rival.

Two contrasts are especially helpful. The first involves the early development of the two faiths and their accession to power. As noted,

Islam emerged from its earliest days – like biblical Israel – as a religious polity, with a conviction that the political and religious spheres of life were unified. Islamic tradition projected Muhammed as a prophetic communal leader and ruler, along the lines of the Israelite Moses. Muhammed both brought laws and led the way toward their implementation. He was also a military conqueror, in this sense combining the roles of both Moses and Joshua in Israelite history. By contrast, the founding figure in Christianity, Jesus, exercised no worldly power, sending forth his disciples on a distinctly religious mission of teaching new truth to the world. It was only centuries later, at a point when Christian missionizing had been highly successful and an effective ecclesiastical hierarchy had been fashioned, that power over the political apparatus of the pre-existent Roman Empire was achieved.

For the history of the Jews in medieval western Christendom, this contrast had potent implications. It meant that the Jews in Christendom found themselves in an environment pervaded by the notion of both ecclesiastical and temporal leadership. To an extent, this bifurcated authority held out benefits to the Jewish minority; it allowed for the playing off of one leadership cohort against the other. At the same time, the bifurcated authority was in some respects harmful, in that it accorded considerable power to an ecclesiastical leadership group that could afford to be relatively unconcerned with temporal gain and loss. In any case, bifurcated authority was a reality with which the Jews of medieval western Christendom regularly had to contend.

Far more important for Jewish fate was the importance of proselytizing in the Christian scheme of things. A faith that had come to power through religious suasion could never forget the importance of that suasion. There were of course periods in which the missionizing impulse was relatively dormant; it could never, however, be neglected in the long term. The extent to which Jews might become the objects of missionizing involved complex and contradictory considerations. There were good reasons to make the Jews secondary, given for example their relatively small numbers and long record of resistance. As we shall see, there were equally compelling reasons to make missionizing among the Jews a very high priority.

A second contrast between Islam and Christianity has to do with their relationships to Judaism and is – from the Jewish perspective – yet more significant. Islam developed on the Arabian peninsula among a new human community of believers. It quite simply proclaimed itself

an innovative religious vision. Fully aware of the prior monotheistic traditions of Judaism and Christianity, Islam venerated these prior traditions to an extent, but proclaimed its supersession of both. The break was clean – a new place, a new people, a new revelation, and a new corpus of authoritative Scripture. By contrast, Christianity emerged out of a geographic and physical Jewish matrix and developed an extremely complex and tormented relationship to that matrix. The complexities of that relationship form the most critical element for the evolution of Jewish life in medieval western Christendom. For centuries, the complex Christian–Jewish relationship was central to Christian thinking only in theoretical terms and exerted little impact on Jews, who were concentrated in the Muslim realm. The augmented Jewish presence in the western Christian world made this complex relationship far more important than it had previously been to the Christian majority, crucial to the fate of the Jewish minority, and critical to our understanding of the history of the Jews in medieval western Christendom.[4]

Because of the very special circumstances of its early history, Christianity has had a complicated and ambivalent relationship toward the Jewish matrix out of which it was spawned. This complicated and ambivalent relationship includes elements of deepest respect and – at the same time – elements of deepest hostility. For Christians, Jews have been viewed, over the ages, as the very noblest of humanity in some senses, while being perceived in other respects as the very worst of the human species. This ambiguous and ambivalent Christian relationship with Judaism and the Jews set the terms for Jewish life throughout medieval western Christendom and demands explication as the critical element in the pre-1000 legacy that would affect subsequent Jewish life in medieval western Christendom.[5]

In order to gain some sense of this complexity and ambivalence, we must briefly trace broad lines of early Christian history (which created the complexity and ambivalence), identify the apologetic stance developed by Christians to differentiate themselves from Judaism and Jews, examine the ecclesiastical doctrine and policies established at the point in time that Christians ascended to power in the Roman world, and conclude by ascertaining the major elements in Christian imagery of Judaism and the Jews. Superficially, it was the doctrine and policies of Christianity – more specifically the doctrine and policies of the Roman Catholic Church – that overtly affected the Jews of medieval western Christendom. At a less obvious, but even deeper

level, Jewish life in medieval western Christendom was shaped by the imagery that everyday Christians bore of their Jewish neighbors. Christian policy toward and imagery of Judaism and the Jews set the stage for Jewish life in medieval western Christendom.

