Conversion and Masculinity in Thirteenth-Century England: One Man's Decision to Leave the Priesthood for Judaism

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Abstract

In 1222, an anonymous Christian deacon was executed for heresy in Oxford after converting to Judaism and marrying a Jewish woman. The first known execution in England for heresy, this paper explores how devout masculine standards in Judaism had the potential to create incentives and rationales for Christian clerical conversion to Judaism at a time when the Church was showing a new determination to enforce clerical celibacy and eradicate father-son religious relationships. This paper argues that his conversion to Judaism might be understood as a reclamation of a masculine identity that had come to be forbidden by the Church. It further suggests new points of contentions between Jews and the Church during the thirteenth century in that the Church seems to have had reasons to regard Jewish masculinity itself as threatening as it offered secular clergymen something they wanted but which the Church now withheld: legitimacy for married, religious men.

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From the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries, the secular clergy in England confronted a growing challenge to their way of life from the Church's broad agenda for moral reform. This agenda often contradicted or ignored the secular clergy's local cultural practices and embedded standards of masculinity.[1] Sparking passionate resistance, the requirement for celibacy and the banning of clerical marriage, perhaps the most contentious of these reforms, were especially provocative to the secular clergy in the Anglo-Norman region, where these reforms were openly flouted and clerical marriages often officially tolerated.[2] While reforms began in the eleventh century, it was not until the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) that the Church was powerful and present enough to seriously enforce clerical celibacy. This council, unlike previous attempts, created enforcement mechanisms for these reforms, which were propagated and upheld by subsequent local councils.[3]

On 17 April 1222, Archbishop of Canterbury Stephen Langton held one of these local councils at the conventual church in Oseney, just outside of Oxford. At this council, a trial occurred wherein an anonymous deacon residing in Oxford was tried and convicted of heresy after converting to Judaism and marrying a Jewish

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[1] Jennifer Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest: Clerical Celibacy, Masculinity, and Reform in England and Normandy, 1066-1300* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 1-14 and 41-111; Thomas Hugh, *The Secular Clergy in England, 1066-1216* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 8-9, 31-35; Anne L. Barstow, *Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy: The Eleventh Century Debates* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1982), 71-76; The present analysis focuses specifically on how Anglo-Norman clergymen responded to the new celibacy requirements during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. For a broader representation of Christian masculinities during this period, the reader may wish to consult Ruth Mazo Karras, *Thou Art the Man: The Masculinity of David in the Christian and Jewish Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021).

[2] Thomas, *The Secular Clergy*, 171-175; Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 42-46, 50-57 and 90-93.

[3] Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 6, 113; Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe, 950-1350* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 243-250.

woman.[4] This event was the first known execution for heresy in England and the only known one for about the next two hundred years.[5]

In addition to a new momentum for the reform movement, anti-Jewish rhetoric was also intensifying at the beginning of the thirteenth century, particularly among the friars. Indeed, the Dominican order had moved into Oxford just one year prior to the convert's heresy trial.[6] In England, this order in particular intentionally located themselves within Jewish neighborhoods in order to further attempts to convert Jews to Christianity.[7] From the late twelfth century, the Church exhibited a growing anxiety toward the presence of Jews in Europe, a fear that gained force throughout the thirteenth century and increasingly viewed Jews as threats to the security of Latin Christendom.[8] The Church's unprecedented response to this clergyman's decision to convert to Judaism suggests that this was an important moment in the relationship between Christianity and Judaism.[9]

I argue that the deacon's conversion to Judaism in Oxford may be interpreted as a reclamation of masculine customs that the Church was finally powerful enough to effectively prohibit. I also argue that this interpretation helps explain how rewriting devout masculine customs might provoke a medieval Anglo-Norman clergyman to question his own truth convictions. During the thirteenth century, Jews and Christians alike viewed learned males, such as clergymen, as trophy converts since both perceived learned males as signifiers of religious truth.[10] This Jewish-Christian coupling of devout masculinity with truth may help us understand this man's decision to convert as an alignment of normative standards of masculinity with their associated truth claim, in that Jewish views of devout

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[4] Frederic Maitland, "The Deacon and the Jewess," *Transactions* 6 (1908-1910): 260-276.

[5] Ibid., 260, 265; Paola Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision, and Ritual Murder in Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 26.

[6] Cecil Roth, *The Jews of Medieval Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 19.

[7] John Tolan, *England's Jews: Finance, Violence, and the Crown in the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2023) 164-165; Robert C. Stacey, "The Conversion of Jews to Christianity in Thirteenth-Century England," *Speculum* 67, no. 2 (1992): 267.

[8] Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 15, 51-76, 234 and 242-264; Rebecca Rist, *Popes & Jews, 1095-1291* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), xi, 81 and 129.

[9] Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision*, 26; Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 15, 51-76, 234 and 242-264.

[10] Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision,* 26, 33, 78-84 and 98.

masculinity expected marriage and children where Christian reform masculinity prohibited them.[11]

Since we do not have personal testimony from our deacon, our investigation requires an oblique methodological approach. The chronicle accounts of his conversion and trial, in addition to being mediated, are also from an unfriendly source—the institution from which he apostatized; but as Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* reminds us, history is by its nature mediated and partial, and inquiries that rely on sources with layers of mediation need not be counted as hopeless.[12] Chroniclers describing the trial of a man they potentially view as threatening fit this bill. Thus, I combine my analysis of the chronicles by analyzing two additional source repositories in order to map out thought worlds relevant to an Anglo-Norman clergyman converting to Judaism: 1) Anglo-Norman clerical experiences during the reforms and 2) medieval Jewish writings addressing devout masculinity. As a theoretical basis, we look to Yair Mintzker's *The Many Deaths of Jew Süss*, in which he invokes Aristotle's idea of "thinking as a kind of discourse."[13] While we cannot state with certainty our deacon's individual motives for converting, putting these relevant thought worlds into discourse with one another holds potential to generate creative thinking about Jewish-Christian relations in terms of masculinity at this moment.

An era abundant in antisemitic narratives, the Middle Ages can pose challenges for historians trying to discern actual events from literary ones. Although many accounts are obviously contrived, like host desecration and ritual murder libels, some narratives are more difficult to assess.[14] Since the nineteenth century scholars have engaged with the sources related to this event as representations of a real occurrence, but many also note that as we get further from the event in question, the retellings tend to exhibit greater disparities.[15] F.W. Maitland, the first scholar

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[11] See discussion below on Jewish masculinity. Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 1-14.

[12] Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2013), xii and xxiv-xxvi.

[13] Yair Mintzker, *The Many Deaths of Jew Süss: The Notorious Trial and Execution of an Eighteenth-Century Court Jew* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2017), 231-279.

[14] Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 7-36; Rist, *Popes & Jews*, 84-86.

[15] Maitland, "The Deacon and the Jewess," 268; Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision*, 26; Adrienne Williams Boyarin, *The Christian Jew and the Unmarked Jewess: The Polemics of*

to comprehensively interpret these sources, understood the event as a real conversion and romance, but also noted how later chroniclers tended toward narrative ornamentation.[16] Other historians have likewise treated this event as an actual conversion and/or romance.[17] Scholars, in fact, identify two thirteenth-century conversions of Christian clergymen who converted and married Jewish women: the Oxford deacon in 1222 and Robert of Reading in 1275.[18] It is telling that both romances come from the Anglo-Norman region. Robert of Reading's conversion was tethered to his study of Hebrew at Oxford University, a medieval university town in which Jews and Christians had ample opportunities for interaction.[19] This counterintuitive choice by a Christian cleric to convert to Judaism during a period of growing antisemitism in Europe begs for an explanation.[20]

My analysis begins by discussing the development of the Church's moral reforms in the Anglo-Norman region. Subsequently, I delve into a selection of oppositional responses to these reforms originating among Anglo-Norman secular clergymen. These responses provide essential context for understanding the deacon's conversion—namely, the fact that a distinct community of Anglo-Norman secular clergymen defined itself in part through defiance of these reforms. By contextualizing the deacon's conversion within the broader framework of these reforms, my analysis expands our understanding of how Anglo-Norman secular clergymen might have creatively resisted these changes, in this instance through conversion. Next, I examine selected trial sources. These texts reveal that the authors responded to the anxiety generated by the deacon's conversion by

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Sameness in Medieval English Anti-Judaism (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2021), 213-216.

[16] Maitland, "The Deacon and Jewess," 260-276.

[17] Robin Mundill, *England's Jewish Solution: Experiment and Expulsion, 1262-1290* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 48-49; Roth, *The Jews of Medieval Oxford*, 15; David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 128 n2; Boyarin, *The Christian Jew and the Unmarked Jewess*, 213-216; Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision*, 70-78.

[18] Boyarin observes that tales of the Jewish seductress type were rare in thirteenth century England and argues that the styles and timing of the sources recording the deacon's conversion and marriage indicate a real event. Boyarin, *The Christian Jew and the Unmarked Jewess*, 213-216.

[19] Boyarin, *The Christian Jew and the Unmarked Jewess*, 120, 122-123, 213 and 216.

[20] Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 15, 51-76 and 242-264.

employing various methods to discredit him.[21] Finally, I explore standards of medieval Jewish masculinity and show how the very aspects of manhood that the Church had recently prohibited for the secular clergy were not only celebrated but also required in Judaism.[22] In conclusion, I employ this framework to discuss how the intersection of devout masculinity and truth could have shaped the deacon's decision to convert.

Reform in Discourse

The Church was not in a position to enforce many of its reforms until the Fourth Lateran Council (1215).[23] This ability was demonstrated by the local, reform-minded councils that followed Lateran IV in Anglo-Norman areas, with one notable example being Langton's Oxford Council.[24] Twelve of the bishops who attended Langton's Oxford Council had also been present at Lateran IV seven years earlier.[25] Rome's influence in England was particularly pronounced during this period, given the recent papal interdict. This authority was extended through papal legates who helped implement Lateran IV's decrees. While none of these legates were stationed in England during Langton's council, Langton himself took up the torch of enforcing Lateran IV with his 1222 council; a notable focus of his

[21] Of apostate clergymen Tartakoff writes: "The conversions to Judaism of learned churchmen suggested that no segment of Christian society was safe." Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision*, 83-84.

[22] Babylonian Talmud *Bava Metzia* 84a, *William Davidson Talmud*, *Sefaria*, accessed December 21, 2023 https://www.sefaria.org/Bava_Metzia.84a.2?lang=bi&with=Rashi&lang2=en; Michael L. Satlow, "Salve to Weapon: Torah Study, Masculinity and the Babylonian Talmud," in *Religious Men and Masculine Identity in the Middle Ages*, eds. Katherine J. Lewis and Pat H. Cullum, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 19; David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of the Nizzahon Vetus* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 69-70.

[23] Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 243-250; Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest,* 7, 112-118; Barstow, *Married Priests*, 190-191.

[24] Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 113-115; Rist, *Popes & Jews,* 171; Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision*, 33. For an English translation of the proceedings from the Oxford council, which reiterate the canons of Lateran IV, see the serialized articles by John William White in *The British Magazine*, Jun 1844-Oct 1844.

[25] Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision*, 33.

efforts was the attempt to enforce badge requirements on England's Jewish communities.[26]

Entrenched expectations for Anglo-Norman men to marry and have children, coupled with local officials often turning a blind eye to bans on clerical marriage, posed formidable obstacles to legislative attempts to uproot clerical marriage prior to Lateran IV.[27] Often, individual reformers assumed the task of legislative enforcement but proved to be isolated, ineffective voices for reform. Anselm of Canterbury's attempts to legislate against celibacy in twelfth-century England, for example, were ignored by several of the bishops who attended the council that produced this legislation.[28] Likewise, English reformer Gerald of Wales observed that supporters of clerical marriage and fatherhood were "indulging [their] native land," while Anglo-Norman clergymen saw reformers as promoting "foreign hypocrisy."[29] The campaign for celibacy was thus understood on some level by both sides as a local versus foreign issue. Prior to Lateran IV, Anglo-Norman clerics openly flouted marriage bans and passionately defended a clergyman's right to marry and "enjoy his wife."[30] It would take more than legislation and the efforts of lone reformers to eradicate an entrenched local practice.[31]

In the thirteenth century, the Church also began to exhibit growing anxiety over Jews' sexuality. This unease manifested in various Christian attempts to feminize Jewish men, portraying them as sexually threatening figures. Additionally, the Church reiterated its ban on Jewish-Christian intermingling during the Lateran IV Council. Reformers regarded the Jews' rejection of celibacy as evidence of their supposed sexual wantonness; during this time clerical portrayals of Jewish men attempted to feminize them further by portraying them as licentious and subject

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[26] Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 114; Tolan, *England's Jews*, 87-89 and 98-107.