Our initial focus on pre-1000 Christian doctrine, policy, and imagery should by no means be taken to imply that they were destined to remain static during the period between 1000 and 1500. Religious thinking is generally characterized by organic growth and development. One of the critical elements in declining Jewish circumstances – as we shall see – was a hardening of ecclesiastical policy toward the Jews and a corresponding deterioration of the image of Judaism and the Jews. Both these processes will be examined as important components in the history of the Jews in medieval western Christendom. For the moment, we shall turn our attention to the pre-1000 legacy, a legacy already rich and complex. This legacy set important parameters for evolving Jewish circumstances in medieval western Christendom.

The history of Jesus of Nazareth and his immediate followers cannot be reconstructed in modern scholarly terms. Our inability to recapture the reality of Jesus and his disciples results from a total lack of data from his immediate time period and circumstances. What we today know of Jesus is derived from sources composed many decades after his death, when the vision he enunciated had undergone considerable alteration. Now, if we do not have sources from the lifetime of Jesus himself, why are modern scholars so certain that the sources we do have – composed a number of decades after his death – come from altered circumstances and reflect shifts in his original vision? The answer to that question lies in historical realities of which we can be relatively certain.

It seems obvious to the majority of students of early Christianity that Jesus and his immediate followers lived within the fractious Jewish community of first-century Palestine and were part and parcel of that Jewish community, sharing its assumptions, its concerns, and its uncertainties. The Jewish community of first-century Palestine lived under the stress of Roman domination, with its members taking differing stances toward their Roman overlords. Some first-century Palestinian Jews were comfortable enough with Roman rule; others found it utterly intolerable. This Jewish community, plagued by dissension in the realm of politics, was further fragmented by religious contention as well. Alternative visions of the historic covenant

between God and the people of Israel were abroad in the land at this time.

Happily, we do have some first-century evidence of Jewish life during this frantic period. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus alerts us nicely to some of the fragmentation in first-century Jewish life. Yet more strikingly, from the writings of the first-century Dead Sea community we gain the sense of one vibrant sub-group of Jews, wiped out during Roman suppression of the Jewish uprising that began in the year 66. In these writings, we encounter a group of Jews deeply critical of the official leadership in Jerusalem, committed to what they believed to be purification of Jewish faith, and very much Bible-centered in their view of history. In fact, as they read closely the words of the prophets of Israel, the members of the Dead Sea community became convinced that these prophets were in fact predicting important events in their own communal experience.

In the tumultuous setting that spawned the Dead Sea community, Jesus of Nazareth preached his own particular vision of the covenant between God and Israel. He brought this vision to his Jewish followers in the language of his community (either Hebrew or Aramaic) and was surely viewed by friend and foe alike as a Jew, one of those – like the Dead Sea group – highly dissatisfied with current religious leadership and norms. Unlike the Dead Sea community, however, Jesus and his immediate followers did not leave us their Hebrew or Aramaic writings.

The very first writings from the Jesus movement that have come down to us derive from the pen of a diaspora, Greek-speaking Jew named Saul of Tarsus, who took the name Paul upon his acceptance of the vision of Jesus. Saul, who never encountered Jesus first-hand, thought and wrote in Greek, not the Hebrew or Aramaic of Jesus and his immediate followers; his preaching was addressed largely to diaspora Jews, not the Palestinian Jews among whom Jesus circulated; in many cases, Paul brought his message to non-Jews as well. Thus, even without certainty as to Jesus' original message, the important linguistic and social shifts reflected in the activities and writings of Paul suggest that his teachings were hardly identical to those of Jesus and his immediate Palestinian Jewish circle. Indeed, Paul's writings and the account of his life in the book of Acts reflect considerable disagreement with the original followers of Jesus.

Paul's stance toward Judaism and the Jews is both complex and ambiguous. Modern scholars are deeply divided on the issue of

Paul's views of Judaism and the Jews.[6] For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that Paul's own letters and the account of his activities in the book of Acts include elements of deep respect toward Judaism and Jews, on the one hand, and elements of sharp disparagement, on the other. This ambiguity, troubling to scholars seeking to clarify the Pauline stance, may in fact be the most important aspect of his teachings on Judaism and the Jews.[7] Paul was surely aware of the growing gulf between the Jewish world, in which he had been raised, and the gentile Christianity he vigorously fostered. He was deeply conscious of the need to differentiate the two. This differentiation had to emphasize the truth of the gentile Christian views and the errors of the Jews. Yet, Paul seems to have been unwilling to dismiss the Jews entirely, recognizing their past greatness and holding out hope for their future redemption.

With the further passage of time, the Palestinian Jewish group declined in importance within the nascent Christian community; the diaspora Jewish groups eventually declined as well; the gentile subgroup came to dominate the young faith community. Here again, there was much room for changes that would reflect a new social grouping, a new linguistic and cultural milieu, and new forms of spirituality. To be sure, much of the original message was undoubtedly retained; at the same time, much was altered. Exactly what remained and what was changed is the key question, to which no precise answer has yet won – or is likely to win – a consensus of scholarly support. What we do know is that the Gospels, on which subsequent knowledge and imagery of Jesus are based, post-date the social, linguistic, and ideational changes just now depicted. Thus, they reveal a Jesus as perceived by later observers far removed from the original Palestinian ambience within which Jesus himself lived and taught.

In this new gentile Christian setting, determined to maintain a sense of continuity with the earlier and somewhat different Jesus movement, the Jews constituted a vexing problem. On the one hand, there was much in the new faith that involved traditional Jewish thinking and that was deeply and inextricably bound up with the Jesus legacy. For example, it was clear that Jesus and his followers were Jews, that the ethical and spiritual norms of the Hebrew Bible were central to their early vision, that miracles of biblical proportions played a key role in their thinking, and that fulfillment of biblical prophecy was a crucial element in the early Jesus movement. At the same time, there was obviously much criticism of the established

Jewish leadership on the part of Jesus and his earliest followers. Such criticism did not of course remove Jesus and his disciples from the Jewish community, just as it did not break the bonds of the Dead Sea community with Palestinian Jewry either. The imputation to Jesus of critical remarks by no means signals rejection of Judaism and the Jews.

Fairly quickly, however, as the Jesus movement evolved into an independent and overwhelmingly gentile Christianity, it became increasingly clear that the bulk of the Jewish world rejected the message of Jesus, his immediate followers, and those who took over leadership subsequently. These developments required for the young Christian group a clear break with Judaism, decisive differentiation between the two faith communities, and requisite proof of the superiority of the new vision over its older rival.[8] What emerged was the notion of profound Jewish error, including the failure to recognize the overwhelming evidence presented for the messianic role fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus' Jewish contemporaries were intended to be the recipients of the blessings of messianic advent. They, however, consistently failed to recognize the obvious signs of his role – his miracles for example and his fulfillment of prophetic prediction for the Messiah and his activities.

The failure to recognize the divinely predicted Messiah was compounded by the purported sin of doing that Messiah to death. Jesus' crucifixion was a Roman punishment, imposed by a Roman official. Whatever might have been the original reality, the Gospel accounts all remove the Romans to the periphery and make the crucifixion of Jesus a Jewish responsibility. Thus, in the Christian reconstruction, much more was involved than simply an internal Jewish dispute between Jesus and his Jewish contemporaries. The bulk of the Jewish world, in this view, committed an unthinkable crime, which had to occasion divine wrath and in fact did. Distressed by the failure of the people whom he had originally singled out, God had – as it were – no alternative but to reject the Jews and to transfer the blessings and responsibilities of the covenant to a new people, the Christians. It is in this sense that the Jews were projected as the best of humanity, the original covenant people, and at the same time as the worst of humanity, a covenant people that had lost its blessings through obtuseness and sinfulness.