[27] Thomas, *The Secular Clergy*, 155-190; Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 42-63 and 86-111.

[28] Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 50-51; Barstow, *Married Priests*, 93-94.

[29] Gerald of Wales quoted in Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 58; *Tractatus pro clericorum conubio* quoted in Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 91.

[30] Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 46-63 and 90-93; "Married clergy," trans. John Boswell in *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 398-401; During the century after the Gregorian Reforms, "England's clergy remained as uxorious as ever." Barstow, *Married Priests*, 94.

[31] Barstow, *Married Priests*, 47-156; Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 41-63.

to menstruation.[32] Reform masculinity thus asserted masculine superiority over both Jewish men and Anglo-Norman married clergy on the grounds that they were sexually active.[33] These portrayals had the potential to shape married clergymen's perceptions of Jewish men in unintended ways, making it seem as if reformers regarded both groups as similarly impure. After the Gregorian Reforms, clerical perspectives on the views on the male body espoused by the Hebrew scriptures were divided. One perspective aligned with, arguably even derived from, the Jewish understanding of sex and marriage, while the other sought a heightened spiritual masculinity through ascetic celibacy.[34] The Church's attempts to enforce clerical celibacy intensified this division, provoking significant resistance from Anglo-Norman clergy who saw marriage and procreation as normative aspects of their masculinity.[35] It is worth noting that Lateran IV, in addition to bolstering the authority of the reforms, also legislated that Jews wear distinguishing badges so that the "damnable mixing" of Jews and Christians, "may not spread further."[36]

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[32] Joan Young Gregg, *Devils, Women, and Jews: Reflection of the Other in Medieval Sermon Series* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 104, 186-187, 194-196 and 219; Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 210; Peter Biller, "View of Jews from Paris around 1300: Christian or 'Scientific'?" in *Christianity and Judaism,* ed. Diana Wood, *Studies in Church History* 29 (1992): 187-207; Irven M. Resnick, *Marks of Distinction: Christian Perceptions of Jews in the High Middle Ages* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 70, 78-80; Barstow, *Married Priests*, 22-23; Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 1-14.

[33] Barstow, *Married Priests*, 21-22; Gregg, *Devils, Women, Jews*, 104 and 185-187; Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 8-9 and 132.

[34] Thibodeaux, *Manly Priest*, 1-11, 90-91 and 124. Norman cleric Serlo of Bayeux's arguments defending clerical marriage cited the Hebraic-Christian tradition of married priests from the Old Testament to support his position. Barstow, *Married Priests*, 131-133; Thomas, *The Secular Clergy*, 170-171; Barstow, *Married Priests*, 21-23.

[35] Barstow, *Married Priests*, 105-156; C.N.L Brooke "Gregorian Reform in Action: Clerical Marriage in England, 1050-1200" *The Cambridge Historical Journal* 12, no. 1 (1956): 1-21; Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 86-111 and 131-150.

[36] Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 15, 51-76 and 242-264; "Fourth Lateran Council—1215 A.D." *Papal Encyclicals Online*, accessed December 21, 2023, https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum12-2.htm; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 133. In 1218, England was the first European country to issue legislation reinforcing Lateran IV's injunction that Jews wear a badge, but despite this royal mandate, most English Jewish communities purchased exemptions, including Oxford's Jewish community in 1221. Langton opposed these exemptions and reissued the requirement at the Oxford council, though the king rescinded his attempt. Tolan, *England's Jews*, 12, 18 and 140.

A clergyman who, at this time and place, apostatized and married a Jewish woman would have been a nightmare scenario.

Anglo-Norman Clerical Experiences

In Anglo-Norman regions, a community comprised of stigmatized married clergymen began to form as early as the eleventh century. Late eleventh-century rallying letters that circulated among married Anglo-Norman clerics provide evidence that they perceived themselves as a distinct community characterized by their defiance. In these letters, they urged each other to "resist emerging adversaries [promoters of celibacy] manfully" and acknowledged that this conflict had affected them "no less than others."[37] (Another Norman defense of clerical marriage was, in fact, favorably quoted by a cleric in twelfth-century Oxford, demonstrating a cross-channel conversation well before the time of our convert.)[38] Bemoaning that they had become "objects of jeering infamy" to laypeople, clergymen in Anglo-Norman areas felt humiliated by celibacy requirements.[39] The poem *Nos uxorati sumus* (*We Married Clergy*), written by an Anglo-Norman priest defending marriage, offers evidence that this sense of isolation continued into the twelfth century. The poet regrets that married clerics seem "born to be made fun of."[40] Directly confronting celibacy requirements, the poet maintains the goodness of male sexuality for its role in the propagation of humanity, arguing that it is indispensable "in [humanity's] quest for perpetuity," and without it "the world would be finished."[41] This cleric's argument that marriage and procreation were goods for all men better aligned, as we will see, with medieval Jewish views of masculinity than with reform masculinity.[42] This community would face

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[37] These men united around both the right of a priest to marry and to have legitimate sons, who could inherit their benefices. "*Cameracensium et Noviomensium clericorum epistolae*" [Letters of the clergy of Cambrai and Noyon], trans. John Ott, accessed December 21, 2023, https://web.pdx.edu/~ott/hst407Church/letter/.

[38] Barstow, *Married Priests*, 137-139; Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 106-108.

[39] "Letters of Cambrai and Noyon," trans. John Ott.

[40] "Married clergy," trans. John Boswell in *Christianity, Social Tolerance*, 398-401; Thibodeaux identifies Serlo of Bayeux as the author of this poem, *Married Priests*, 100-176.

[41] "Married clergy," trans. John Boswell in *Christianity, Social Tolerance*, 398-401.