Canonization of Christian Scripture enhanced the complicated and ambivalent Christian stance thus far elaborated. Christian

Scripture became an amalgam, composed of an Old Testament, which is more or less the set of sacred books revered by the Jews, and a New Testament, composed of subsequent writings centered around depictions of the life and activities of Jesus and the epistles of Paul. For Christians, these two sets of books fit together perfectly. The Old Testament was intended to prefigure the New Testament and to find its fulfillment therein; the New Testament laid bare the deepest meanings of the Old. This canon of sacred literature accorded relevance and respect to the Jews, at least in the earlier portions of their history; at the same time, it constituted clear repudiation of Jewish understanding of the Hebrew Bible. Jewish understanding was superficial and ultimately erroneous; it was Christian understanding of the Hebrew Bible that revealed its true meaning. Again, the contrast with the sacred literature of Islam is instructive. Incorporating none of the books of Judaism or Christianity, Islam made its break with the prior monotheistic faith communities relatively neat; there was none of the complexity and ambivalence inherent in the Christian absorption and reinterpretation of the sacred literature of its Jewish predecessor.

While differentiation of Christianity from Judaism and explanation of the superiority of the former over the latter obviously played a central role in the self-definition and self-justification of the Christian faith, the resultant negative imagery of Judaism and the Jews was to plague Jewish life over the ages. To the extent that the bulk of the Jewish world was centered in the Muslim sphere, prior to the year 1000, the impact of this imagery on Jewish life was minimal. As a larger number of Jews were absorbed into the Christian realm, this deleterious imagery came to play a central role in setting the parameters within which Jewish life was to develop. To the extent that Jews were viewed as the one-time covenant people who had lost their mission and function, they were saddled immediately with heavy negative overtones. When the emotional imagery of the Crucifixion was added to this mix, the potential for evocation of powerful anti-Jewish feelings was high.

What has been said thus far revolves around religious argumentation and resultant imagery. By the early fourth century, a new ingredient was added. By that time, the Christian community had grown sufficiently to establish patterns of ecclesiastical organization and to be concerned with maintaining hard-won achievements. Thus, at the Council of Elvira, one of the earliest Church councils whose

proceedings have come down to us, it was decreed that Jews must not cohabit with Christians and must not bless Christian fields. Reflected in these stipulations is a defensive stance, a concern lest Jews intrude on Christians and their beliefs in one way or another. Relationships in which Jews might exercise power over Christians, such as slave-owning, public office, and marriage, were particularly dangerous and were eventually prohibited.

The special dangers that Jews might pose to a Christian society flowed from the close relationship between the two faiths that has already been delineated. Obviously, divergent views always pose a danger to any religious or ideological community. The dangers posed by Jews, however, were special. Since so much of Christian thinking was rooted in the Jewish world and since Judaism's Scriptures were embedded in Christianity's sacred canon, there always lurked the possibility of Christians questioning the accepted sense of Christian rectitude and Jewish error. With so much Jewish thinking at the disposal of Christians, might not some of them question the authoritative view and suggest that the Jewish version of Scripture and history might possibly be correct? Because of the intimacy of the Christian–Jewish relationship and the ready availability of knowledge of Jewish views, protection of the Christian populace against the threat of Judaism took on heightened significance.

A truly critical turning point came with the change of direction in Roman governance initiated by Emperor Constantine the Great, who ruled the Roman Empire in its totality from 324 to 337. Constantine reversed the prior policy of persecution of Christians, beginning a process that eventuated in Christian power over the entire empire. Here was a new phenomenon – a vast Western state ruled in the name of a monotheistic faith. New issues had to be raised. One of these issues – neither the most nor the least significant – involved the status of another monotheistic people, the Jews. What emerged from Constantine's ground-breaking regime was, on the one hand, reinforcement of the prior Roman status for Judaism as a permitted religious faith. At the same time, the defensive concerns noted already in the Council of Elvira were now to have the backing of the secular authorities. Constantine decreed, for example, that Jews were not to seek or accept converts to their faith. Quite specifically, he singled out the situation of slaves. Slaves both Christian and non-Christian were not to be circumcised by Jewish owners. On the other hand, those who changed faith in the other direction, moving from Judaism to

Christianity, were never to suffer reprisal from disappointed Jews. The recognition of Jewish rights within the newly Christianized Roman Empire was of decisive importance for subsequent Jewish life in the Western world. The sense that Jewish life, while legitimate, was subject to requisite restrictions was equally momentous.

Many of these disparate strands of theory and policy were woven together by one of the great figures in antiquity, Augustine, the bishop of Hippo in North Africa. The Augustinian synthesis was solidly grounded in profound knowledge of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament and of the histories of Greece, Rome, Israel, and the Church. Augustine's view of Judaism and the Jews is not ambiguous and unclear, as was the case for Paul; it is, however, grounded in much the same ambivalence discerned in Paul. Augustine also understood fully the importance of the Constantinian position on the legitimacy of Judaism within a Christian world and was determined to provide for that political decision requisite theological grounding.[9]

On the positive side, Augustine was deeply aware of the greatness of early Israelite/Jewish history, contrasting this God-centered history with what he saw as the errors of paganism reflected in Greece and Rome. The Jews, recognizing the one true God, had led a blessed existence on the terrestrial level. To be sure, they did not reach the fullest possible understanding of God's ways. Their deficiencies led to their undoing, with the appearance of Jesus as God's appointed Messiah. The failure of the Jews to read properly the prophetic message led them to spurn Jesus and eventually to insist on his death. All these traditional motifs – with their positive and negative implications – find a place in the Augustinian synthesis.

In particular, Augustine laid a solid foundation for the Constantinian recognition of the legitimacy of Jewish existence in a Christian state and society. Whereas Constantine may well have been guided by little more than imperial precedent and the normal inclination to preserve the status quo, Augustine approached the issue of the Jews from a distinctly theological perspective. He insisted, on theological grounds, that Jews must live a protected existence within Christian society. Citing an enigmatic biblical verse, Psalm 59:12 – "Slay them not, lest my people forget" – Augustine argued that God himself had ordained that the Jews were not to be killed. Rather they were to be scattered in order to serve divine purposes.

What were these divine purposes that required preservation of the Jewish people? According to Augustine, God intended that the

Jewish people be preserved in order that they serve as witnesses to Christian truth, in one of two prominent ways. In the first place, Jews acknowledge before all humanity the divine origins and thus the truth of the prophetic corpus. By insisting that the words of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the other prophets of ancient Israel were God-given, the Jews create an obvious basis for Christian claims about Jesus. Isaiah predicted – in the Christian view – that a virgin would conceive and give birth. By bearing witness to the divine origins of such a statement, the Jews buttressed Christian truth claims. To be sure, Jews did not themselves understand the real import of the Isaiah message. Nonetheless, their disinterested – as it were – insistence that the Isaiah message was divinely inspired served as a powerful weapon in the Christian effort to bring truth to the pagan world. Obviously, this grounding for protection of Jews had again its positive and negative implications. It was positive in that it pointed once more to the Jewish legacy of biblical truth; it was negative in that it again highlighted Jewish failure to understand the truth they themselves had brought to humanity.

Augustine adduced yet another grounding for protection of the Jews. This second rationalization was more decidedly negative. Augustine offered what had become a widely accepted Christian sense of history, more specifically of the working of sin and resultant divine punishment throughout history. For Augustine, as for many Christians, the Jews had sinned grievously in their failure to acknowledge Jesus and in their responsibility for his death. The consequences of this sinfulness were obvious to those who knew how to read the record of history. The Jews sinned and were almost immediately punished by God with loss of their political independence, with destruction of their political and religious capital, and with permanent exile from the land promised to them. It is hard to imagine, for Augustine, a clearer manifestation of sin and divinely imposed punishment. Here the negative implications dominate.

Finally, Augustine – following the Psalmist and Paul – makes one last point. God is a God of mercy. Furious at the Jews for their failures, God stripped them of their role in covenantal history and consigned them to harsh punishment. Nonetheless, the merciful God always holds out love and hope, even for those whom he severely chastises. The Jews must be preserved within and by Christian society, because in the fullness of time they will yet return in repentance and win once more divine love and grace. Here, the Pauline hope for eventual

Jewish recognition of truth – in effect by repudiating Judaism – and for resultant reconciliation with an ever-forgiving God finds full expression. Here too we encounter the recurrent underlying ambivalence. On the one hand, there is warmth and hope – the Jews will turn to God and God will once again embrace them. The key to that outcome, however, lies in casting off the Jewish heritage and accepting the Christian vision. In effect, capitulation is the Christian hope for the Jewish future.