[42] Berger, *Nizzahon Vetus,* 69-70 and 205.

increasing stigmatization as the Church dug in its heels on this issue and became more willing and able to discipline sexually active priests beginning in the thirteenth century.[43]

In response to Lateran IV, pro-marriage English clergymen wrote a series of spirited songs imitating fake council proceedings, in which they comically addressed the most recent prohibitions of clerical marriage. In one song, echoing the biblical commandment not to covet your neighbor's wife, one priest writes that it is wrong to steal another man's woman; rather, "you should have your own, and delight in her, and thus await the last day more securely."[44] This author privileges the commandments found in Deuteronomy over the new laws of the Church. Another priest concludes his poem with a humorous misinterpretation of the commandment to love, declaring that since the pope has commanded clergymen to fulfill it, "[w]e clerics will have two concubines, monks and canons, the same number or three, deans and bishops, four or five. Thus[,] at last we will fulfill divine law."[45] With blithe insubordination, these responses declare the priests' intention to disregard the freshly reiterated requirements for celibacy established at Lateran IV. The dominant tone of these poems, significantly, is not so much a defense of clerical marriage as it is one of defiance. Expressing frustration through humor, these English clergymen no longer seem to see engagement as a way forward. English clergymen had faced a century of uneven enforcement from various parties, often motivated by ulterior (usually financial) motives. The English monarchy, for example, had seized the wives and mistresses of clergymen multiple times (most recently in 1208) and ransomed them back to their husbands. Even some Church reformers exploited the requirement for celibacy for financial gain, such as the when canons at Dunstable attempted, with partial success, to unseat several veteran clergymen from valuable benefices through accusations of fornication.[46] Thus, this dismissive tone, rather than a defensive one, not only suggests a loss of hope that the bans would eventually be lifted and a determination to defy them, but also likely reflects the disingenuous enforcement

[43] Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 32-40, 86-125 and 126-150; "Fourth Lateran Council—1215 A.D."
[44] Portions of poems translated in Thomas, *The Secular Clergy*, 154-155; full poems in original Latin in *The Latin Poems commonly attributed to Walter Mapes*, ed. Thomas Wright (London: John Bowyer Nichols and Son, 1841), 171-173.
[45] Thomas, *The Secular Clergy*, 154-155.
[46] Ibid., 160-165.

that English clergymen had experienced. This resolve and potential loss of hope following Lateran IV is important to remember when considering the decision of our deacon to convert to Judaism in Oxford during these very same years.

Chronicles Recording the Trial

There exist eight known thirteenth-century records of the deacon's trial at Oseney in 1222. Maitland, the first historian to compile these records into one place, assessed that the most reliable narratives are Henry de Bracton's record and the accounts from the chronicles of Waverley, Dunstable, Ralph of Coggeshall, and Walter of Coventry's *Memoriale*.[47] Three less reliable accounts were written later in the thirteenth century: two by Mathew Paris (one in *Historia Anglorum* and one in *Chronica Maiora*) and one by Thomas Wykes. The reliable accounts, mostly written within about five years of the event, give us a reasonably clear picture of what happened: a deacon residing in Oxford converted to Judaism, underwent circumcision, married a Jewish woman, and was subsequently convicted of heresy and burnt at the stake.[48]

Later in the thirteenth century chroniclers embellish this basic framework.[49] The Jewish woman, for example, who was passively acknowledged or ignored by the more reliable sources, was cast by Matthew Paris, decades later, as a proselytizing seductress.[50] My analysis focuses on how Wykes, Paris in *Historia Anglorum*, and Walter of Coventry's *Memoriale* narrate this event.[51] In their attempts to discredit the deacon, these narrations suggest anxiety over improper expressions of masculinity in both body and behavior. While Wykes and Paris' accounts include less reliable plotlines, their embellishments engage with the dialogues on masculinity under discussion, particularly in their insistence on discrediting the deacon whose supposed impure masculine expressions would have been perceived as destabilizing to Christianity.

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[47] Maitland, "The Deacon and the Jewess," 268.
[48] Translations of these sources come from Maitland, "The Deacon and the Jewess," 260-276.
[49] Ibid., 268-276.
[50] Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision*, 26.
[51] Maitland, "The Deacon and the Jewess," 267-272.

Thomas Wykes

Other than the proceedings of the council, Wykes' chronicle from Oseney is the only known local record of the trial.[52] Wykes embellishes our original story with an accusation of host desecration—intentional mishandling of the bread of the Eucharist—against the convert, claiming that "[a] Jew revealed" the convert's abuse of the host, which was miraculously "found unpolluted, uncorrupted, in a fair vessel."[53] Not only does the miraculous preservation of the host serve to "corrobor[ate] the Christian faith" by discrediting the clergyman's conversion, but also, casting the accuser as a Jew isolates the convert, potentially damaging his credibility.[54] Given the perceived religious authority of a deacon, it is unsurprising that Wykes narrates his conversion as a demonstration of Christianity's superiority.[55] However, this accusation does more than merely discredit the deacon; it also serves to connect the celibate priestly body to the emerging perception of Jews as threats to Christendom.

The antisemitic narrative of the host's miraculous preservation from Jewish pollution emerged toward the end of the thirteenth century after the establishment of the doctrine of transubstantiation, which required that only celibate priests handle the host.[56] During the century in which the priestly body was rededicated to celibacy, in part so that it could properly handle the host, a narrative emerged in which "the circumcised" consistently failed in their attempts to do bodily harm to the host, the holiest of bodies.[57] Implicitly casting the Jew as antithetical to the celibate priest, this narrative suggests a conscious fear that the Jewish body was villainously impure, but not just in any circumstance: it was particularly threatening in circumstances where it stood in for the celibate priest.

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[52] Ibid., 261, 271. For an English translation of the Oxford Constitutions, see serialized articles by John William White in *The British Magazine*, Jun 1844-Oct 1844. Constitutions 34, 35, 37 deal with clerical celibacy.

[53] Maitland, "The Deacon and the Jewess," 271-272.

[54] Ibid., 272.

[55] Roth, *The Jews of Medieval Oxford*, 20-21; Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision*, 10, 70-84 and 98.

[56] Rubin, *Gentile Tales,* 1-2; Thomas, *The Secular Clergy*, 20-25; Gregg, *Devils, Women, Jews*, 189-194.

[57] Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision*, 21, 84; Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 13.