This last point leads us to the issue of missionizing among the Jews. Augustine erected a structure that formulated impressively all the ambivalences of prior Christian tradition toward the Jews. He also projected the importance of sympathetic preaching to the Jews. This loving concern was projected as a human extension of divine mercy toward the Jewish people, God's original chosen folk. To be sure, we may suggest yet other elements in the commitment to proselytizing. As noted, Christianity had developed out of the missionizing impulse. Less benignly, Jews posed a considerable threat to Christian well-being, as has already been indicated. While protective steps had been taken by Christian ecclesiastical leadership from early on, successful missionizing was a far better tool for dealing with the Jewish danger. Effective missionizing would make clear to Christian observers that Jews themselves had come round to acknowledgement of the truth of Christianity. Indeed, wholly successful missionizing would obviate the Jewish danger altogether.

Thus, the legacy bequeathed to post-1000 western Christendom from the Christian past was extremely complex and ambivalent. It involved considerable respect for the Jewish past, along with hope for a de-judaized future; it included acknowledgement of Jewish rights of existence within Christian society, a set of defensive limitations on Jewish life aimed at protecting the Christian majority, and a commitment (at least in theory) to preaching among the Jews in hopes of limiting the dangers they might pose and of bringing about the anticipated de-judaized future. This complex and ambivalent legacy was to affect every facet of Jewish existence in medieval western Christendom.

THE JEWISH LEGACY

By the year 1000, the Jewish people was over two thousand years old and had undergone recurrent historical change. Coalescing as

a Near-Eastern religious–political community during the first pre-Christian millennium, the Jews had suffered a series of catastrophes that might well have brought their history to an end; instead, they had surmounted the disasters of military defeat and exile by evolving for themselves new political structures and innovative religious stances. By time the Jews of first-century Palestine faced yet another deep crisis, as tensions escalated between them and their Roman overlords, a variety of organizational patterns and religious options were well in place. When the confrontations with Rome ended badly – with devastating military defeats, destruction of the historic capital of Jerusalem, and loss of the religious anchor provided by the Second Temple – the Jews nonetheless had at their disposal alternative possibilities for ongoing political and religious creativity.[10]

A permanent diaspora community became a feature of Jewish life very early in Jewish history, with defeat at the hands of the Babylonian Empire at the beginning of the sixth pre-Christian century (586 BCE). Much of Judean society was exiled to Mesopotamia. Within a relatively short time, it became possible for Jews to return to the Land of Israel, and many did. Nonetheless, a permanent Jewish presence remained in Mesopotamia, with the passage of time secondary to the reconstituted center in Palestine. With the crushing defeats at the hands of the Romans, a slow shift in the balance of power between the Jewish community of Palestine and that in Mesopotamia began. By the end of the third century, the diaspora community had outstripped the homeland community, in size, creativity, and influence. It was, for example, the Talmud created by Mesopotamian Jewry that came to dominate subsequent Jewish religious life, not that of Palestinian Jewry. By the onset of our period, patterns of diaspora existence were fully established among the Jews.

By the year 1000, Jews had long been inured to living as subjects under the rule of others. This was obviously the case for Mesopotamian Jewry from the sixth pre-Christian century onward. Even in the revitalized center of Jewish life in Palestine, the Jews had become accustomed to conforming to the political will and institutions of overlords. During the entire period of the Second Commonwealth, stretching from the late sixth pre-Christian century down through the first and second Christian centuries, the Jews of Palestine had enjoyed political independence under their own Hasmonean rulers for less than a century. For the rest of that lengthy period, they lived under the hegemony of Persians, Greeks, and Romans.

Accommodation to subject status meant, first of all, establishment of effective structures for handling the affairs of the minority community. The (Palestinian) Mishnah and the (Mesopotamian) Babylonian Talmud both show evidence of effective self-governing agencies. Beyond these structural elements, there were attitudinal issues as well. By the year 1000, the Jews who were already resident in or attracted to western Christendom were fully equipped with perspectives that enabled them to live comfortably as a subject community and to cope with the religious implications of lack of the independence once enjoyed by their ancestors.