In Wykes' entry, the resurrected body of Christ, celebrated at Easter and manifest in the host, stands opposite the convert's circumcised body. The two male bodies—Christ's crucified body and the convert's circumcised body—become competing truth claims.[58] The miraculous preservation of the host serves as an instrument to declare victory over Judaism—the victory of the blood of Christ over the blood of circumcision. By circumcising himself to enter the Judaic covenant, the convert joined the very people whom Christians portrayed as responsible for the bodily death of Christ.[59] In fact, married clergymen would not have been far off the mark in thinking that reformers regarded them as impure in a way similar to how Jewish men were perceived. In the twelfth century, English reformer Thomas Agnellus referred to noncelibate clergymen who handled the host as "Christ-killers," an antisemitic libel that, in this instance, directly compared Jews to sexually active priests.[60]

Wykes' retelling of the trial, with the inclusion of a charge of host desecration, notably combines the newly invigorated requirement for clerical celibacy with portrayals of Jewish males as a threat to it. This suggests that the deacon's conversion could, at the very least, be used to express and resolve anxieties over the perceived threat accompanying a clergyman's apostasy to a religion that stood opposite to reform masculinity's calls for religious men to be unmarried and childless. Wykes' attempt to discredit the clergyman's conversion through a host desecration libel underlines the connection between the discipline of the religious male body—handlers of the host and authorities of religious truth—and the perceived security of Christendom, preserved in this case through a miracle.

Memoriale

The entry for this event in Walter of Coventry's *Memoriale* is thought to be written nearly contemporaneously to the event and focuses on key moments of

[58] Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision*, 11, 83-84.

[59] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 200-201, 214-221; Maitland, "The Deacon and the Jewess," 272; Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 1-6.

[60] Thomas, *The Secular Clergy*, 179-180; Rist, *Popes & Jews*, 108.

the trial.[61] The author writes that three clergymen were convicted of wrongdoings that day: one for homicide, one for sacrilege/theft, and one—the deacon—for heresy. Once convicted, Archbishop Langton stripped them of their clerical garments.[62] Significantly, our convert is the only one to be described as having "sinned enormously." He was the only one to be degraded publicly ("before the people") outside of the church at Oseney, to be made a spectacle of.[63] Afterwards, he was immediately burnt, the only convicted clergyman to suffer this end. On that day in Oxford, it was a clergyman's apostasy to Judaism that required the greatest public rejection, rather than homicide.[64] There was no precedent for executing Christian converts to Judaism in England. Did the Church perhaps fear that other Anglo-Norman clerics, resentful of newly enforced reform requirements, might find reasons for converting?[65]

A second moment worth our attention is the physical inspection of the deacon's body, seemingly conducted to expose his circumcision after he appeared at the council in clerical garments.[66] The chronicler describes his circumcision with suspicion: "[H]e had caused himself to be circumcised in imitation of the Jewish rite."[67] The language suggests that the chronicler believes this to be a self-circumcision, language also echoed by Ralph of Coggeshall, who writes that the convert "had circumcised himself."[68] An assessment of self-circumcision suggests that the convert's body was seen; however, it is unclear by what metric observers would have been able to determine if he had self-circumcised, especially considering that this circumcision would have been performed on an adult rather than an infant. In fact, portraying this as a self-circumcision and possible imitation serves to question the authority, and perhaps the authenticity, of the deacon's

[61] *Memoriale Walteri de Coventria, Vol. II,* ed. William Stubbs (London: Longman & Co., 1873), viii; Maitland, "The Deacon and the Jewess," 267-268.
[62] Maitland, "The Deacon and the Jewess," 268.
[63] Ibid., 268.
[64] Ibid., 260 and 267-268.
[65] Maitland, "The Deacon and the Jewess," 260, 265; Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision,* 26.
[66] Maitland, "The Deacon and the Jewess," 267-268.
[67] Ibid., 268.
[68] Ibid., 267.

conversion.[69] The exposure of his circumcision ultimately seems to have sealed his fate. It is this moment in the trial to which we presently turn our attention.

Matthew Paris

One of the longest surviving narratives is found in Matthew Paris' *Historia Anglorum*. This account was scrawled in the margins of the original manuscript, around the entry for the year 1222, decades after the event it describes.[70] Paris' source is believed to have been eyewitness John of Basingstoke, who studied in Oxford.[71] In this version, a Jewish woman is depicted as seducing the deacon to Judaism.[72] Subsequently, when confronted with "evidence," the deacon allegedly confesses to both his illicit relationship and to crucifying a Christian boy as part of a Jewish sacrifice. However, it is noteworthy that he is portrayed as apostatizing only *after* his bodily inspection. Once the council witnessed his circumcision, he is recorded as making a formal renunciation of his Christian faith: "I renounce the new-fangled law and the comments of Jesus the false prophet." His renunciation ended with a slander toward Mary, "a charge not to be repeated."[73] While the content of the slander is unknown, medieval Christian antisemitic narratives connected Jewish denials of Mary's virginity to the supposed sensuality of the Jews. Likewise, clergymen frustrated with calls for celibacy sometimes argued that Mary's conception was the product of adultery.[74] Both these narratives could potentially be present at once: the deacon was married while still considered to be a clergyman and was also presented as a Jewish man once his circumcision was revealed. If the unrepeatable slander was indeed meant to indicate his denial of Mary's purity, we can speculate that the deacon's marriage and conversion might

[69] Medieval Christian narratives also interpreted circumcision as feminizing the Jewish male, that is as evidence of excessive sexual appetite (Resnick, *Marks of Distinction,* 79.)
[70] *Matthæi Parisiensis, Historia Anglorum,* Vol. II, ed. Frederic Madden (London: Longmans, 1866), 254 n1.
[71] Maitland, "The Deacon and the Jewess," 269.
[72] Ibid., 269-270; Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 30.
[73] Maitland, "The Deacon and the Jewess," 269-270. Blood libel accusations originated in England in the mid-twelfth century: *Thomas of Monmouth: The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, trans. by Miri Rubin (London: Penguin, 2014)
[74] Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 107-108.

have materialized Christian fears of Jewish men, often portrayed effeminately as licentious predators of Christian purity. If the alleged slander against Mary was a commentary on the converted, circumcised, and married deacon's impurity, it could be suggested that Christian portrayals of Jewish males as effeminate predators were perhaps elicited by an underlying fear of the Jewish male as an object of envy for Christian clergymen.[75]

After his apostasy, Archbishop Langton turned the convert over to the Sheriff of Oxford Fawkes of Bréauté, who is portrayed as bloodthirsty ("ever swift to shed blood") and itching to execute whoever is handed to him.[76] The only person who emerges from this incident virtuously is the archbishop, who grieves for the convert's soul, while the convert is emasculated as irrational, wooed away from truth by a woman ("no argument would bring him to his senses").[77]

In Paris' entry, only the archbishop provides a model of masculine authority and, implicitly of self-control.[78] As in Wykes' account alleging host desecration, the association of religious truth is tethered to an expression of proper masculinity.