The requisite foundations of religious life were likewise well in place by the year 1000, all across the Jewish world. Again, we know almost nothing of Jewish existence and religious life in pre-1000 western Christendom. As the growing Jewish communities of this area become known to us, it is clear that they were deeply rooted in rich literary and institutional frameworks. Jewish religious life was grounded in what the Jews viewed as the record of divine revelation contained in Hebrew Scripture. That corpus was, by the year 1000, very well established both as to its overall contents and its precise textual readings. The biblical corpus served as the basis for the extensive set of behavioral guidelines by which Jewish life was ordered; it served, at the same time, as the source for Jewish perspectives on the widest possible range of communal and personal responsibilities.

While the biblical text was very well established, the modalities for reading and understanding that text admitted of considerable flexibility. By the year 1000, traditional homiletic interpretation lived side by side with a newer scientific philology and with innovative philosophic approaches, both developed creatively in the Muslim environment. Alternative modes of biblical exegesis were to become an important issue internally within the Jewish communities of our period. Correct and mistaken reading of the Hebrew Bible was destined to serve as the focal point of much Christian proselytizing among the Jews and of the Jewish polemical literature intended to shield Jews from that proselytizing.

In the traditional Jewish view, the biblical canon, which Jews called their Written Torah, had been supplemented by God with an Oral Torah, the roots of which could also be traced back to the Sinai experience. This Oral Torah was seen as grounded, like the Written Torah, in divine revelation. At the same time, this Oral Torah was acknowledged to have been enriched through ongoing wrestling by

gifted Jewish leaders with the exigencies of temporal experience and to have been expanded by the religious intuitions of the Jewish folk. At critical points in time, this oral legacy had been formulated and eventually committed to writing. The first great classic of Oral Torah was the Mishnah, composed in late-second- and early-third-century Palestine. A relatively terse collection of legal injunctions, the Mishnah quickly became the object of investigation and explication in the Jewish study centers of Palestine and Babylonia. In both settings, elaboration of the Mishnah turned eventually into wide-ranging talmudic texts. Of the two Talmuds, it was the later and lengthier Babylonian version that came to dominate subsequent Jewish academic life and behavioral norms.[11]

Institutionally, Jewish life was anchored in the synagogue and the home. The origins of the synagogue are shrouded in obscurity. By the year 1000, however, it was the recognized venue for wide-ranging communal ritual.[12] The system of community ritual involved the daily prayer and observance cycle, the weekly prayer and observance cycle, and the yearly prayer and observance cycle. Religious leadership in the synagogue rested primarily on mastery of the corpus of Written and Oral Law, the ability to guide the community in its practice, and the capacity to exhort the community to fulfillment of its obligations. The synagogue functioned as a center for educating Jews and for inspiring the translation of knowledge into praxis. The home was the locus of family ritual and played an equally, if not more important role in sustaining Jewish life. Much of Jewish practice and teaching revolved around the family and the home. The home, along with the synagogue, served to imbue major life-cycle events and everyday life with deep religious meaning. By time Jews began appearing in western Christendom in numbers, they were well provided with an extensive set of institutions and attitudes that could serve effectively to cushion the pressures exerted by the ruling Christian majority and to guide and enrich the lives of those Jews living within the relatively enclosed Jewish community.

Jewish life under western Christian rule was fairly limited prior to the year 1000. Nonetheless, those Jews living within western Christendom and those who were subsequently absorbed into it had at their disposal a full set of accommodations to living under the rule of others and a full set of justifications for the subservience to which they had become accustomed. Prior Jewish experience under Christian control, of which we know very little, was much supplemented by the

fuller experience Jews had amassed under Islam. In addition, those Jews entering western Christendom from the realm of Islam brought with them the beginnings of the medieval cultural and spiritual awakening that was fated subsequently to enrich European civilization. The growing number of Jews in western Christendom was poised to encounter the many and diverse challenges of the coming centuries.