Although the line between fact and fiction in Paris' account may be elusive, elements of the convert's outburst may not be as contrived as they first appear. The moral reforms largely defined what clergymen were banned from doing, setting nearly impossible standards for even the most devout secular clergymen, who operated in the world outside of the cloister.[79] Anglo-Norman defenders of clerical marriage perceived reformers as "creators of new traditions;" it may not be a coincidence that our convert is portrayed as declaring that he "renounce[d] the new-fangled law."[80] While apparently referring to the New Testament, this linguistic choice could be also read in light of the recent peak in frustrations over the reforms: the convert could have seen the reformers as perverters of truth through the creation of new traditions and his own actions as a return to tradition

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[75] Gregg, *Devils, Women, Jews*, 104, 185-189 and 194-196; Tolan, *England's Jews*, 155-159.

[76] Maitland, "The Deacon and the Jewess," 269-270.

[77] Ibid., 269-270.

[78] Jacqueline Murray, "Masculinizing Religious Life: Sexual Prowess, the Battle for Chastity and Monastic Identity," in *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, eds. P.H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), 24-42; Thomas, *The Secular Clergy*, 179-180; Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 28-32 and 112-113; Maitland, "The Deacon and the Jewess," 269-270.

[79] Thomas, *The Secular Clergy*, 8-9, 17-18 and 27-29.

[80] Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 91; Maitland, "The Deacon and the Jewess," 269.

and truth. While the deacon's conversion to Judaism sets his case apart from other Anglo-Norman clerical experiences, a shared trait emerges in the clerics' frustration with the Church over their loss of social legitimacy.[81] The convert's outburst, seemingly designed to discredit him as irrational, gains a deeper context when viewed alongside the experiences of Anglo-Norman clergymen grappling with the reforms after Lateran IV.[82] Moreover, it becomes better understandable how a religion that not only permitted marriage but also regarded it as a positive commandment could hold increasing appeal for a clergyman during this pivotal moment.

Medieval Jewish Masculinity

From the tenth through twelfth century, the Babylonian Talmud became the cornerstone of Jewish education as a result of what Talya Fishman describes at the "textualization" of medieval Jewish culture.[83] At the tail end of this process, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Christian clerical scholars also began consuming and studying rabbinic exegesis, a development Jeremy Cohen describes as an "intellectual awakening."[84] These clergymen often took it upon themselves to study Jewish perspectives of the Old Testament, the Hebrew language, and the Talmud as part of their religious education. Thirteenth-century Christian clergymen accessed Jewish religious texts, studied them, and even sought out Jews for instruction in Hebrew and rabbinical exegesis.[85] Robert of Reading, for

[81] Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 64-85 and 96-98; "Married clergy," trans. John Boswell in *Christianity, Social Tolerance*, 398-401; "Letters of Cambrai and Noyon," trans. John Ott; Brooke "Gregorian Reform," 20-21; Barstow, *Married Priests*, 103-104.

[82] Thomas, *The Secular Clergy*, 154-155; *The Latin Poems*, ed. Wright, 171-173.

[83] Talya Fishman, *Becoming the People of the Talmud: Oral Torah as Written Tradition in Medieval Jewish Cultures* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 1-4 and 7-10; Satlow, "Salve to Weapon," 26-27.

[84] Jeremy Cohen, "Scholarship and Intolerance in the Medieval Academy: The Study and Evaluation of Judaism in European Christendom," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 3 (1986): 593; Rist, *Popes & Jews*, 27 and 108.

[85] Cohen, "Scholarship Intolerance," 592-593, 596, 600 and 605-613; Boyarin, *The Christian Jew and the Unmarked Jewess*, 214-216; Tolan, *England's Jews*, 139-189; Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision*, 80; Robert Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity in Medieval Western Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 324-326.

example, a clergyman in late thirteenth-century Oxford, converted to Judaism after formally studying Hebrew.[86]

A Christian clergyman who converted to Judaism would presumably be interested in the opinions of its religious learned. Accordingly, our construction of Jewish masculinity begins with a passage from the Babylonian Talmud that was actively commented upon during this period and ends with a compilation of texts by a thirteenth-century Jewish polemicist.[87] While the observations about Jewish masculinity that follow are not entirely new to the Middle Ages, that they continued to be discussed and reaffirmed is significant for their potential to dialogue with the upheaval in standards for holy masculinity occurring within Christendom at this time.[88]

BT Bava Metzia 84a

A passage from the Babylonian Talmud (BT *Bava Metzia* 84a), which received active commentary during the Middle Ages, draws a complex portrait of the devout Jewish male, and while the precise moral may be difficult to identify, its narration demonstrates the importance of marriage and procreation to Jewish masculinity.[89]

This passage narrates an encounter between Reish Lakish and his teacher, Rabbi Yohanan. Lakish, a bandit, sees Rabbi Yohanan from afar, mistakes him for a woman due to his beauty, and pursues him. Michael Satlow argues that Rabbi Yohanan in this encounter represents the Torah, coded as feminine.[90] The male pursuit of the Torah is thus presented as heterosexual desire. Rabbi Yohanan teaches Lakish Torah, "turn[ing] him into a great man," and arranges for Lakish

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[86] Boyarin, *The Christian Jew and the Unmarked Jewess*, 213 and 290.

[87] Satlow, "Salve to Weapon," 25. Commentary for this passage during the eleventh through thirteenth centuries is found in Rashi's commentary and the Tosafot. BT *Bava Metzia* 84a, *Sefaria.*

[88] Satlow, "Salve to Weapon," 19; Michael Satlow, "'Try to be a man': The Rabbinic Construction of Masculinity," *Harvard Theological Review* 89, no. 1 (1996): 26-35.

[89] BT *Bava Metzia* 84a*, Sefaria.* Daniel Boyarin describes this passage as "a paradigmatic story of the formation of the Jewish male subject:" *Unheroic Conduct*, 128.

[90] Satlow, "Salve to Weapon," 24-27.

to marry his sister, with whom he has children.[91] Notably, this passage presents perhaps the central feature of being a Jewish man after circumcision, the study of Torah, as sexual desire, couching Resh Lakish's growing family life and his growing Torah knowledge as parallel developments.[92] Daniel Boyarin characterizes this passage as telling the Jewish male: "You can have it all, both the spiritual female, the Torah, and an embodied female…"[93] For Anglo-Norman clergymen, it could have seemed as if the embodied female was precisely what the reformers sought to deny devout men.

Not coincidentally, this exemplum follows a passage about rabbis boasting of the size of their sexual organs in order to defend the legitimacy of their children.[94] In this story, a Roman noblewoman accuses two rabbis of being so obese as to be unable to have intercourse with their wives, casting doubt on the legitimacy of their offspring. The Gemara records three responses, one of which quotes Judges 8:21 ("For as the man is, so is his strength"), suggesting that their sexual organs were proportionate to their bellies.[95] The procreative use and size of the male reproductive organ is presented as a metric for devout manliness, thus tying masculine virtue to marital intercourse and legitimate children, which the story of Lakish following these comments fulfills. While in Judaism the emphasis was placed on the transmission of Torah wisdom to one's sons, in Anglo-Norman clerical masculinity, the focus was the transfer of one's benefice to one's son.[96] Medieval Judaism and Anglo-Norman clerical masculinity were thus similarly at odds with Church reformers on the proper relationship between male sexuality, fatherhood, and religious devotion.

For Anglo-Norman clerics after Lateran IV, marital sex, legitimate children, and a religious relationship between father and son became increasingly difficult.[97] While some simply ignored these new regulations, an Anglo-Norman clergyman, frustrated with such reforms, might conclude that it was the practitioners of the "old law" who correctly understood the virtues of marriage, children, and father-

[91] BT *Bava Metzia* 84a*, Sefaria*; Satlow, "Salve to Weapon," 16 and 24-27.
[92] Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 32-40; Satlow, "Salve to Weapon," 19.
[93] D. Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, 132.
[94] Satlow, "Salve to Weapon," 23-24; BT *Bava Metzia* 84a*, Sefaria.*
[95] BT *Bava Metzia* 84a, *Sefaria.*
[96] Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 64-85; Satlow, "Salve to Weapon," 19-20.
[97] Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 64-85.

son religious devotion as proper virtues for men in religious service, not just laymen.[98] As the Jewish polemical texts we now turn to demonstrate, medieval Jews defending Judaism critiqued Christian priests for advocating singleness, celibacy, and by consequence childlessness as signs of male virtue.

Thirteenth-Century Jewish Polemicist

In the late thirteenth century, an anonymous Franco-German Ashkenazi Jew compiled a collection of anti-Christian polemical texts, now entitled the *Nizzahon Vetus* (*Old Book of Polemic*).[99] Passages from it addressing conversion to Judaism and Christian priestly celibacy demonstrate an understanding of exceptional disincentives for Christian male converts and reaffirm the Jewish perspective that devout men ought to marry and father children.[100]

For Christians, converting to Judaism in the Middle Ages could be isolating, dangerous, and for males, painful. Praising the fortitude of converts to Judaism, a passage from the *Nizzahon Vetus* explains the discomforts of a male convert who "[...] must wound himself by removing his foreskin through circumcision [...] exile himself from place to place [...] deprive himself of worldly goods and fear for his life from the external threat of being killed by the uncircumcised, and [...] lack many things that his heart desires."[101] (Notably, the list of deterrents for female proselytes is subordinated to the male's list, noting briefly that she "also separates herself from all pleasures.")[102] Jewish converts to Christianity were on occasion accused of converting out of social convenience; the opposite accusation could not be made.[103] Circumcision was a particularly powerful and male-exclusive deterrent

[98] Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 2, 5-6, 14 and 58.

[99] Berger, *Nizzahon Vetus*, 3-4; Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision*, 78-84.

[100] Medieval Jews of northern Europe seem to have been particularly resistant to the idea of celibacy as a lifestyle. Elisheva Baumgarten, *Practicing Piety in Medieval Ashkenaz: Men, Women, and Everyday Religious Observance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 253 n244.

[101] Berger, *Nizzahon Vetus,* 206; Cohen, "Scholarship and Intolerance," 598. "Uncircumcised" was a metonym for Christians. Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision*, 78.

[102] Berger, *Nizzahon Vetus,* 206.

[103] Cohen, "Scholarship and Intolerance," 598; Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision*, 10 and 78-89. There were social incentives (some explicitly manufactured) for Jews to convert to Christianity that were not present in the reverse. Stacey, "The Conversion of Jews," 263-283.

to conversion that in turn heightened the perceived threat of male converts to Judaism.[104] As the polemicist argues here, the willingness of converts to undergo things like circumcision demonstrates that, unlike converts to Christianity who convert for "worldly pleasures," converts to Judaism "knew for certain that their [previous] faith is without foundation."[105] Male converts to Judaism, due to all these disincentives, might be perceived as converting for the most serious religious reasons.[106]

In another passage from the *Nizzahon Vetus*, celibacy is rejected as a masculine virtue and Christian priests who refrain from marriage and procreation are grouped with heretics.[107] The author rebukes Christian priests who attempt to achieve celibacy through castration asking "what do eunuchs have to do with priests? The latter have testicles…," and further declares that "having children is a characteristic of the God-fearing man."[108] He interprets this masculine biological feature as something that leads to licentiousness if not properly expressed through marriage, in which the devout man's wife ought to be "as fruitful as a vine."[109] In line with the Talmudic passage above, he views the biological potential of the male sexual organs as a virtuous and normative expression of masculinity. Where the Christian reformers asserted that virtue came through overcoming sexual desire, this Jewish polemicist, specifically referring to celibate priests and nuns, argued that their unconsummated lustful desires were "the sort of burning which is an abhorrent act that the Lord detests."[110] In agreement with the Talmud, the author argues for a masculinity in which sexual desires are not wholly denied but rather find holy expression.[111] Another passage puts the question at the center of our analysis more bluntly:

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[104] Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision*, 84 and 89.
[105] Berger, *Nizzahon Vetus,* 206.
[106] Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision*, 89.
[107] Berger, *Nizzahon Vetus,* 69.
[108] Ibid., 69-70.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid., 70.
[111] Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 1-11 and 32-40; Satlow, "Salve to Weapon," 19; Brooke "Gregorian Reform," 17-19.

> If the Christian priest is supposed to take the place of the biblical priest, why doesn't he get married and have children like Aaron the high priest? Moreover, the first commandment given to Adam dealt with being fruitful and multiplying, yet you refrain from this and instead pursue fornication and wine, which capture your fancy.[112]

This passage portrays celibate priests as not only disobeying religious commandments but also as lacking self-control, feminizing them as vulnerable to fleshly desires, and ignoring their responsibility to marry and father children. In the mid-twelfth century, in fact, Herman-Judah, a future Jewish convert to Christianity, was supposedly given a choice by his fellow Jews, who suspected him of Christian sympathies, to either consummate his marriage to prove his Jewish convictions or depart the synagogue.[113] From outside this debate on clerical celibacy, the polemicist of the *Nizzahon Vetus* objects to it like some Anglo-Norman clergymen did; however, by the late thirteenth century, Jewish men alone would have been able to return to their marriage and children as a religiously devout men, their social legitimacy intact.[114]

Conclusion

I have argued that the Oxford clergyman's conversion to Judaism in thirteenth-century England might be understood as the reclamation of a masculine identity that had come to be forbidden by the Church and that was banned with increasing efficiency after Lateran IV.[115] His status as a deacon would have provoked alarm among the reformers, who had recently sought both to ban (once more) the sexual

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[112] Berger, *Nizzahon Vetus,* 205.

[113] Karl Morrison, *Conversion and Text*, 39-40 and 94-95.

[114] Anglo-Norman priests likewise argued that celibacy would lead to licentiousness. "Married clergy," trans. John Boswell in *Christianity, Social Tolerance*, 398-401. Serlo of Bayeux, a twelfth century Norman clergyman, cited Old Testament precedent to defend married priests in *De Concubinis Sacerdotum* [Concerning Concubines of Priests]. His works were used by Thibauld d'Etampes to defend clerical marriage and its sons in twelfth-century Oxford. Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 86, 103-06; Barstow, *Married Priests*, 131-133; Thomas, *The Secular Clergy*, 170-172.

[115] Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 113.

intermingling of Jews and Christians and to enforce clerical celibacy.[116] Moreover, the coupling of masculinity with truth in both Christianity and Judaism at a time when Christian anxiety over the presence of Jews in Europe was on the rise would have made the deacon's conversion all the more threatening to the Church.[117] Demonstrating this anxiety, sermon exempla from the thirteenth century represent clergymen's conversion to Judaism as a result of lust rather than rational choice.[118] The Church's determination to enforce clerical reforms and its growing nervousness toward Jews—perhaps even the connection between the two—could have contributed to the outcome of the deacon's trial. As the first execution for heresy in England, this moment was a new direction for the clerical reform movement there.[119]

After 1215, married clergymen (or those who wanted to marry) were less likely to be officially tolerated.[120] While defiance or conformity might seem to have been the only options for Anglo-Norman clergymen, our case indicates that conversion to Judaism might have offered a different path—that of leaving the Church altogether. But how does a new paradigm of masculinity lead to a religious conversion? Both Christianity and Judaism understood devout masculine behavior to hold moral and religious meaning that went beyond the individual man himself: paradigms of masculinity reaffirmed the broader religious social order. In Christianity, for example, after 1215 it was only the pure, celibate, male body that could deliver divine grace via the sacraments.[121] Celibacy also reinforced the pastoral revolution of the thirteenth century, wherein clergymen saw the value of their duties to their flock as proceeding from their celibate lifestyle; that is as spiritual rather than a biological fathers.[122] For Jews, the longstanding structure of the home organized around husband, wife, and children was integrated into religious observance. Men preserved Torah through the fathering of sons and

[116] "Fourth Lateran Council—1215 A.D."; Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision*, 78-89.
[117] Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision,* 4, 78-84; Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 15, 51-76 and 242-264.
[118] Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision,* 26, 75.
[119] Maitland, "The Deacon and the Jewess," 260, 265; Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision,* 26.
[120] Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 8, 49-63 and 112-119.
[121] Barstow, *Married Priests*, 4; Thomas, *The Secular Clergy*, 9-10, 30-32 and 178-180.
[122] Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 7-8, 114-115 and 125.

through observing the commandment to procreate.[123] Both the Jewish requirement for men to have children and the reformers' reverse requirement for clergymen's celibacy connected the right expression of masculinity to broader understandings of a proper social order and religious truth. Although from different confessions, Anglo-Norman married clergymen and the thirteenth-century Jewish polemicist who penned the *Nizzahon Vetus* held something significant in common—the belief that a married man with children and a devout man could, perhaps even should, occupy the same body.

At a critical moment in the lives of secular clergymen in England, a cross-confessional dynamic emerged along the lines of different expectations for devout males wherein Judaism offered something forbidden to a significant number of devout Christian men. If the Oxford convert saw marriage and children not only as traditional but also as normative, the reformers' attempts to enforce a new paradigm of masculinity could have motivated him to question the very things that seemed to depend on it. The possibility for Jewish masculinity, and the truth of Judaism, to be attractive to Anglo-Norman clergymen in the face of the Church's shifting paradigm may expand our understanding of why the Church began increasingly portraying and perceiving Jews as more threatening in the thirteenth century.[124] While we cannot say with certainty what caused our deacon's conversion, situating it within a context of relevant ideas encourages productive thinking about this moment in the history of Christian-Jewish relations. Exploring these ideas in dialogue opens the possibility of a narrative wherein Jewish notions about masculinity held relevance for Christian secular clergymen and were received seriously. By interpreting this man's conversion as potentially engaging in a discourse between Christian and Jewish masculinities, we can also gain a broader understanding of how moments of change can upset boundaries and simultaneously motivate their reinforcement out of fear that those whose lives are disrupted may cross them.

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[123] Satlow, "Salve to Weapon," 19-21; Maimonides exemplifies the connection between Jewish masculine expectations and Jewish social order in a late twelfth-century passage: "Sexual relations are considered a dimension of Sabbath pleasure. Therefore, Torah scholars who are healthy set aside Friday night as a night when they fulfill their conjugal duties." *Mishneh Torah* 30:14, trans. Eliyahu Touger, *Sefaria*, accessed December 21, 2023, https://www.sefaria.org/Mishneh_Torah%2C_Sabbath.30.14?lang=bi.

[124] Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 15, 51-76 and 242-264.

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